

I plan to fill these gaps in six *future* issues of *Cartographic Perspectives*. Five will begin with an *Atlas* poem—reprinted in its entirety and in the order of its appearance within the sequence. Analysis of the poem’s content will be followed by discussion of its introductory quote or epigraph, which Slessor (as his poetry notebook makes clear) found in the map catalogue. Next comes an examination of both the cartographer and the map highlighted in the epigraph. By reproducing the map as well as the catalogue’s description of the map, each article will uncover the cartographic connections between Slessor’s published poem and its manuscript versions, its map(s), and the map catalogue. An Epilogue will round out my series by exploring the unique atlas-like structure of Slessor’s sequence and identifying the likely author of the catalogue that Slessor creatively transformed into *The Atlas*.

My Introduction, the only part of the series published in this issue, provides the background for what will become the *first extended examination* of *The Atlas*. Opening with a brief biography of Slessor as poet, journalist, and man-about-Sydney, it surveys *Cuckooz Contrey* before turning to *The Atlas*, which debuted in that collection. The effort that Slessor lavished on his sequence and on mastering the period in which it is set are revealed throughout the notebook in which he drafted all five poems. Reviewing his corpus shows that *The Atlas* uniquely combines strategies apparent in Slessor’s earlier and later poems, including his emphasis on the arts and the use of illustrations to heighten his poetry’s allure. The Introduction presents the maps created to illustrate his poetry, especially *Strange Lands*, made by the famously controversial Norman Lindsay and featured as the frontispiece of *Cuckooz Contrey*. Slessor’s poetic allusions to maps lead to the magnificent nautical library in which he may have found the inspiration for *The Atlas*. Yet, as the second half of this article demonstrates, that library collection has proved one of many challenges to producing this groundbreaking study.

KEYWORDS: Kenneth Slessor (1901–1971); *Cuckooz Contrey* (1932); *The Atlas* sequence (ca. 1930); poetry—twentieth-century; poetry—Australian; poetry and maps; Norman Lindsay (1879–1969); Raymond Lindsay (1903–1960); James Emery (d. 1947); Hugh McCrae (1876–1958)

INTRODUCTION TO MAPS AND MAPPING IN KENNETH SLESSOR’S POETIC SEQUENCE *THE ATLAS*

“Slessor’s interests in history, in Australian and international culture, in music, in maps, his fascination with Sydney and its harbor, his sense of humour and his originality provide a great sweep in the range of his poems, even though his total output was small.”

— Dennis Haskell, “Introduction,” *Kenneth Slessor: Selected Poems* (1993)

Kenneth Slessor (1901–1971) is not well-known outside of Australia. Yet forty years after his death, Nicholas Birns singles him out as “arguably not only the most talented poet Australia has ever produced but also one whose



Figure 1. Kenneth Slessor, undated photograph, probably from the 1920s or early 1930s. (NLA MS 3020/7/3/118, Box 8). Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

work has raised questions about the identity and thrust of Australian poetry that have resounded throughout the era” (2007, 173; see Murray 1994, 17). And in 1991 Geoffrey Dutton, the Australian writer/historian who authored the first full-scale biography about Slessor, emphasized that the poet’s “minimal” international reputation is “a comment on communications, not on the quality of his poetry” (1991, 332).

I discovered Slessor belatedly while doing a word search on “maps” in the Columbia Granger’s World of Poetry database. Among the hundreds of entries citing the word, one line leapt off the screen—“staring from maps in sweet and poisoned places.” The line came from the poem “Mermaids.” Reading the poem whetted my appetite for more. But what hooked me was the realization that “Mermaids” was just one of *five* poems comprising a sequence titled *The Atlas*,¹ and that each poem begins with an introductory quote or epigraph from an important—and usually gorgeously illustrated—seventeenth-century map or atlas.

To my knowledge, no other twentieth-century poet has produced such a sequence of map-related poems. Among the handful of poets of map-fixated collections (John Holmes, Charles Olson, Debora Greger, Maura Stanton, Pamela Alexander), and even among those poets who see themselves as cartographers (Elizabeth Bishop, Howard Nemerov, Mark Strand, Gloria Oden: Haft 2001; 2008)—Slessor may be the first poet to regard himself as an atlas-maker and to have

designed a major poem cycle to emulate the narrative structure of atlases.

Research on the sequence has proved disappointing, however. Although *The Atlas* opened Slessor’s third solo collection, *Cuckooz Contrey* (1932), when the poet was at the height of his artistry and productivity, few critics offer much insight into the sequence, and none has attempted to explore the relationship between the poems and the maps heralded in their epigraphs. To remedy this astonishing gap, I plan to offer the first extended analysis of *The Atlas*, beginning with this Introduction and culminating in six articles that will be submitted to *Cartographic Perspectives* for publication in future issues. My hope for the seven-part series is that it will introduce Slessor to new readers, especially those of you who love beautiful maps as he did.

KENNETH SLESSOR: SYDNEY’S POET AND JOURNALIST

Kenneth Slessor (Figure 1) lived a rich life. Born the year of Australia’s federation (1901), he grew up with his nation to become “one of Australia’s all-time great poets [and] also one of her all-time great journalists” (Blaikie 1966, 49). As a boy, he lived in England for a time with his parents (1908–1910: Slessor 1970, 253) and, back at home, visited the mines of rural New South Wales with

his father, a Jewish mining engineer whose father and grandfather had been distinguished musicians in Germany (Dutton 1991, 1–2). As the Australian Official War Correspondent during World War II, Slessor reported not only from Australia but from Greece, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and New Guinea (1940–1944: Slessor 1970, 67; Dutton 1991, 120).

Otherwise, except for brief stints at the Melbourne-based *Punch* and *Herald* (1924–1926), Slessor spent his life in Sydney. “This was my city and this was my love,” he wrote in 1952 (Slessor 1970, 13). It was in Sydney that he met and married Noela Senior in 1922, and where she died of cancer in 1945. It was in Sydney that he met and married Pauline Wallace in 1951; and a year later celebrated the birth of his only child, Paul Slessor (Stewart 1977, 52; Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994; Haskell 2002, 16:261), before the marriage dissolved in 1961. It was in Sydney that Slessor blossomed as a journalist—from his first jobs at the Sydney *Sun* (1920–1924, 1926–1927, 1944–1957); to the heady days at *Smith’s Weekly*, culminating in his promotion to editor-in-chief (1927–1940); then on to his presidency of the prestigious Journalists’ Club (1956–1965), and his final years as leader/editorial writer and book reviewer for the *Daily Telegraph* (1957–1971). Most of his poetry also originated in Sydney. And it was in a Sydney hospital that Slessor, still employed as a journalist and regarded as “the nation’s greatest living poet” (Dutton 1991, 326), died alone after a heart attack on June 30, 1971.

Although he remained a full-time journalist for half of the century (1920–1971), as a poet Slessor considered himself “an extinct volcano” during the last twenty-five years of his life (Stewart, 1977, 53). He blamed the war, Noela’s death (Julian Croft 1997, in Mead 1997, 210), the “ratrace,” and having nothing more to say poetically (Dutton 1991, 315–317; Jaffa 1971, 17 and n.10). Others cite his “underconfidence” and lack of recognition throughout the three decades (1917–1948) he was publishing new poems (Norman Lindsay, quoted in Stewart 1977, 174–175; Dutton 1991, xii, 159–165). Or his conviction that politics and serious poetry have nothing to do with one another (Caesar 1995, 4, 105–107), although a poet who made his living a journalist might feel the need to make such a distinction. Nevertheless, Slessor’s poetic silence did not prevent his being active in the literary community. Rather than publishing his own verses, he mentored younger poets and served on the Advisory Board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund (1953–1971) as well as on the National Literature Board of Review (1967). He edited the prestigious literary journal *Southerly* (1956–1962) and co-edited *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* (Thompson 1958; rev., 1961). He wrote books and essays on Australian life, lectured and composed reviews on Australian poetry, judged literary competitions, recorded his verses or read them to appreciative audiences, and saw his poems published not only in school texts but also in more than twenty anthologies of Australian verse. In the process he won the Coronation Medal (1954) and, for his services to Australian literature, was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E., 1959).

Other tributes followed his death. Since 1973, music lovers have been greeted at the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House by John Olsen’s *Salute to Five Bells*, a large mural inspired by Slessor’s epic poem “Five Bells” (Churcher 2008). From the Opera House, a path around Circular Quay features the Sydney Writers Walk: one of its fifty plaques celebrates Slessor and his poem “William

Street,” whose busy namesake climbs east to King’s Cross just blocks away from the ferry terminals of Circular Quay (Rivera 2011). Since 1980, over thirty Australian poets have received the Kenneth Slessor Prize for a poetry collection or lengthy poem published as a book (Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry 2006; NSW Premiere’s Literary Awards 2011).

Slessor’s own work continues to be anthologized in major collections of Australian verse as well as translated into other languages—including Braille, music, dance, and theater performance. The bibliography on him is impressive (Thomson 1968, 204–209; Caesar 1995, 122–126). Beginning with reviews of his collections during the 1920s and 1930s, critiques of Slessor’s poetry increased after the 1944 publication of his *One Hundred Poems*—especially following its reprinting in 1947 and 1951—and have continued apace since 1957 when he renamed that selection *Poems* and included three short, previously uncollected poems: “An Inscription for Dog River” and “Beach Burial,” both inspired by wartime events in the Middle East (1941–1942), and “Polarities,” his last published new poem (1948). *Poems* regularly reappeared in cloth and paperback editions, morphing after Slessor’s death into the equally popular *Selected Poems*, and now yields place to Dennis Haskell and Geoffrey Dutton’s 1994 annotated *Kenneth Slessor: Collected Poems* (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994; rpt., 1999). Containing nearly all of Slessor’s poetry—serious and light, published and unpublished, early (1917) and late (1962), Haskell and Dutton’s edition expands our knowledge of Slessor’s work even further.

CUCKOOZ CONTREY (1932)

Slessor’s reputation as “Australia’s first modern poet as well as one of its finest” (John Lucas, quoted in Hamilton 1994, 497) derives from two collections he published in the 1930s: *Cuckooz Contrey* (1932) and *Five Bells: XX Poems* (1939) (Jaffa 1971, 20; Stewart 1977, 46; Tranter and Mead 1991, xxvii–xxviii). Slessor certainly understood their quality. In 1944, when selecting verses for *One Hundred Poems*, he reprinted every poem from *Cuckooz Contrey* in “Part II: 1927–1932” (Slessor 1944, 49–100) and every poem from *Five Bells* in the final “Part III: 1933–1939” (101–123). By contrast, “Part I: 1919–1926” (1–46) contained fewer than half of the works published in his first two collections, *Thief of the Moon* (1924) and *Earth-Visitors* (1926).² Except for his wartime poem “Beach Burial,” Slessor’s most acclaimed verses derive from the two collections he composed while working full-time at *Smith’s Weekly* (Dennis Haskell, in Mead 1997, 212). *Cuckooz Contrey* contributed “Five Visions of Captain Cook,” “Captain Dobbin,” “Elegy in a Botanic Gardens,” “Crow Country,” “A Bushranger,” “Metempsychosis,” and “Country Towns”; while *Five Bells* showcased “Out of Time,” “South Country,” and “Five Bells”—the haunting title poem about a friend’s drowning in Sydney Harbor.

Almost immediately after its publication, H.M. Green, Australia’s great literary historian, featured six of Slessor’s poems in *Modern Australian Poetry* and declared *Cuckooz Contrey* “the first wave of modernism in verse” (Green 1946, vii; see Green [1961] 1985, 950; Jaffa 1971, 20, 71). Subsequently the American poet-critic Selden Rodman placed “Five Bells” in his often-reprinted anthology

100 Modern Poems (1949, 91–93). Slessor’s friend and fellow poet/editor Douglas Stewart hailed Slessor’s “Five Visions of Captain Cook” as “the most dramatic break-through into the [Australian] poetry of the twentieth century” (1964, xxx). While Slessor’s contemporaries mourned their losses at Gallipoli (Jaffa 1971, 15, 37), or eulogized the outback to counter their colonial and geographic marginalization, Slessor looked back beyond Australia’s settlement as a penal colony to the heroic myth of her “discovery” by European sailors and her ensuing chronicle of maritime exploration. For Stewart and many others, Slessor’s most important contribution to Australian literature was the lengthy “voyager poem” (1960, 14; 1977, 160), whose “idiom of discovery and self-discovery seems appropriate in a country with little established cultural tradition, but possessing the fascinations of a continent which still retains something of an uninterpreted mystique” (Harris 1963, 20). Even Adrian Caesar, who regards Slessor as a romantic rather than as a modernist, acknowledges that the poet demonstrated the possibility of “graft[ing] a European tradition with Australian material to produce a distinctive twentieth-century voice” (1995, 110; see 50). And Andrew Taylor, for whom modernism is “the fate either of classical realism or of romanticism” (1987, 53), argues that Slessor’s “is the first inescapable Australian text that all subsequent texts must engage in discourse with” (ibid., 55).³

CIRCLING THE ATLAS

Cuckooz Contrey is especially fascinating because Slessor, who loved maps as much as navigator’s tales, opened it with one of the most original interpretations of cartography described in poetry—his five-poem sequence *The Atlas*. Slessor began each of these five poems with the title of a map or an atlas by a cartographer prominent during Europe’s “golden age of cartography,” and then alludes to that particular work throughout the poem. While celebrating the cartographic achievements of seventeenth-century atlas makers, Slessor’s sequence “roves all over the world” (Stewart 1964, xxxv), imaginatively recreating the places portrayed on very different types of maps, which include Robert Norton’s military plan of Algiers (*The Atlas*, 1: “The King of Cuckooz”), John Ogilby’s English road maps (*The Atlas*, 2: “Post-roads”), Joan Blaeu’s perspective plan/bird’s-eye view of Amsterdam in *Toonneel der Steden van vereenighde Nederlanden* or “Townbooks of the Netherlands” (*The Atlas*, 3: “Dutch Seacoast”), John Speed’s world map in *A Prospect of the Famous Parts of the World* (*The Atlas*, 4: “Mermaids”), and a map of the West Indies, supposedly by Nicolas or Adrien Sanson, featuring buccaneers and a seafight (*The Atlas*, 5: “The Seafight”). With its quaint epigraphs, alluring titles, and word-pictures about a bygone era, *The Atlas* whets our appetite for the maps behind its beautifully crafted verses.

None of these maps appear in Slessor’s collection, however. Nor have Slessor’s biographers and critics found the maps and atlases whose titles became the epithets within the sequence, let alone juxtaposed those maps and atlases with Slessor’s five poems to see what light they might shed upon one another. Yet any study of ecphrastic poetry—poetry that describes, interprets, or somehow

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Slessor's ambitious sequence acts as a bridge between literature and cartography, between Australia and everywhere else, between enduring works of art and ephemera, between the seventeenth century and the Great Depression, and—with the ending of every poem pulling us into his present—between both the past and the twenty-first century.

responds to another art form (Brown 1992; Heffernan 1993; Hollander 1995)—must confront the sequence's apparent models. Otherwise, we risk forfeiting a deeper understanding of *The Atlas* poems: their sensuality, their exotic language, their presentation—and interpretation—of space. Nor has anyone unearthed the rare catalogue of maps that inspired Slessor to compose *The Atlas*, let alone compared that catalogue with the poetry notebook in which Slessor drafted his sequence. Only by recognizing the role that such “ephemera” had on Slessor's creation can we date the sequence and make sense of the peculiar place-names and phrases that he copied so assiduously into his notebook. And only by comparing each of *The Atlas* poems with both its map and catalogue description can we know whether beautiful pictures or lyrical prose inspired his verses. Equally important, no one has considered the atlas-like arrangement of Slessor's sequence, despite the fact that, among the hundreds of twentieth-century poems about maps, *The Atlas* seems to be unique not only *as a sequence designed around old maps and atlases but in emulating* what Denis Wood (1987) and James Akerman (1991, 102) identify as *the narrative structure of atlases*.

Such important issues will be addressed in six articles that follow this one. The Epilogue, for instance, will focus on the sequence's resemblance to seventeenth-century geographical atlases and conclude with the well-known cartographic historian who, in all likelihood, wrote the catalogue of maps and atlases that inspired *The Atlas*. Between the Introduction and the Epilogue, five other articles will highlight the individual poems of the sequence. To achieve an atlas-like harmony, each article will adhere to the same pattern. First, the poem will be reprinted and analyzed in terms of influences upon it and critical reactions to it. Then we will turn to the poetry notebook to see how Slessor created his verses and to compare his drafts with the published version. Whether the poem retained its original place within the sequence is noted, as is the precise point at which Slessor discovered his epigraph. Next, and for the first time in any study of *The Atlas*, the map featured in the poem's epigraph is not only presented but described: What does it look like? When was it created, by whom, and why? How does the map reflect the period (history) and place (geography) in which it is set? The map and poem are then juxtaposed, and both of them compared to the description of that map in the undated catalogue of atlases and maps that Slessor used—the crucial question being whether the map itself or its description directly inspired the poem. Finally, whenever cartographic historians fall silent about a detail that impacts our understanding of Slessor's poem or its maps, an attempt is made to fill that gap. Take “Cuckooz,” for example, the as-yet-unidentified name on Norton's map of Algiers (1620). Even though Slessor happily pirated “Cuckooz” for the title of his entire collection *and* of its opening poem, no one has uncovered the name's meaning and significance. Moreover, his confusion about the identity of the cartographer responsible for “The Seafight” map is inevitable given the extremely vague, if not equally confused identification in the catalogue of atlases and maps.

Slessor's ambitious sequence acts as a bridge between literature and cartography, between Australia and everywhere else, between enduring works of art and ephemera, between the seventeenth century and the Great Depression, and—with the ending of every poem pulling us into his present—between both the past and the twenty-first century. By comparing Slessor's verbal maps to their graphic and non-graphic models, my work will break new ground over the next

few years as it explores the selectivity and creativity that enable cartographers, poets, and compilers of atlases to universalize their visions while transforming their sources.

For now, however, both poetically and cartographically, there is much about *The Atlas* that needs to be covered in the four remaining sections of the Introduction, the only part of my book-length study published in this issue. “*The Atlas in Context*” previews the poetry notebook in which Slessor composed his sequence, then goes on to locate the sequence within the context of Slessor’s poetry as a whole before turning to its acknowledged inspirations. In the process, we shall discover the degree to which *The Atlas* is the unique sum of its parts. Slessor wrote other substantial poems and other verses inspired by the quotations he used as epigraphs. He wrote other poems steeped in the past, and other poems alluding to the arts—including maps. Many of his poems were illustrated, some with maps, although he depended for these on men like Norman Lindsay (1879–1969), the influential Australian artist and writer whom Slessor regarded as both a mentor and a friend. Yet never again did *all* these elements come together as imaginatively as they did in *The Atlas*. As we shall see, Slessor’s decision to open *Cuckooz Contrey* with the sequence is only the most obvious indication of how significant he considered *The Atlas* to be.

This Introduction breaks new ground by examining *The Atlas* as a unit within Slessor’s poetry notebook. In so doing, it demonstrates not only the enormous effort Slessor lavished on drafting the sequence and mastering the period in which it is set, but also reveals the title he originally intended to give to *Cuckooz Contrey*. As the first study of the poet’s fascination with maps, “Maps as Illustrations in Slessor’s Poetry” surveys the cartographic illustrations that accompany *Trio* (1931) and celebrate the publication of *Cuckooz Contrey* (1932). It also previews *Strange Lands* (1932), the whimsical etching that Lindsay created as the frontispiece for *Cuckooz Contrey*. Despite Lindsay’s notoriety and the uniqueness of that etching in his oeuvre, until now no one has discussed this cartographic frontispiece or its relationship to *The Atlas*. “Maps in Slessor’s Life and Poetry” presents a never-before-attempted catalogue of map allusions in Slessor’s poetry. Finally, “Problems Researching *The Atlas*” does more than track down *Old Maps of the World*, the rare and hitherto elusive catalogue to which Slessor refers in his notes on *The Atlas*. It also posits what my articles on the individual poems will attempt to prove: that the relationship between this ephemeral catalogue and *The Atlas* is far more profound and far-reaching than anyone might have anticipated.

THE ATLAS IN CONTEXT: SLESSOR’S NOTEBOOKS AND POETRY

Since 1972, the Manuscript Section of the National Library of Australia has held the “Papers of Kenneth Adolf Slessor (1901–1971)” under the collection number MS 3020. An online guide to the collection reveals that, at present, twenty-three neatly ordered boxes contain his “correspondence; family papers; literary drafts, manuscripts and typescripts; diaries; despatches; notes and notebooks; newspaper cuttings; publications; business, financial and legal papers;

and photographs” (“Guide to the Papers of Kenneth Slessor,” NLA MS 3020). Except for his divorce papers, these materials are available for research, though not for loan, and many of the documents have been collected and reprinted. Until very recently, however, those wishing to study the stages in which Slessor composed a particular poem had to visit the National Library of Australia in Canberra or be satisfied with the tantalizing fragments of drafts published by others. Yet because of the Library’s commitment to share Slessor’s creative strategies with his readers, the poetry notebook for “Five Bells” (NLA MS 3020/19/46) as well as another notebook first began to grace the Library’s “Digital Collections” in preparation for the National Library Treasures Gallery opening in late 2011 (Elizabeth Caplice, e-mail to author: May 28, 2010). As luck would have it, that other online notebook (NLA MS 3020/19/1) is not only a “National Treasure” (ibid.), it’s also the notebook that Slessor used when creating *The Atlas*.

Measuring 33 by 21 by 2.5 centimeters (13 x 8 ¼ x 1 inches), the notebook sports a gray cover on which is printed “Invicta Australia 1927 Rough Diary, No.27” (-s1).⁴ In 1927, the Australian firm Sands & McDougall sold this large desk diary for nine shillings, rather more than they charged for others because of its size and the advantages of a blotter and its “one day on a page” feature (-s5 and -s268). The notebook is crammed with drafts of poems, but also contains drafts of prose pieces, a play, a “talkie,” and an “interview”—the sheer number and variety of which may explain why this particular poetry journal was the first to be digitized. Most of the notebook is hand-written and composed from front to back on the right-hand pages of the diary; other parts are composed upside-down from back to front on consecutive pages, or typed on loose sheets of paper inserted at some unspecified time. Of the notebook’s 301 scanned items, the first 16 are front-matter, followed by 282 pages of Slessor’s work, an advertisement for 1928 diaries, and 2 pages of back-matter. Of the 282 items of Slessor’s work, some of them blank, *The Atlas* occupies almost 130 pages—nearly half of the notebook.⁵

For anyone reading the notebook, the startling revelation is the title that Slessor had in mind for his new collection. Underlined at the top of the September 13 entry is not “Cuckooz Contrey,” but “**The Atlas.**”

The number of notebook pages devoted to *The Atlas* is only one indicator of the sequence’s importance. Slessor settled early upon its title, tweaking “Atlases” to “Atlas” within the first three pages before switching, more or less regularly, to “The Atlas” by the March 28th entry (-s83). While Slessor may have added some page headers to the drafts at a later time, the title of *The Atlas* appears consistent when compared to the alternative titles in the journal for three important poems—“The Crow’s Voice” (-s67), which became “Crow Country”; “Advice to Metaphysicians” (-s163), published as “Advice to Psychologists”; and “Ship’s Bells” (-s206), which turned into “Five Bells.” Such consistency over 130 pages suggests that Slessor had a clear vision of what he wanted from the sequence, which included opening *Cuckooz Contrey* with it. On the final hand-written pages of *The Atlas* draft, Slessor made three lists while attempting to arrange the order of his poems within his new collection (September 13–14, -s242 to -s243). Although none of the lists displays the precise order of the poems as they appeared in *Cuckooz Contrey*, each one begins with *The Atlas*.

For anyone reading the notebook, the startling revelation is the title that Slessor had in mind for his new collection. Underlined at the top of the September 13 entry is not “Cuckooz Contrey,” but “**The Atlas**” (-s242). None of Slessor’s notebooks in the National Library of Australia reveal when Slessor resolved the

final order of his poem or when he changed the name of his collection to *Cuckooz Contrey*. But even after its demotion from title-poem, *The Atlas* still permeates the collection it introduces. The name “Cuckooz” pops up in the title “The King of Cuckooz,” the opening poem of *The Atlas*. And “Cuckooz Contrey,” which appears in the initial line of that poem (“The King of Cuckooz Contrey”), is not only the name that Slessor ultimately gave his collection. It also appears as the title of Norman Lindsay’s frontispiece illustration. And it graces the preceding half-title page with its epigraph to the entire collection:

“The unknown hilly country to the south of the Bay is coloured green,
and marked ‘Part of the King of Cuckooz Contrey.’”

As to *The Atlas* being the unique sum of its parts, no one denies that Slessor enjoyed writing poems of substantial length. *Cuckooz Contrey* is framed by two lengthy series, beginning with *The Atlas* (Slessor 1932, 11–18) and ending with “The Old Play” (ibid., 61–74). If poet Judith Wright can refer to *The Atlas* as “the brilliant and, for once thoroughly light-hearted series” (Wright 1965, 144; see Green (1961) 1985, 946), “The Old Play” is its opposite: a bitterly ironic portrayal of “forgotten gods like a bored society audience” (Dutton 1991, 135) “watching man perform his old play of life” (Jaffa 1971, 155 n.27). Geoffrey Dutton recognizes the despair underlying the tragicomedy of “The Old Play” and reads it “as metaphor of a personal crisis, most probably in his relation with Noela,” from whom Slessor was separated for a time as early as 1931 (1991, 135; see 132–136, 219–220, and 259). In fact, a page inserted into *The Atlas* draft declares in red and black type, “let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments” (MS 3020/19/3: -s127; Shakespeare, Sonnet 116). Dutton speculates that Slessor, “always extremely sensitive to word-play,” chose to emphasize the enigmatic name “Cuckooz” because “‘cuckoo’ is so close to ‘cuckold’, ‘contrey’ to the ‘country matters’ of Shakespeare. He could be very hard on himself” (1991, 135, 136). Although Wright exaggerates the “light-heartedness” of *The Atlas*, and Dutton—like Slessor himself—doesn’t know what “Cuckooz” actually represents (see my forthcoming study on “The King of Cuckooz”), their comments encourage further illumination of the poet’s life and work.

Within the frame of these two sequences, *Cuckooz Contrey* contains two other substantial poems, which along with *The Atlas* and “The Old Play” fill over half of the collection’s 64 pages of verse: the much anthologized “Five Visions of Captain Cook” (Slessor 1932, 31–40) with its five-poem sequence about the English navigator “whose deification as the agent of European civilization, and the discoverer of Australia had become part of the national mythology of post-Federation Australia” (Julian Croft, quoted in Mead 1997, 204); and the 165-line “Captain Dobbin,” a powerful yet wistful tribute to a retired sea-captain who spends his time dreaming about the sea (Slessor 1932, 19–23).

The Atlas, because it opened *Cuckooz Contrey*, became for Slessor’s readers the first of his collected poems to include an epigraph: “a quotation set at the beginning of a literary work or a division of it to suggest its theme” (*Merriam-Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged*, 1986, s.v. “epigraph”). The Kenneth Slessor archive at the National Library of Australia reveals that he began this practice early: a poem draft entitled “Iron Rations” begins with a 1919 epigraph from the *Sun* (NLA MS 3020/19/6/67). As a journalist, he continued to find news clips inspirational in “Wayside

Pipers” (1920⁶: Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 268) and in the light verses he published in *Smith's Weekly* while working there.⁷ Several of these newspaper-inspired verses were written during the years he was composing the “serious” poetry for his collection. What is striking is the fact that the epigraphs in *Cuckooz Contrey* are far more literary and, with one exception, far less contemporary or Australian. In addition to the titles of seventeenth-century maps for *The Atlas* (Slessor 1932, 11–18), Slessor chose a 1661 extract from Samuel Pepys’s famous diary for “The Country Ride” (42), a passage from *Gulliver's Travels* for “Glubbdbudrib” (27), a quote in French from Heinrich Heine’s 1826 *Tambour Legrand* for “The Old Play” (61), and a sentiment from Norman Lindsay’s 1923 story *The Succubus* for “Burying Friends” (50). After *Cuckooz Contrey*, Slessor never again used epigraphs in the “serious” verses he published, and his most frequently anthologized poems lack them entirely.

Slessor loved the arts and incorporated them into his poetry, especially during his twenties. “The Old Play” illustrates his interest in theater, which he frequently indulged. So does the two-part verse-drama, “Man of Sentiment,” the longest poem of Slessor’s “early period” in *One Hundred Poems*. Music was a lifelong passion (Stewart 1977, 16, 21; Dutton 1991, 313). Not only did his ambitious twelve-part sequence “Music” conclude the poems from 1919–1926 in *One Hundred Poems*, but musicians and their instruments are found in several of his works, including *The Atlas*, where “Five thousand naked Concubines” play dulcimers (“The King of Cuckooz”), Harpies sing (“Mermaids”), and “men blast...trumpets” (“The Seafight”). However, when Douglas Stewart praises the “music” of *The Atlas* (Stewart, to Slessor, 17 Feb 1963: NLA MS 3020 1/5/353; Stewart 1969, 158; 1977, 74), he refers to the sensual aural effects and sound patterns at which Slessor excelled: rhythm and phrasing, meter and rhyme, movement and repetition, assonance and consonance (Thomson 1968, 152–156). Not surprisingly, many of his poems have been set to music since composer Lindsay Aked began the trend in 1955 (Aked and Slessor 1955).

The visual arts hold a special place in Slessor’s work and in any study of his maps. As Leonie Kramer observes, “Many of Slessor’s early poems are tributes, directly or by implication, to the artists’ power over the temporal” (1977, 13; see Dutton 1991, 32). A painting by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) inspired “Nuremberg” (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 332), which is the earliest of Slessor’s published poems collected in *One Hundred Poems* (1922/1924). Likewise, the painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) moved Slessor to compose “Rubens’ Hell” (1932: 384) as well as “Rubens’ Innocents” with its “tumbling babes of heaven,/ plump cherubim with blown cheeks” (1923/1929: 9, lines 1–2). “A Man of Sentiment: Part One” alludes to the Dance of Death series by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/8–1543) (1923: 345–346 and 34, line 96). Slessor refers to the artist and illustrator Gustave Doré (1832–1883) in the first part of “Two Nocturnes,” written between 1917 and 1924 (1924: 14–15, 336). Although Slessor’s verses never mention the maps drawn by Dürer or Holbein (Haft 2003, 44, 49–50, 53), within *The Atlas* “Dutch Seacoast” (ca. 1930: 73–74) re-creates the map of Amsterdam made “by the great cartographer” Joan Blaeu (ca. 1599–1673: Tooley et al. 1999–2004, 1:145), while “Post-roads” (ca. 1930: 72–73) imagines the ghost of John Ogilby (1600–1676: Tooley et al. 1999–2004, 3:345–346) surveying “the unmapped savanna of dumb shades” just as he’d measured the roads of England and Wales prior to mapping them in his brilliantly

illustrated *Britannia* (1675). In his early poetry, Slessor has been compared to the celebrated colorist Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) (Wallace-Crabbe 1964, 379; Dutton 1991, 67), from whose 1717 painting *L'Embarquement pour l'Île de Cythère* Slessor took the title of his poem “The Embarkation for Cythera” (1924: 29–30). And his uncollected poem “Blind” (1920: 270) has been dubbed “the most poignant statement of Slessor the frustrated painter; it was a kind of blindness for him not to be Turner” (Dutton 1991, 49).

The visual appeal of Slessor’s poetry is one of its greatest charms as well as one of its potential weaknesses. J.T. Kirtley, whose 1924 review of *Thief of the Moon* Slessor pasted behind the cover of his own copy, summarizes this ambivalence well (NLA MS 3020/4/1: emphasis mine):

Mr. Slessor is one of the most promising of the younger school of Australian poets. He has a feeling for “the just word,” a strong sense of form, and an equally strong sense of *colour*... Austere critics may complain that Mr. Slessor is inclined to overload his verse with adjectives, and displays a tendency towards precocity in diction. Nevertheless his poems reveal imaginative powers of a high order, and a *rare pictorial appeal*.

H.M. Green, amidst his praise for *The Atlas* ([1961] 1985, 946), argues that elsewhere the poet’s images can be too “prolific” and “startling” (953):

Slessor’s capacity for producing original and striking effects has tempted him to be as original and striking as he can. This temptation may well have been encouraged by his lifelong pursuit of journalism, one of whose principal objects is to catch the reader’s eye, almost at all costs; some of the images appear to have been heightened a little, so that they arouse a faint and far-off sense of artificiality.

Although Green links “artificiality” with journalism, it has become commonplace to blame many of Slessor’s youthful excesses on Norman Lindsay (Jaffa 1971, 36–49; Dutton 1991, 66–75; Caesar 1995, 31–39), the controversial bohemian artist popularized, however inaccurately, in the 1993 film *Sirens*. Dutton, for instance, describes “The Embarkation for Cythera,” as “Watteau vulgarized into Norman Lindsay” (1991, 67). Except for Slessor’s “Nuremberg,” first published in the magazine *Art in Australia* (Slessor 1922, 14), and his later “Dutch Seacoast” and “Rubens’ Hell,” the pictorial poems described above, and subsequently collected in *Thief of the Moon*, premiered in the short-lived but aptly named magazine *Vision: A Literary Quarterly* (Johnson, Lindsay, Slessor 1923–1924). Founded by Slessor, Frank Johnson, and Norman’s eldest son Jack, *Vision* catered to “Youth”—defined as “any condition of the mind which is vital, which ascends”—and promised its readers poetry and prose that “liberate the imagination by gaiety or fantasy” (*Vision* 1, May 1923, 2; see Lindsay 1960, 84; Dutton 1991, 58 and 71). Cavorting through the four issues of *Vision* were Norman’s drawings of fauns, nymphs, centaurs, and mermaids—lustful creatures of Greek mythology that Lindsay hoped to relocate in Australia’s literature and countryside. Like present-day visitors to Lindsay’s Blue Mountain estate in Springwood, just west of Sydney, Slessor couldn’t help but admire the statues that Norman made to animate his property. He not only dedicated “Realities” (1926) and “Earth-Visitors” (1926) to Norman, but set his poems

in this garden among Lindsay's statues of fauns and nymphs. According to Paul Slessor, his father also owned seventeen small watercolors, drawings, and pen-and-ink sketches by Lindsay (Paul Slessor, e-mail to author: November 11, 2011), "which the artist, with his customary generosity, had probably given him" (Stewart 1977, 17). In 1955, Slessor showed his appreciation in a tribute entitled "Australian Poetry and Norman Lindsay" (Slessor 1970, 111–112):

Norman Lindsay has exercised more influence and produced more effect on numbers of this country's poets than any other single individual in Australia's history.... My own debt to Norman Lindsay's perpetual powerhouse of stimulation and suggestion is obvious. (See also Lindsay to Slessor, September 1955, regarding the drawings he'd made for poets' works: NLA MS 3020 1/2/167, Box 1)

Their mutual respect, their shared antiquarian passions, and their belief in the "concrete" as opposed to the "abstract" image (Thomson 1968, 139–146; Jaffa 1971, 38–39) connected them throughout nearly fifty years of friendship (Norman Lindsay, in Stewart 1977, 174). As Lindsay wrote to Slessor in 1939, "I never absorb a poem of yours without finding a whole flood of pictorial images let loose in my mind" (Dutton 1991, 166; see 345 n.36; Jaffa 1971, 41 and n.22). Not surprisingly, Slessor's poetry inspired several of Lindsay's illustrations, including *Strange Lands* (1932: 25.5 x 20.3 cm), first exhibited at Sydney's Macleod Gallery in 1932 (Lindsay and Bloomfield 1998, 335).

In addition to its pictorial appeal and allusions to visual artists, Slessor's poetry was often illustrated—at least prior to *One Hundred Poems*.

In addition to its pictorial appeal and allusions to visual artists, Slessor's poetry was often illustrated—at least prior to *One Hundred Poems*. Virgil Reilly's drawings of contemporary young women, dubbed "the sex symbols of Australia" (Dutton 1991, 120), accompanied the light verses that Slessor published in *Smith's Weekly* between 1928 and 1933 (Julian Croft, in Slessor *et al.* 1983, v). For Slessor, who was composing *Cuckooz Contrey* at roughly the same time, these years were among the "happiest" and most productive of his life (Slessor 1970, 41). A year after *Cuckooz Contrey* appeared in print, Slessor collected forty-seven of his witty *Smith's Weekly* poems, along with their illustrations, in *Darlinghurst Nights* (Slessor and Reilly 1933a; see Caesar 1995, 40 n.1). Still others were reprinted posthumously in *Backless Betty from Bondi* (Slessor *et al.* 1983). Although neither Slessor's name nor a publication date appears in *Funny Farmyard: Nursery Rhymes and Painting Book*, penciled on the cover of his copy in the National Library of Australia are both his name and "1933" (Slessor and Miller 1933b). Published by Slessor's friend Frank C. Johnson, who also published *Vision* and *Cuckooz Contrey* among other works by the poet, this rare children's book features verses about "Daniel Duck" and other impertinent creatures, all illustrated with oversize lino-cut drawings by Syd Miller, another *Smith's Weekly* artist (Slessor 1970, 43; see Dutton 1991, 166). Syd Miller also illustrated Slessor's *Surf: All About It* (Slessor and Miller 1931).

It wasn't only his light verse that attracted illustrators. James E. Flett designed a drawing of two sailors to accompany "Five Visions of Captain Cook" when that poem debuted in *Trio: A Book of Poems*, the collection Slessor shared with two other poets (Slessor *et al.* 1931). And Norman Lindsay famously provided at least eleven images for other "serious" poetry (Thomson 1968, 2; Jaffa 1971, 51 and n.42). Above "Adventure Bay," one of the ten poems that Slessor

published in *Vision*, three bare-breasted and bare-bottomed mermaids tempt the crew of an approaching vessel. The image certainly enhances the sexuality of the poem, whose lover must “like Francis Drake turn circumnavigator” to reach the beloved’s unseen geography—“Port of all drownéd lovers, Adventure Bay!” (*Vision* 3, November 1923, 6; Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 10, lines 2, 12). For *Thief of the Moon*, Lindsay supplied three original woodcuts: a naked couple embracing in the moonlight; a female faun arousing a bewigged gentleman; and, to illustrate “The Man of Sentiment,” an older man courting a doubtful young woman. In *Earth-Visitors*, Lindsay framed Slessor’s verses and three equally risqué woodcuts with copperplate engravings of a gentleman bowing (final page) and a lady curtseying, her breasts amply exposed (title page).

MAPS AS ILLUSTRATIONS IN SLESSOR’S POETRY

Cuckooz Contrey opens with a reproduction of Norman Lindsay’s etching *Strange Lands*, aptly retitled “Cuckooz Contrey.” Lindsay’s work is not only the frontispiece of the collection but also its sole illustration. Animating the image are many of his favorite characters. At its center, three armed men gaze quizzically at a voluptuous harpy hovering above. Staring at them are other creatures of myth—a mermaid, faun, and phoenix. But what makes the *Cuckooz Contrey* image so different from Lindsay’s earlier illustrations of Slessor’s poetry, as well as from his own work generally (Lindsay and Bloomfield 1998), is the wealth of detail and the fact that his figures are standing on an old chart.

Now Lindsay’s etching was not the first map-related image to illustrate a Slessor poem. Two others accompanied “Five Visions of Captain Cook” when that poem opened *Trio* (Slessor *et al.* 1931). The first is a reproduction of an oil painting of James Cook by Norman’s second son Raymond (1903–1960: Smith 1986b), whose signature appears on a scroll in the lower left. Raymond Lindsay depicted the Captain as seated, compass in one hand and an empty chart in the other; surrounding him are three sailors, Neptune, a sea monster, and a mermaid astride the terraqueous globe (Figure 2). The second illustration shows part of Cook’s historic circumnavigation in the *Endeavour* and bears the title:

Chart of part of the Celebrated Voyage thro.
Vnknown Austral Seas within the South Pacific
Ocean, made by Captain James Cook in the years
1769–1770 together with parts of the Routes
traversed by Luiz Vaez de Torres, 1606, and Abel
Iansz[oon] Tasman, 1642–3 [*sic*].

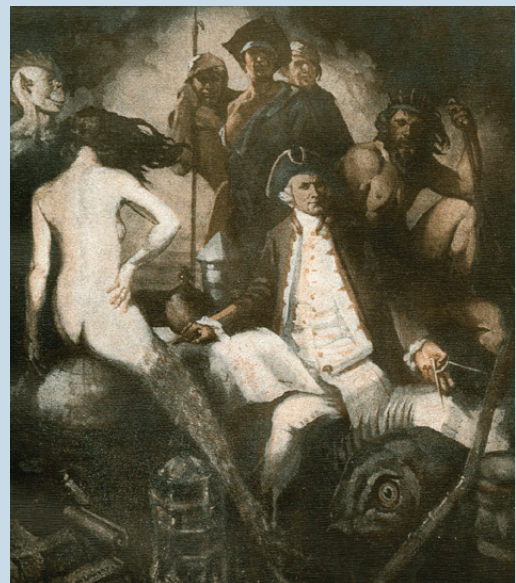


Figure 2. Illustration by Raymond Lindsay (the second of Norman Lindsay’s sons) of Kenneth Slessor’s poem “Five Visions of Captain Cook.” Both the poem and illustration appear in *Trio: A Book of Poems* by Kenneth Slessor, Harley Matthews, Colin Simpson, and Raymond Lindsay (Sydney: Sunnybrook Press, 1931). Lindsay depicted Captain Cook as seated, compass in one hand and an empty chart in the other. Surrounding him are three sailors, Neptune, a sea monster, and a mermaid astride the terraqueous globe. Raymond’s signature appears on a scroll in the lower left. Reproduced with the permission of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Special Collections Library, the Pennsylvania State University Libraries.

Centered on New Zealand [*sic*] and Australia (“*Nova Hollandia*”), the chart features a portrait of James Cook, a scale of statute miles, and several details copied not from the Enlightenment maps of Cook’s day but from the fanciful decorative charts of the early-Modern period—a compass rose, rhumb lines, wind-blowing heads, sailing ships, sea monsters, landfalls, and local interests (kangaroos and aboriginal hunters). Like other twentieth-century maps illustrating long poems or historical novels, this chart graced the end papers of *Trio*, although the online version published by the State Library of New South Wales comes from an identical but separate map (Figure 3). Its cartouche announces in Latin that the map “was made by James Emery in 1931” (*Iacobus Emerius fecit, MDCCCXXXI*). Emery (d. 1947) is nearly forgotten now, although over twenty of his map titles appear on the ever-expanding Australia Trove database based at the National Library of Australia. Australian poet



James Emery. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW. Z/M2 800/1770/1

Figure 3. Map by James Emery for Kenneth Slessor’s poem “Five Visions of Captain Cook.” Both the poem and illustration appear in *Trio: A Book of Poems* by Kenneth Slessor, Harley Matthews, Colin Simpson, and Raymond Lindsay (Sydney: Sunnybrook Press, 1931). Emery’s map traces part of Cook’s historic circumnavigation in the *Endeavour* and bears the title: “Chart of part of the Celebrated Voyage thro. Vnknown Austral Seas within the South Pacific Ocean, made by Captain James Cook in the years 1769–1770 together with parts of the Routes traversed by Luiz Vaez de Torres, 1606, and Abel Iansz[oon] Tasman, 1642–3 [*sic*].” In addition to its portrait of James Cook and a scale of statute miles, the map features fanciful details from early-Modern charts—a compass rose, rhumb lines, wind-blowing heads, sailing ships, sea monsters, landfalls, and local interests (kangaroos and aboriginal hunters). Reproduced with permission of the Mitchell Library.

Robert FitzGerald dedicated *Heemskerck Shoals* to Emery, whom he called an accomplished “cartographer, artist and historian” (FitzGerald 1949: emphasis mine). And Slessor, in his essay “The Lane” (1962), also paid homage to his friend and drinking companion: “Jim Emery [was] the cartographer, whose big fists could hold a pen for the most exquisite and tiny lettering” (Slessor 1970, 26). A year after Emery produced the chart of Cook’s 1769–1770 voyage, he published a delightful map showing the location of Sunnybrook Press, whose very first publication just happened to be *Trio*. And that same year (1932), he illustrated Slessor’s *Atlas* poem, “The Seafight.”

Like Emery’s chart for “Five Visions of Captain Cook,” Lindsay’s *Cuckooz Contrey* map emulates pre-Enlightenment cartography. His seas are filled with ships and monsters, his lands covered with exotic creatures and monuments, and, above all, a compass rose beams (top center) while puffed-up faces blow winds across the waters (top corners) (Figure 4). Like Emery, Lindsay created his image specifically to illustrate Slessor’s work. Of the more than 370 plates that he etched during his life (Lindsay and Bloomfield 1998, 18), only *Strange Lands* is at all map-like. Furthermore, according to Lin Bloomfield in *The Complete Etchings of Norman Lindsay* (ibid., 162):

Strange Lands [1932] was intended as an original illustration to *Cuckooz Contrey* by Kenneth Slessor; but the book was published with a reproduction of the etching and the etching was published separately.

Certain details in *Strange Lands* allude to other poems in Slessor’s collection, like the Lilliputians from “Gulliver,” or Adam and the Gorgon’s eyes from “The Old Play” (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 83, and 108–118, lines 57 and 242, respectively). But it focuses almost exclusively on *The Atlas* as the opening sequence of *Cuckooz Contrey*. Lindsay’s image of first contact, in fact, reflects the reader’s “first contact” with Slessor’s new collection. Moreover, it provides a visual counterpart to the sequence’s recreation of the world portrayed on seventeenth-century maps. As we shall discover in future issues of *Cartographic Perspectives*, “Mermaids,” the exuberant fourth poem



Figure 4. Frontispiece by Norman Lindsay. The sole illustration for Kenneth Slessor’s *Cuckooz Contrey* (Sydney: Frank C. Johnson, 1932), Lindsay’s “*Cuckooz Contrey*” is a reproduction of his etching *Strange Lands* (1932: 25.5 x 20.3 cm). Many of his favorite characters animate his image: armed men and voluptuous harpies as well as a mermaid, faun, and phoenix. What makes this image different from the rest of Lindsay’s work is that his figures are standing on an old chart. Details demonstrate that the illustration was intended to represent Slessor’s opening sequence, *The Atlas*. © Lin Bloomfield, Odana Editions, Bungendore, NSW, Australia.



Figure 5. Detail of Hugh McCrae’s mounted drawing, dated Dec 1932, congratulating Slessor on the publication of *Cuckooz Contrey*. A poet and illustrator who admired Slessor’s work as much as Slessor admired his, McCrae drew *Cuckooz Contrey*—open to its title page and Lindsay’s etching—as if it were sticking out of his own perfectly bisected head. Below the drawing, he wrote: “Dear Ken—It has got into my head; and I can never get it out again. Don’t want to.... All the congratulations in the world. H. McC” (NLA MS 3020/27/1/17). Reproduced with the permission of Mrs. Janet Hay and the Manuscripts Branch of the National Library of Australia.

of the sequence, laments the passing of precisely the kind of world that believed in harpies and mermaids and that ornamented maps with compass roses, while “The King of Cuckooz” and “The Seafight” suggest the temptations and dangers of visiting strange lands. Lindsay’s etching echoes Slessor’s pictorial images: “sky full of ships” (“Dutch Seacoast”: Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 74, line 107) and “sailors.../staring from maps in sweet and poisoned places” (“Mermaids”: 75, lines 137–138). Among the tiny pictures etched near the hovering harpy, three are certainly the bearded King of Cuckooz in various poses. So arresting is the drawing that Hugh McCrae (1876–1958) reproduced it in a drawing he made in December 1932 to thank Slessor for giving him a copy of the

recently published book (Figure 5). McCrae, a poet and illustrator who admired both Slessor’s and Lindsay’s work as much as they admired his (Slessor 1970, 92–110; Stewart 1977, 33–34; Lindsay and Bloomfield 1998, 40–41, 55–64), drew *Cuckooz Contrey*—open to its title page and Lindsay’s etching—as if it were sticking out of his own recognizable, perfectly bisected head. Below the drawing, McCrae wrote: “Dear Ken—It has got into my head; and I can never get it out again. Don’t want to.... All the congratulations in the world. H. McC” (NLA MS 3020/27/1/17).

Lindsay made only forty copies of *Strange Lands*. The illustration contains none of the place-names common to most maps, let alone the political divisions and scales of distances found on Emery’s chart. By implying that such first contact may happen anywhere, Lindsay foregoes the specificity of place that anchors the individual poems of *The Atlas* in “the real world” and makes the sequence a sophisticated poetic commentary on seventeenth-century atlas making. Evocative as it is, Lindsay’s “Cuckooz Contrey”—like any ephrastic work—cannot help but interpret *The Atlas* poems through the filters of the artist’s own preoccupations.

Years later (1955), Slessor would voice his discomfort with illustrations of poetry. A master of “picture-making with words” (Ronald McCuaig, quoted in Thomson 1968, 55), Slessor faulted the single interpretation that graphics impose on a poem (Slessor 1970, 114):

It is a contradiction that a poem in which time is fluid should be fixed to an instant by the illustration of a few of its lines. Nor should the imagination, which may be given infinity when released by a poem, be limited by the finite dimensions of a drawing. The Forest of Arden of the mind’s eye is obviously far superior to the Forest of Arden supplied by the most talented scene-painter.

Slessor suggests that poetry exists in “the mapless country of the human mind” (ibid., 96), implying that maps are also poor illustrations of poems. Yet when Slessor was establishing himself as a poet, illustrations helped to sell his verses. Lindsay’s etchings, in particular, attracted book collectors to the beautifully crafted limited editions. As Slessor had to admit (ibid.):

Drawings by Norman Lindsay, even a tailpiece or a mere decoration, could often mean the difference between publication and oblivion.

MAPS IN SLESSOR’S LIFE AND POETRY

Throughout his life, Slessor collected old maps along with other antiques. Hal Porter describes the Sydney home in which Slessor lived during the 1950s and early 1960s (1975, 90):

The house, half of a minor mansion, is self-contained, dusty, quasi-secretive ... Its major pieces [are] early-Victorian, nothing flimsy, antelope-legged or genteelly curlicued. It smells—hall, living-room, dining-room, study—of cigars, old calf-bound books, burgundy, a matured masculine affluence ... Knick-knacks everywhere: old maps, framed theatre programmes, etchings and water-colours by Norman Lindsay, sketches by Hugh McCrae, Tarot cards, shelves and cabinets loaded with glassware, silver, china.

Slessor gave his son “globes of the world” to whet his curiosity (Dutton 1991, 290). Around the time that Paul was born, Slessor composed “Lovett Bay” (ca.1951), which, as he explains under the title, came to him “after looking at the Admiralty Chart made by Captain F.W. Sidney R.N., 1868–72” (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 319; see 469–470). Just as he did in *The Atlas*, Slessor refers to maps (or their absence) within this poem while describing his subject: “A bay all phosphorus and shine,/ A bay of burning gold, perhaps—/ Or so it seemed in ‘69/ To Captain Sidney making maps” (320, lines 5–8).

Poetic references to maps are to be found among the earliest of Slessor’s poems as well. In “The Uncharted” (1919), one of his published juvenilia not selected for *One Hundred Poems*, Slessor deprecates man’s pitiful aspirations (256; see 441):

There’s never an island uncharted, whose loveliness mariners seek
But the seagull can reach in a week;

For Nature built shrines ere she fashioned your jellyfish sire,
And always the sun shall rise splendidly over *your* funeral pyre!

“In an Old Book Shop,” later published as “In Tyrrell’s Book Shop,” Slessor recalls some treasures of his youth (1920: 265, lines 25–28; see 447; Dutton 1991, 37–39):

Broadsheets there are, of horrid hangman’s tales,
Yellow-stained maps from some forgotten book;
Journals of convict years in New South Wales,
And Captain Cook.

Slessor also alludes to maps in two pieces from *Thief of the Moon* that he later selected for *One Hundred Poems*. The final lines of “Amazement” present the poet remembering when he was younger and life still inspired awe: “So, too, I solved an undiscovered globe./ Swam in uncharted oceans, mapped the skies,/ And strode the Nine Lands of the world afresh” (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 21, lines 12–14). The worldly cleric in “The Man of Sentiment, Part I,” “reassures” a young woman that the isolated path he hopes to take her down is “prick’d/ In curious inks on charts of old, I’ll vow,/ Drown’d in some careless Viscount’s library/ Five hundred years, and like to rot five more” (31, lines 13–16).

Because there are no new map-related poems in *Earth-Visitors*, we have to wait until 1932 for more to appear in print. The year that *Cuckooz Contrey* debuted, Slessor published in *Smith’s Weekly* two pieces of light verse that refer to maps. In “Camille,” “...even the gum on the flap/ So recently kissed by Estella/ May babble all over the map/ As loud as the vulgar rosella” (294, lines 21–24). And in “Eve—of Ottawa,” later collected in *Backless Betty from Bondi* (Slessor *et al.* 1983), we are told: “And then YOU came, with Hansards in your lap/ And tariffs like tiaras in your hair,/ Bidding us read the news, consult the map/ And banish our despair” (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 238, lines 33–36). *Cuckooz Contrey* mentions globes in “Elegy in a Botanic Gardens” (96–97, line 22); while the ironic verses of “The Nabob,” dedicated to the bon vivant William Hickey (1749–1827), suggest that “There are worse things than steak, perhaps,/ Worse things than oyster-sauces and tureens/ And worlds of provender like painted maps/ Pricked out with ports of claret and pitchcocked eels” (86, lines 17–20).

However, in *Cuckooz Contrey* we discover an *unprecedented* integration of maps, not only within *The Atlas* but also in “Captain Dobbin” and “Five Visions of Captain Cook.” Maps play many roles in Slessor’s acclaimed sea-faring poems. For the mariner, they are usually guides as well as records of exploration. In the Coral Sea, for instance, Cook’s charisma and fearlessness are revealed by his men’s absolute faith in his choice to sail “westabout” “into the dark” of the treacherous Great Barrier Reef *without even a map to guide them* (p.88, I:47, 32; Thomson 1968, 21): “They’d sailed all day outside a coral hedge,/ And half the night. Cook sailed at night./ Let there be reefs a fathom from the keel/ And empty charts. The sailors didn’t ask,/ Nor Joseph Banks. Who cared? It was the spell/ Of Cook that lulled them...” (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, p.89, I:58–62). And when the Captain famously maps eastern Australia, “Here, in this jolly-boat they graced,/ Were food and freedom, wind and storm,/ While,

In *Cuckooz Contrey* we discover an unprecedented integration of maps, not only within *The Atlas* but also in “Captain Dobbin” and “Five Visions of Captain Cook.”

fowling-piece across his waist,/ Cook mapped the coast, with one eye cocked for game” (p.91, IV:119–122). Cook’s magic also encourages the ground-breaking experiments—first with sextants, then with state-of-the-art chronometers—that refined exponentially the accuracy and ease of determining longitude for maps and navigation (pp. 89–90, III:83–102): “I’ve never heard/ Of sailors aching for the longitude/ Of shipwrecks before or since. It was the spell/ Of Cook did this, the phylacteries of Cook” (p.89, II:77–80).

In “Captain Dobbin,” the map is more ambivalent. Here Dobbin represents the artist, while his maps symbolize art; poetry, in particular. Long retired to watch the sea from his window, Dobbin keeps “A ledger sticky with ink,/ Entries of time and weather, state of the moon,/ Nature of cargo and captain’s name./ For some mysterious and awful purpose/ Never divulged” (77, lines 14–18). He obsesses over his beloved sea, pieces of which are “stolen and put in coloured maps”; at night, reliving the past, “...he sails from shelf to shelf... / Or [to] the hanging-gardens of old charts...” (78, lines 36, 44, 46). Slessor’s use of nautical charts in “Captain Dobbin” is beautifully summarized by Adrian Caesar (Caesar 1995, 52–53; see Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 70–76, for the bracketed line numbers):

In books and maps the Captain finds a stimulus which can transport him to the South Seas of memory and imagination. He pores over Atlas leaves through his magnifying glass [lines 49ff.]—which gives him an entrée into a world richer in sight, sound, and adventure than his impoverished present....

The poem expresses a strong ambivalence towards the charts, books, and photographs which on the one hand spark Dobbin’s memory and imagination, but on the other are seen to be both threatened with decay themselves, and deeply reductive of the lived experiences. Thus the voyages these shipmates have shared are marked by “inadequate lines/ On charts” [lines 110–111], and “a year sucked quietly from the blood” is “no more/ Than a scratch on a dry chart” [lines 123–125]. So memory may be imbued with as much sadness as joy, just as the “return” from inadequate fragments of the dead past to the impoverished present may prove “too choking bitter-sweet” [line 126].

Dobbin spends his waning years rereading his own “autobiography” “of angles and triangles and lozenges/ Ruled tack by tack across the sheet,/ That with a single scratch expressed the stars....” (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 81, lines 114–116). Or poring over the expeditions of “Magellan, Bougainville and Cook” (line 131).

In “Five Bells,” published seven years after *Cuckooz Contrey*, Slessor could write “I have lived many lives,” and mean his own as well as those he’d resurrected poetically from books or maps (ibid., 120, line 6; see Jaffa 1971, 51). For the most part, however, the poetry culminating in *Cuckooz Contrey* is written by an armchair explorer living through the adventures of others. As Herbert Jaffa said of Slessor just before his death, “in this imagined living he has sailed many journeys and explored many coasts, though, in fact, he seldom ventured far from his room overlooking Sydney Harbor” (1971, 112–113; see 69). Slessor had high hopes for his retirement, on the other hand, and told his friends that “before he

As Herbert Jaffa said of Slessor just before his death, “in this imagined living he has sailed many journeys and explored many coasts, though, in fact, he seldom ventured far from his room overlooking Sydney Harbor.”

settled down, he would make a lazy, leisurely voyage, of which he talked with great anticipatory relish, in a tramp steamer to Bangkok and other enticing ports of the Far East where his heroes Marco Polo and Captain Dobbin had been before him” (Stewart 1977, 59). The overlap between Slessor and Captain Dobbin comes full circle in the 1990 collection *The Sea Poems of Kenneth Slessor*, which includes “Captain Dobbin” and “Five Visions of Captain Cook” as well as parts of *The Atlas*. There, on the title page, is an engraving of Slessor in silhouette gazing through his window at the moonlit harbor (Slessor *et al.* 1990).

But Captain Dobbin is not just “a metaphoric representation of the artist” heroically attempting to revive the past through memory and imagination or to anchor time’s relentless flux through art (Caesar 1995, 51). Slessor himself later acknowledged that he had modeled Dobbin on a very real person, namely Noela’s maternal uncle, Captain Francis Joseph Bayldon (1872–1948: see Thompson 1962, in Kiernan 1977, 7). The “doyen of Australian seafarers” (Phillips 1979), Bayldon “worshipped” Cook as much as his fictitious alter-ego Captain Dobbin did (Slessor 1970, 192; see Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 81, line 134). After achieving renown as a master mariner and accomplished hydrographer, Bayldon retired from the sea in 1910 only to open the Sydney Nautical Academy (subsequently the Sydney Nautical School and, later still, part of Sydney Technical College) and run it for thirty-seven years. Though particularly enamored of Australian maritime history and exploration, Bayldon nevertheless possessed, in Slessor’s words, “an astonishing knowledge of nautical things” generally (Kiernan 1977, 7; Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 362), knowledge that he shared not only as an instructor but also as a writer and lecturer. Appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (M.B.E.) in 1938, Bayldon’s ashes were scattered a decade later on the Bayldon Shoals (Solomon Islands), which had been named since 1912 for their surveyor.

In his 1966 response to scholar Julian Croft, Slessor confesses: “My interest in the sea and seafarers certainly increased greatly because of the stimulus and information given by Captain Bayldon and his library.”

For Slessor, this “old sea-captain was to be a major influence on his poetic career” (Dutton 1991, 142). Not only did Bayldon’s character and personal history help fashion “Captain Dobbin,” but his passion for Cook sparked “Five Visions of Captain Cook,” another brilliant “character poem” (Vivian Smith, quoted in Kiernan 1977, 31). Slessor acknowledged his debt in his note on “Five Visions of Captain Cook” in *Cuckooz Contrey*: “For an excellent marshalling of these details, the author is indebted to Captain F.J. Bayldon, of Sydney” (Slessor 1932, 76; rpt., Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 366). And in his 1965 lecture, Slessor went even further (Slessor 1970, 192): “All that I have written about Captain Cook I got from Captain Bayldon. The *Five Visions*, rough and incomplete as they seem to me still, are merely fragments of the image he built for me.” Bayldon’s “magnificent nautical library” profoundly influenced Slessor as well (*ibid.*). The poet’s 1966 response to scholar Julian Croft confesses: “My interest in the sea and seafarers certainly increased greatly because of the stimulus and information given by Captain Bayldon and his library” (23 April 2066: NLA MS 3020/1/7/549; rpt., Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 358).

Slessor not only modeled Captain Dobbin’s library on Bayldon’s with breathtaking precision and intimacy, but he may have found in Bayldon’s library the inspiration for *The Atlas*. During the 1920s, Slessor and his wife frequented Bayldon’s house at 127 Darling Point Road in Edgecliff, near Noela’s parents and not far from their own home (Slessor 1970, 192; Stewart 1977, 45; Dutton 1991, 115 and 143). Slessor later recalled weekly visits in which Bayldon

encouraged him “to browse through this collection” and “over a glass of sherry... to ask questions” (Slessor 1970, 192). The Bayldon Nautical Collection, now preserved in the Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales, contains—in Slessor’s words—“more than a thousand books about the sea and seamen, logs, journals, learned papers, instruction manuals, maps and charts, many of them exceedingly rare and valuable” (ibid.).

For the poet, Bayldon’s library proved a treasure trove of information, images, and ideas (Jaffa 1971, 105). The heightened importance of maps in *Cuckooz Contrey* when compared to their rather ornamental use in his earlier work suggests that Slessor did not experience the full impact of Bayldon or his library until the poet’s return to Sydney from Melbourne in 1926. This sounds obvious, since Bayldon lived in Sydney. But Slessor may have known the captain since 1920, the year Slessor and Noela met, although the National Library of Australia lists no correspondence between him and the Captain at any point in their lives (“Correspondence Index,” NLA MS 3020). Several other details support an even later date than 1926. First there’s the absence in *Earth-Visitors* of any new poems alluding to maps, despite the fact that all of Slessor’s most recent work in that collection was written upon his return. Second, Slessor completed “Captain Dobbin” in April 1929 (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 362) and “Five Visions of Captain Cook” a month later (ibid., 366; see MS 3020/19/4/39). Furthermore, while working on *The Atlas*, Slessor penciled into his poetry journal a reminder to ask Bayldon specifically about a map (-s107). Finally, as I shall argue, Slessor could not have begun *The Atlas* until at least 1929—despite his notebook’s date of 1927.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. For now, two of Geoffrey Dutton’s statements take precedence. The first biographer to attempt a reconstruction of what Slessor actually found in Bayldon’s library, Dutton suggests that the Captain’s library appealed to Slessor’s “journalist’s passion for getting things right, and his poet’s passion for the concrete image, and his personal sense of dissolution and inevitable death” (Dutton 1991, 145). Things begin to get vague, however, when he describes the library’s specific impact upon *The Atlas* (ibid., 144):

Slessor took his notebook along to Captain Bayldon’s and it is full of jottings from old maps and books, lists of galleons, sloops, flying fish, sea monsters, battles and mermaids. In an old atlas he finds “The King of Cuckooz Contrey...The place where the King of Englands Fleet did ride.” Later he notes: “If only world cd. be like world of old mapmakers neatly parcelled into known and unknown...instead of which it is strange dark confusion bubbling currents...” Among “Lost Contreys” he finds another mention of “The King of Cuckooz Contrey.” In a map of an expedition against the Barbary Pirates he finds another mention of his favourite king, the map being of “The Platt of Argier and the Pts. adjoining within the view thereof made by Robert Norton the Muster Mr. of his Ma’t’s Fleet ther, Ao. Di. 1620 & by his owne carfull & dilligent observations then not without danger.” He used this below the title of the first poem when he published the five poems he called “The Atlas.”

The Bayldon Nautical Collection, now preserved in the Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales, contains—in Slessor’s words—“more than a thousand books about the sea and seamen, logs, journals, learned papers, instruction manuals, maps and charts, many of them exceedingly rare and valuable.”

I have quoted Dutton's summary with its ellipses because the questions he raises, as much as the "facts" presented, are what prompted me to (1) request a sabbatical, (2) obtain a research grant, and (3) spend a full day flying from New York City to Australia in search of my own answers. What follows are the reasons why even those most familiar with Slessor and his poetry know so little about this ambitious sequence. And why no one has been imprudent enough to attempt a full-scale analysis of *The Atlas*—until now.

PROBLEMS RESEARCHING *THE ATLAS*

Time and distance are obstacles to researching *The Atlas*. Dutton's sensitive biography reveals how carefully he combed over Slessor's manuscripts at the National Library of Australia in Canberra. Yet he leaves the reader uncertain as to whether Slessor's notebooks identify his sources or not. "Lost Contreys," for instance, not only is spelled "Lost Countries" in Slessor's notebook (March 6, -s65), but also happens to be the name Slessor gave to a list that he was compiling in his poetry journal rather than the title of some external source. And this list of "Lost Countries" soon gave way to his poem titled "Lost Lands" (March 28, -s83), which ultimately became "Lesbia's Daughter" in *Five Bells* (see Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 358, 398). Furthermore, Dutton may not have visited the Bayldon Collection in Sydney, three hours away. Had he done so, he might have discovered that little else is true about what he surmises to be the library's specific relation to *The Atlas*. "The King of Cuckooz Contrey," for example, was not found by Slessor "in an old atlas." And although Dutton claims correctly that the Robert Norton map of Argier contains "another mention of [Slessor's] favourite king," the map itself is nowhere to be found in the Bayldon Collection. Bayldon avidly collected works on naval history and warfare, as the "Guide to the Bayldon Nautical Collection" demonstrates (Carr 1987). But his library specialized in practical treatises and naval charts dating from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries—not in beautiful seventeenth-century maps, most of which were out-of-date even before they were printed.

Slessor's ultimate source for The Atlas is not a particular map or an atlas at all. Uniquely, at least in my research into the hundreds of maps described in twentieth-century poetry, the source is a catalogue of maps and atlases.

Slessor's ultimate source for *The Atlas* is not a particular map or an atlas at all. Uniquely, at least in my research into the hundreds of maps described in twentieth-century poetry, the source is a *catalogue* of maps and atlases. Published by Francis Edwards Ltd., a firm still active today, the undated catalogue sports the title *Old Maps of the World* on its cover (Francis Edwards 1929). Slessor used this title when referring to the catalogue, although libraries and booksellers prefer the more easily searchable one that appears on the title page, namely *Ancient Geography; a Catalogue of Atlases & Maps of All Parts of the World from XV Century to Present Day* (ibid.). If we know what we are looking for, Slessor's notebook overflows with references to *Old Maps of the World*, especially in the first four pages of his *Atlas* draft. But even if we don't, Slessor acknowledged his debt when citing his source for the title of Robert Norton's map (April 5, -s90) and, more fully, when drafting what he called "The Atlas Notes" (July 22, -s191). He placed a slightly expanded version into his "Author's Notes" at the back of *Cuckooz Contrey* (Slessor 1932, 75):

THE ATLAS—For much of the information concerning the subjects of these poems, also the prefatory quotation, the author is indebted to the catalogue, *Old Maps of the World*, published by Francis Edwards Ltd., of London.

Unfortunately, this acknowledgment disappeared in subsequent reprintings of *The Atlas*—that is, until the 1994 publication of Slessor’s *Collected Poems* (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 357–358). For over sixty years, the information simply vanished. Besides contacting Slessor himself, the only way to know about *Old Maps of the World* was to lay hands on the rare *Cuckooz Contrey*, which, like all of Slessor’s pre-1944 collections, had a small print run. In 1932 only 500 copies were printed, although that general edition of 500 seems generous when compared to the limited editions of 150 for *Thief of the Moon*, 425 for *Earth-Visitors*, and 75 for *Trio*. Today, searching the WorldCat database reveals that only twenty copies of *Cuckooz Contrey* remain in public libraries or universities worldwide; and of these, fifteen are in Australia. *Cuckooz Contrey* is unavailable for viewing on the Internet, and privately owned copies are extremely rare: in 2010, an antiquarian bookseller listed one available copy for \$1,950 (item 717: New Century Antiquarian Books 2010). Libraries that own a copy naturally refuse to lend it, so readers must resort to making a trip to the special collections division of such a library, or, since the work is still under copyright, to asking a librarian to duplicate and mail a few pages of the book. What to duplicate becomes tricky if readers do not know exactly what is inside the volume. Like the presence of “Author’s Notes,” of which the “Contents” of *Cuckooz Contrey* makes no mention.

Even if readers manage to obtain a copy of *Cuckooz Contrey*, or to discover the existence of *Old Maps of the World* either from the Haskell and Dutton edition of Slessor’s *Collected Poems* (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994) or from Caesar’s biography of Slessor (Caesar 1995, 58), putting their hands on the catalogue itself poses yet another obstacle. However many were printed originally, fewer than fifty show up on WorldCat today and not one of those copies is in the Bayldon Collection. Nor is it in the rest of the State Library of New South Wales, or in the National Library of Australia with its impressive map collection, or in the University of Sydney’s Rare Books Library which houses Slessor’s own library. *In fact, not a single “public” copy remains in Australia.* No wonder that even a reputable scholar like Julian Croft felt hamstrung when trying to research “the charts” in *The Atlas* four decades after *Cuckooz Contrey* was published. On March 21, 1966, Croft wrote to Slessor from the University of Newcastle in New South Wales to ask about the poet’s sources for certain poems in the 1932 collection. After visiting the library where the Bayldon Collection had been housed since 1950, Croft admitted (NLA MS 3020 1/7/550):

...I have a similar trouble with “The Atlas.” The Public [i.e., The State] Library of New South Wales does not seem to hold any of the charts, and I have had a lot of trouble in tracing down any information at all. Could you help me with some background information?

If the Francis Edwards catalogue proves as rare a bird as *Cuckooz Contrey* or the seventeenth-century maps in *The Atlas*, it is for completely different reasons. While collectors treasure old maps and first editions, most people discard a catalogue when the next one arrives—which may explain why *Old Maps of the*

THE ATLAS — For much of the information concerning the subjects of these poems, also the prefatory quotation, the author is indebted to the catalogue, *Old Maps of the World*, published by Francis Edwards Ltd., of London.

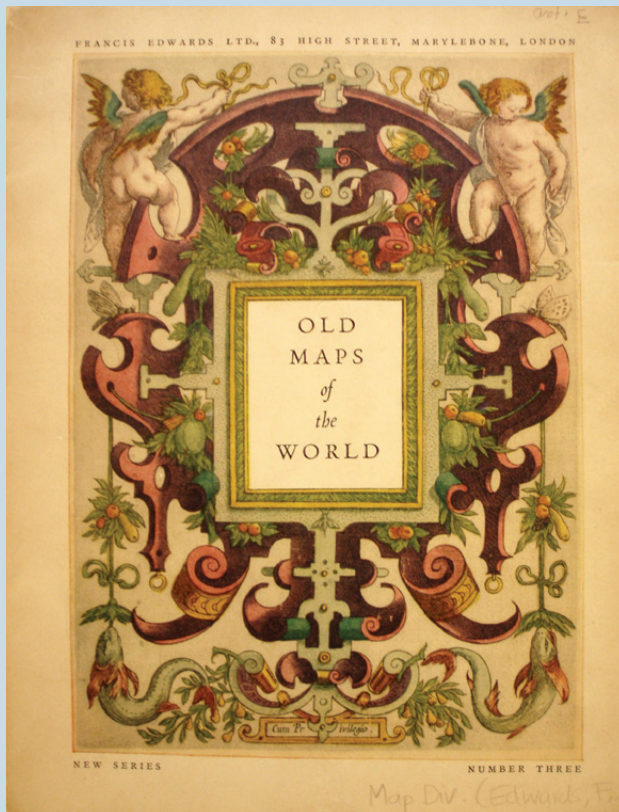


Figure 6. Cover of the Francis Edwards catalogue *Old Maps of the World*, otherwise known as *Ancient Geography; a Catalogue of Atlases & Maps of All Parts of the World from XV Century to Present Day* (London: F. Edwards Ltd., 1929). In his “Author’s Notes” at the end of *Cuckooz Contrey*, Slessor acknowledged his debt to this beautifully produced and lyrical catalogue, one of four “new series” catalogues debuted by the firm of Francis Edwards in 1929. Courtesy of the New York Public Library and of Francis Edwards Ltd.

World fails to appear in either Bayldon’s or Slessor’s archives. Catalogues saved from the trash-heap of history are often stored in folders labeled “ephemera,” and disappear off-site when space is needed for new acquisitions. I am extremely fortunate, therefore, to have access to two copies of *Old Maps of the World* at the New York Public Library, only a few subway stops away from where I teach.

So what does Slessor’s elusive source look like? As catalogues go, it is pretty impressive. Francis Edwards had been publishing them since 1855 (Maggs Bros. 1985, item 272) and, by the end of 1929, could boast over 522 numbered catalogues. Sometime that year, presumably before the stock market crash in October 1929, Francis Edwards began producing a new series. Only four came out in the end, but they were larger and far better illustrated than their predecessors. Slessor’s catalogue is the third of this short-lived series. Its cover shows an elaborate cartouche printed in color. At the center is the title *Old Maps of the World* surrounded by putti, assorted flora and fauna, and the claim “Cum Privilegio” at the bottom. Above the cartouche is the publisher’s name and address (“Francis Edwards Ltd., 83 High Street, Marylebone, London”) and below, the issue number (“New Series, Number Three”) (Figure 6). With 143 pages and measurements of 21 by 16.5 by 1.3 centimeters (8¼ x 6½ x ½ inches), it has the feel of a small book. Opening the cover reveals a title-page followed by a “Preface” (pp. 4–5) and two pages of “Data,” a list that must have helped Slessor in refining his search of the most celebrated seventeenth-century cartographers because it enumerates important dates in European cartography from 500 B.C. to 1801 (pp. 6–7). At the back, the colophon (“Printed in Great Britain by

Robert Maclehose and Co., Ltd. The University Press, Glasgow”) is preceded by an “Index” (pp. 142–143). Between these pages, the catalogue is divided into three unequal parts. Part I covers “Atlases and Maps” (pp. 8–70); Part II, “Single Sheet Maps or Maps of One or More Sheets on Particular Districts” (pp. 71–138); and the diminutive Part III, “Road Books” (pp. 139–141). The 852 items scattered throughout are interspersed with five illustrations, three of which are maps: one in color by Blaeu (opposite p.20) and two black-and-white maps, the first attributed to Ortelius (opposite p.48), the second, to Ptolemy (opposite p.112; see also p.65, and opposite p.81). Each item lists the cartographer along with the map’s description, date, and price. Not surprisingly, many of the catalogue’s item numbers and titles punctuate Slessor’s draft of *The Atlas*.

Douglas Stewart, while unaware of the Francis Edwards catalogue, nailed it perfectly when describing the sequence as “a collection of curiosities which Slessor must have picked up and found irresistible in his idiosyncratic and out-

of-the-way reading” (1969, 157; 1977, 73). With its poetic advertisements of maps and cartographers as well as the period vocabulary of its maps, *Old Maps of the World* certainly did prove “irresistible” to Slessor. One example will suffice to illustrate my point. In the anonymous “Preface,” Slessor read (Francis Edwards 1929, 4–5):

To see a Dutch town by Blaeu is to see how delightful the art of map-making can be made—little red houses neatly arranged in rows, with blue tiled roofs, churches and public buildings standing out above their neighbours, watermills turning merrily, not only the ocean but rivers and canals filled with shipping, shipbuilding in the yards, soldiers on the fortifications, mynheers walking down shady groves, even the very design of garden plots being shown—the whole forms an animated scene of infinite brilliance.

This passage so delighted Slessor that in *Cuckooz Contrey* he quoted it *verbatim* in his “Author’s Notes” for “Dutch Seacoast,” the third poem of *The Atlas* (Slessor 1932, 75). The courteous seventeenth-century Dutch expression “mynheers” (“my lords,” i.e., “Dutchmen”) even survives the transcription. And if we turn to his poetry notebook, we see him pulling phrases from this same passage (February 22, -s58):

Blaeu’s painted towns, fortifications, soldiers, tulip gardens, blue-tiled roofs, scarlet houses in neat rows, canals, spires, watermills turning, rivers full of boats, shipyards, soldiers on fortifications, mynheers in groves (drinking)

Even when substituting a more picturesque word for the one in the catalogue—“tulip gardens” for “garden plots,” “scarlet” for “red,” “drinking” for “walking”—the poet still reveals his debt. What is more, Slessor’s phrases beginning with “Blaeu’s painted towns” appear on the very first page of his 130-page *Atlas* draft. Even though he does not mention *Old Maps of the World* on that page—in fact, he does not name the catalogue until more than 110 pages into his draft (July 22, -s191),—anyone familiar with the Francis Edwards catalogue scarcely requires his header “Atlases,” just below the “February 22, 1927” entry (-s58, above) to recognize that Slessor had just begun the opening sequence of *Cuckooz Contrey*.

Which brings us to the date of the catalogue, and of the sequence itself. Because Slessor composed *The Atlas* in a 1927 diary, it is reasonable to assume that he began the sequence in 1927 and completed most of it by December 6, 1930. This latter date appears in his “August 9, 1927” entry, where he lists the poems not yet completed and the entry dates on which drafts of those poems appeared (-s206):

Projected
6 Dec 1930
Beach scene – see page[s] of March 15, March 31, May 27
Lost Lands (The Atlas) – p. of March 28, May 25, May 29
Down (“Das Rheingold”) – May 27
Sea-fight (The Atlas) – July 12 ✓
City Bridge piece – May 27
Ship’s Bells

Since Slessor began to compose *The Atlas* by quoting from the catalogue, he must have started his sequence no earlier than 1929—the year that he completed both “Captain Dobbin” and “Five Visions of Captain Cook.”

The two references to *The Atlas* concern us here. As mentioned earlier, “Lost Lands” would not appear in the sequence, but became a separate poem, “Lesbia’s Daughters,” in *Five Bells*. “The Seafight” (without the notebook’s hyphen) became the last poem of the sequence, and was clearly incomplete on December 6, 1930. Yet, alone among the projected poems, it is crossed out and a check appears beside “July 12”—evidence that the ever-organized poet emended the “August 9, 1927” entry after finishing “The Seafight.” How soon after December 6, 1930 the cycle was completed is anybody’s guess, since that entry is the notebook’s last recorded date for the sequence and Slessor’s later notebooks do not include such information (see NLA MS 3020/19/46, dated February 1934 inside the front cover; and NLA MS 3020/19/12, with dates from October 1938 through 1950). It is possible that he didn’t complete *The Atlas* until early 1931, or even later, since *Cuckooz Contrey* didn’t appear in print until September 1932 (Slessor 1932, opposite “Contents”; see also NLA MS 3020/4 and NLA MS 3020/27/7). As for when he began the sequence, the draft’s first entry date “February 22, 1927” can’t be right. For although *Old Maps of the World* is undated, libraries throughout the world indicate that it was published in 1929; and that date is confirmed by checking Francis Edwards’ official file set of its own catalogues (nos. 1–1051), now housed at the Grolier Club Library in New York City. Since Slessor began to compose *The Atlas* by quoting from the catalogue, he must have started his sequence no earlier than 1929—the year that he completed both “Captain Dobbin” and “Five Visions of Captain Cook.” The National Library of Australia acknowledges this dating problem in their online description of the Rough Diary, describing it simply as “Notebook containing notes and drafts of poems, including ‘Five Bells’, c. 1930s” (Series 19, Folder 1: www.nla.gov.au/cdview/nla.ms-ms3020-19).

Yet that same poetry notebook may hold the key to refining the date on which Slessor began *The Atlas*. Immediately before the drafts of that sequence commence with his “February 22” entry (–s58), Slessor sketches out a “talkie” version of Norman Lindsay’s *Redheap* (January 9 – February 20, –s22 to –s57, esp. –s55). The novel, based on Lindsay’s childhood in Creswick, Australia, was published in London in April 1930 and the Australian government banned it a month later. Sixteen-thousand copies were returned to Britain, and *Redheap* went without an Australian edition until 1959 (Stewart 1977, 177; Smith 2006a). Slessor’s switch from working on Lindsay’s *Redheap* to beginning *The Atlas* might therefore indicate his recognition that the Lindsay “talkie” had become a dead-end, except for one detail: an undated clipping from an unidentified newspaper inserted into the *Redheap* drafts. Titled “Scenario Written; May Speak for Itself,” it announces that Slessor’s script (“scenario”) was completed, and that production of the *Redheap* talkie was scheduled for the middle of the following year (i.e., 1931: –s55). The talkie never came out. Instead, a disgusted Lindsay sailed in July 1931 for the United States, where his book was a bestseller under the title *Every Mother’s Son* (Smith 1986a). The clipping, however, although it does not mention Slessor’s name, makes it clear that he had finished the script before moving on to his next major artistic project, *The Atlas*. So it is likely that Slessor began *The Atlas* sometime in the spring of 1930, then spent at least seven months developing it and other projects, before completing most of the sequence by December 6, 1930.⁸

We may never know whether Slessor found *Old Maps of the World* in Bayldon's library or whether the poet, with his own interest in maps, sent away for the catalogue or came upon it elsewhere. At first glance, the catalogue whose important cartographic milestones end with 1801 (Francis Edwards 1929, 7) seems out-of-place in Bayldon's up-to-date nautical library. But many maps and atlases from the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries are represented in its entries, and, even if they were not, we know that Bayldon had a passionate interest in the discovery and exploration of Australia.⁹ Furthermore, around that time Francis Edwards was publishing other catalogues that would have thrilled the Captain. For instance, the 1926 *Sea and its Story* (no. 487), with sections on shipwrecks and disasters, the South Seas, and Captain Cook; or the 1927 *Geographia: Atlases and Maps* (no. 498), covering Australia and the Pacific; or the 1928 *Australasia* (no. 505); or *Captain James Cook, 1728–1928*, the unnumbered 1929 catalogue that offered original oil paintings and manuscript log books. If Slessor owned the catalogue, on the other hand, why would he discard such an inspirational source when a heavily marked-up catalogue of books—with numerous poetry collections in it checked and circled—still exists among his papers at the National Library of Australia? In all likelihood, then, Slessor discovered the catalogue at Bayldon's. But instead of bringing his precious—not to mention heavy and oversized—poetry notebook to the Captain's, as Dutton suggests (Dutton 1991, 144), Slessor could have borrowed the catalogue and, in the privacy of his own study, copied its singular charms into his notebook.

The inaccessibility of the catalogue, *Cuckooz Contrey*—and, until very recently, Slessor's poetry notebook—represents only part of the problem facing fans of *The Atlas*. Another is that editors rarely anthologize the complete sequence (see Thomson 1968, 206–207). Perhaps because Slessor never revised *The Atlas*, as he did many of his earlier poems (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 331), its erudite seventeenth-century vocabulary and settings have discouraged compilers of school texts, study guides, and poetry introductions. The sequence's length of 180 lines doesn't help. Yet editors who shy away from it nevertheless include “Captain Dobbin” (165 lines), “Five Visions of Captain Cook” (213 lines), and “Five Bells” (128 lines) in their anthologies. Their choices make sense because these other poems focus on Australia, and almost all the anthologies containing Slessor's poetry, along with their readers, hail from Australia. *Nothing* in our world-roving sequence explicitly addresses Slessor's continent, whose outlines were unconnected dreams on seventeenth-century European maps.

When *The Atlas* is anthologized in major collections, on the other hand, it appears diminished in some way. Douglas Stewart, who calls *The Atlas* “irresistible” and a “major poem” (1969, 157, 159; 1977, 73, 75), wrote Slessor for permission to reprint it and certain other poems in his forthcoming *Modern Australian Verse*. Concerning *The Atlas*, Stewart explained (Douglas Stewart to Kenneth Slessor, 17 February 1963: NLA MS 3020 1/5/353):

I wanted one of your earlier, more ‘romantic’ poems for a contrast with the others and to represent that aspect of your work; and “The Atlas,” full of colour and charm and music and comedy, seems to do the job better than any other possible choice.

Stewart then opens his important anthology with Slessor's poetry (Stewart 1964, 1–13) and notes that he has chosen “the less frequently anthologized

Nothing in our world-roving sequence explicitly addresses Slessor's continent, whose outlines were unconnected dreams on seventeenth-century European maps.

If we go online to read
The Atlas in its entirety,
we find only two sites
that post all five poems,
and on one of them none
of the five poems begins
with its epigraph...

“The Atlas” because it contains “more variety, more subtlety, more of Slessor’s particular qualities of sensuous imagination, humour and melody” than other sequences (ibid., xxvi). Yet, as he wrote Slessor, because “‘The Seafight’ ... gives us the death-at-sea theme which would already be covered in ‘Five Bells’ and ‘Beach Burial’—two poems he considered “essential” to the anthology (Douglas Stewart to Kenneth Slessor, 17 February 1963: NLA MS 3020 1/5/353), Stewart wins Slessor’s approval to reprint only the first four poems (Stewart 1964, 3–9). Only the final three poems of the sequence survive in the posthumous *The Sea Poems of Kenneth Slessor* (Slessor *et al.* 1990, 19–22), another beautifully engraved collector’s edition with a print run of 240. Two poems, “Mermaids” and “The Seafight,” appear in Dennis Haskell’s edition *Kenneth Slessor: Poetry, Essays, War Despatches* (Slessor and Haskell 1991, 19–21). Although thirty poems by Slessor make the cut in Les Murray’s *Fivefathers: Five Australian Poets of the Pre-academic Era*, only “Dutch Seacoast” comes from *The Atlas* (1994, 22–23). Even worse, when “Mermaids” appeared without its four *Atlas*-mates in Judith Wright’s *New Land, New Language: An Anthology of Australian Verse*, it did so *not only without its epigraph but also without the title of the sequence itself—as if the poem had been composed independently* (Wright 1957, 104–105). And if we go online to read *The Atlas* in its entirety, we find only two sites that post all five poems (Australian Poetry Library 2011), and on one of them *none of the five poems begins with its epigraph*—an ironic turn of events considering the fact that the epigraphs are the only part of the sequence not under copyright (PoemHunter.com 2010).

If such learned allusions seem off-putting, or at least in need of comment, Slessor himself is partly to blame. It’s not that he was averse to explaining his poems: the “Author’s Notes” in *Cuckooz Contrey* demonstrate his willingness to share his sources with readers, even if Angus & Robertson did not continue that tradition when publishing *One Hundred Poems*. Between 1931 and 1967, moreover, he talked about his poetry in at least sixteen public lectures, interviews, and articles appearing in literary journals like *Southerly* or newspapers like the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*. And he subsequently collected many of these in *Bread and Wine; Selected Prose* (Slessor 1970). After Slessor’s death, his lecture on “Five Visions of Captain Cook” (ibid., 191–196) and his article on seven other poems (196–201) were reprinted in the second edition of *Poems* (Slessor 1972) and in *Selected Poems* (Slessor 1975; see Slessor 1993, 128–139). Yet in none of these did Slessor ever attempt to explain *The Atlas*, or his attraction to its sources, or his reasons for placing the sequence first in *Cuckooz Contrey*. Instead, he demoted *The Atlas* in the process of rearranging the poems that had been published in *Cuckooz Contrey* before reprinting them in “Part II: 1927–1932” of *One Hundred Poems*. In 1944, Slessor *reversed* the position of “Captain Dobbin” (Slessor 1944, 49–54) and *The Atlas* (54–61) so as to showcase “Captain Dobbin” as the opening poem of his “middle period.” The same reversal can be seen in his 1957 collection *Poems* (Slessor 1957: “Captain Dobbin,” 42–46; *The Atlas*, 47–53). For half a century, “Captain Dobbin” retained the primary position until the 1994 Haskell and Dutton edition of Slessor’s *Collected Poems* restored the original order of the poems within his collections (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 70–76 for *The Atlas*, 77–82 for “Captain Dobbin”).

Perhaps by 1944, following the Depression, his resignation as war correspondent, and Noela’s decline (Dutton 1991, 267), Slessor was nostalgic

for his weekly visits with her to Captain Bayldon—as nostalgic as he had been for lost lands and bygone eras in 1929. Perhaps he was paying tribute to Captain Bayldon, now in his seventies, for “introduc[ing him] to certain books and charts and to ways of enlarging his knowledge of the sea and of the men who sail on it” (Thomson 1968, 15). Or perhaps he felt that “Captain Dobbin” was a better poem, or that it might appeal to a wider audience. Whatever the reasons, the revised position of *The Atlas* meant that the sequence “comes oddly after ‘Captain Dobbin’” (Stewart 1969, 157; 1977, 73). Worse still, Slessor’s rearrangement confused those who assumed that “Captain Dobbin” opened *Cuckooz Contrey* as well. Dutton’s rather dismissive response to *The Atlas* derives, I suggest, from such confusion (Dutton 1991, 141). In his biography, published three years before he co-edited Slessor’s *Collected Poems*, Dutton derides the sequence’s “rococo frills” (ibid., 146) and has only this to say about it: “If in these poems he seems not to be rid of the Norman Lindsay influence, it is partly that the galleons and pirates of Captain Bayldon’s books were also Lindsay’s stock-in-trade” (144; see Lindsay and Bloomfield 1998, 21). Given Slessor’s esteem for Bayldon, his later privileging of “Captain Dobbin” is understandable. It was one of his own favorite poems, in his words, one of his “least unsuccessful”—along with “Nuremberg,” “Dutch Seacoast,” “Elegy in a Botanic Garden,” “Country Towns,” “Out of Time,” “Sleep,” and “Beach Burial” (Kenneth Slessor to Professor M.B. Yoken, March 14, 1971: National Library of Australia MS 3020/1/12/973; rpt., Slessor 1970, 282; Slessor and Haskell 1991, 281–282). Yet one can’t help noticing that “Dutch Seacoast” also appears among Slessor’s modest list of eight. Just months before his death, “Captain Dobbin” and the central poem of *The Atlas* were still vying for his ironic honor of “least unsuccessful.”

Slessor’s silence about *The Atlas* has discouraged others from engaging with this major sequence and contributed to the misinformation that crops up even in the most glowing of its rare critiques. For instance, the bibliography in A.K. Thomson’s useful collection of articles by and about Slessor states that *The Atlas* first appeared in “*Vision* no. 2, 1963, p. 6” (1968, 205) even though the four issues of *Vision* spanned 1923 to 1924 and *The Atlas*, written a few years later, was not published until 1932 in *Cuckooz Contrey*. Yet Thomson himself deems the sequence “wholly successful” and commends the poems for their “humour” and “gusto,” their “range of metres...and tones,” their erudition and contribution to the collection (ibid., 39):

In their context they add something to and receive something from “Captain Dobbin” and “Five Visions of Captain Cook.”... The poems also display Slessor’s extraordinary knowledge of and command over words. As always, when he writes an historical poem, or a poem touching history in any way, he masters the period.

Douglas Stewart, when alluding to Slessor’s cartographic references in *The Atlas*, mistakenly refers to the John Ogilby of “Post-roads” as an *eighteenth*-century scientist, even though Ogilby the famous cartographer died in 1676 (1969, 158; 1977, 74: emphasis mine). Stewart also assumes that the “Sansón” map of “The Seafight” pictures a 1692 battle at sea, even though the actual map first appears in 1703 and probably celebrates a more recent battle (see my forthcoming article on “The Seafight”). But when evaluating the relative merits of *The Atlas*

and “Five Visions of Captain Cook,” both of which he featured in his *Modern Australian Verse*, Stewart is in his element (1969, 160; 1977, 77):

How then does “Captain Cook” stand as pure poetry, compared with, say, “The Atlas”? Well, in some ways I think it is a little less: it is not quite so beautifully decorative, it is not quite so melodious, it is not so rich in human nature. And in some ways I think it is a little more: it has a larger theme, it has more meaning for Australia, it has more structure and more depth of feeling.

Finally, the Haskell and Dutton edition of Slessor’s *Collected Poems* misidentifies two of the five cartographers whose titles Slessor used for epigraphs (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 360): Joan Blaeu (1598–1673) is confused with his father and partner, Willem Janszoon Blaeu (1571–1638: Tooley et al. 1999–2004, 1:143–144); and John Speed (1552–1629: *ibid.*, 4:193–194), with “an author, and mayor of Southampton” who lived from 1628 to 1711. Yet that same 1994 edition has proved indispensable for introducing a new generation of readers to Slessor’s “Author’s Notes” on *The Atlas* and to the sequence’s original place within *Cuckooz Contrey*.

So what are we to make of *The Atlas*? Because Slessor kept no personal diaries to enlighten us (Dutton 1991, 104), and because scholarly analysis of the sequence has been so minimal, we are left to discover the poems for ourselves. Unlike earlier explorers, however, we come well equipped. Slessor’s notebook offers remarkable insights into his creative process, and his unpublished correspondence reveals the delight felt by readers upon encountering particular poems of *The Atlas*. Aided by the Francis Edwards catalogue, we can retrace the routes Slessor took while navigating the sequence’s enticements. Bayldon’s collection and other magnificent libraries promise to help us sort myth from fact. And the maps will show us what all the fuss is about.

NOTES

1. I italicize “*The Atlas*” throughout because of its length and the unique names that Slessor gave its constituent poems: “The King of Cuckooz,” “Post-roads,” etc. In every other one of his collected sequences, he identified constituent parts by first line only (in the Table of Contents) and by a roman numeral (within the sequence itself). For these reasons, I use quotation marks to indicate the title of all other Slessor poems and sequences, regardless of length.

Although *The Atlas* is not reprinted here, you may read it online (Australian Poetry Library 2011).

2. Slessor chose 25 out of 56 non-overlapping poems in the two collections. If Parts I and II of the dramatic sketch “The Man of Sentiment” are considered two poems, Slessor selected 25 of the 36 poems in *Earth-Visitors* (Moore, in Thomson 1968, 115; Dutton 1991, 257), 15 of which were among the 35 published in *Thief of the Moon* (1924). Caesar says that 24 of the 34 poems in *Thief of the Moon* appear again in *Earth-Visitors*; and that together these two volumes produced 36 of the 104 poems in *One Hundred Poems*—in other words, slightly more than one-third of the poems (Caesar 1995, 26). For other enumerations, see Thomson 1968, 1–3.

3. For more on Slessor and modernism, see Jaffa 1971, esp.71–80; Haskell’s “Introduction” in Slessor and Haskell 1991, xi–xxix; Smith 1992, 128–141; Mead 1997, 139–175; Haskell 2007, 305–318.
4. For brevity, subsequent references to items within NLA MS 3020/19/1 will be abbreviated “-s#”. For example, “-s1” represents both “NLA MS 3020/19/1/1” and “<http://nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms3020-19-1-s1-e-cd>.”
5. The first and final pages are easily identifiable. The sequence begins on the page marked February 22 (-s58). At the head of that page, the word “Atlases” appears and the next five pages, through March 4, are labeled consecutively “Atlases 2” through “Atlas 6” (-s59 to -s63). Work on the sequence ends with two pages marked September 13 and 14 (-s242 to -s243), although four typed lines of “Mermaids” are inserted randomly between October 23 and October 24 (-s277). By the March 18 entry, Slessor was sketching plans for a sequence rather than a single poem (-s76). As the item numbers indicate, during the “period” between February 22 and September 14, Slessor repeatedly interrupted his work on *The Atlas* to develop other projects, including the poems that would become “Crow Country” (-s66 to -s73; completed November 1930; Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 365), “Advice to Psychologists” (-s161, -s163, -s164, -s189, -s190; completed 1934, 404), and “Five Bells” (-s206, -s235 to -s241; completed January 1937, 391; see Dutton 1991, 169–170). Slessor’s lighter verses are also represented: the still uncollected “Miniature Minnie” (alternately titled “Darlinghurst Nights No.3”: -s198ff., and -s222 to -s225) as well as “Jantzen Josie” and “Bluebottle Blues,” dubbed “Surf Verse” in the notebook (-s192 to -s205), before it appeared in Slessor’s undated and unascribed *Surf: All About It*, an entertaining informational booklet (Slessor and Miller 1931, 37, 40).
6. A single date for a poem indicates when it was published; two dates separated by a slash—1922/1924, for instance—indicate completion date (1922) followed by publication date (1924). Unless otherwise noted, all such dates come from Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994.
7. The light verse sporting epigraphs includes “Nocturne” (1928), “Eve—of Ottawa” (1932), “The Man who Came Back” (1932), “Epitaph for a Dead Dog” (1933), and “To a Town Hall Pigeon” (1936) (Slessor, Haskell, and Dutton 1994, 209, 237, 206–207, 295, and 312, respectively).
8. At the end of his poetry notebook, Slessor returns briefly to Lindsay’s *Redheap* in a section called “Questions & Answers.” Composed upside-down after a play entitled “The Roof” (-s285ff.) are several questions and answers, the latest of which dates to November 1930 (-s301) and is preceded in pencil by the words “A Springwood Night, being a four-bottle interview with Norman Lindsay, by Kenneth Slessor” (NLA MS 3020/19/1, -s295). “A Springwood Night” became part of “An Interview with Norman Lindsay,” which appeared in the December 1930 issue of *Art in Australia* (rpt., Stewart 1977, 162–171). Lindsay’s disgust at Australia for banning his book is evident not only in *Art of Australia* but also in a June 1930 selection from the notebook (-s291).
9. The Bayldon Collection includes a diary of “Zodiacal Light Observations,” a scrapbook and manuscript on shipwrecks, tables of sailing directions and bearings, records of Bayldon’s voyages on various ships, dictionaries of nautical terms, literature on the “discovery” and exploration of Australia (particularly by Captain James Cook), as well as novels, songs, poetry, and essays about sailors

and the sea. Despite the absence of any of *The Atlas* maps, Bayldon's splendid collection of books contributed much to my research, as we shall see in my forthcoming studies, especially regarding famous battles and heroes of the British navy ("The King of Cuckooz," "The Seafight"), the history of corsairs, privateers, pirates, and buccaneers ("The King of Cuckooz," "The Seafight"), voyages of exploration and discovery ("Mermaids"), and the romance and myths of the sea ("Mermaids").

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