

Q. 5 Identify ... author's main purpose and explore, in depth, one or two main techniques used to achieve this purpose.

Fleur Adcock's purpose behind her poem *Knife-play* is to explore the breakdown in an intimate relationship and the pain and devastating consequences that can occur for the couple involved. The poem is typical of a number of her poems where she looks at the pressures and destructive forces in man-woman-lover relationships as the people attempt to control each other.

She uses the classical technique of extended metaphor to help her achieve this. This metaphor likens the couple in the relationship to showpeople in a knife-throwing circus act. The man throws the knives at his female assistant and this central image gives the poem its title. The extended metaphor technique allows Adcock to explore the central idea from a variety of 'angles' and shows her skills as a writer.

The man is described as "the man with long knives .." with "an expert eye for dagger-throwing" and "a showman's aim". The "knives", "burns", "razor cuts" and "whistling blades" are symbols, metaphorical devices for the harsh words, the verbal and emotional attacks and wounds the couple inflict on each other.

As the poem progresses, we learn that the narrator, who was initially the victim of these attacks - "oh I could dance and dodge turning on a brave performance/ To empty stands"- has learned the skills of attack. "These knives that bristle in my flesh/Increase my armoury and lessen yours" and turns the weapons against her partner. However, she is aware of the irony - "I have now .. the upper hand"- but she knows also it is just a "pretty trick" and shallow. The utter futility of this is summed up in the apt simile at the end of the poem. The narrator decides to end the relationship and "die like a bee on a sting". Just as the bee rips its abdomen out to sting, and so dies, so too she sees that ending the relationship will rip her heart out and that something of her will die too. The simile offers yet another angle of the knife play extended metaphor.

This recurring pattern of images of knives, wounds, cutting, weapons, fighting builds up an unusual but strong emotive mood of destruction and despair in the relationship. The different references and images of the extended metaphor are woven throughout to heighten the effectiveness of the poem. The word play and images add wit and meaning to the gruesome, brutal side of human relationships. As such, it is central to achieve the main purpose of the poem.

*Describes /explains
in context of quest.*

*Identifies & explains
language technique*

Briefly discusses

*Describes
begins to discuss*

*Discusses
Close reading
Explains
Some evaluation*

Discusses

Evaluates technique

Offers judgement