



The
Wellington
Academy



Stewart Island

Fleur Adcock

edexcel 

Time and Place poetry
Revision booklets

How does this poem fit into the Time and Place collection?

The poem is about Stewart Island, which is the third largest island of New Zealand. Its permanent population is 381 people who mostly live on the eastern side of the island. This poem focuses on Fleur Adcock's feelings towards Stewart Island.

Context / Background to the poem

Fleur Adcock was born in New Zealand in 1934 but moved with her parents to England when she was five years old and spent the Second World War in Britain. In England, Adcock found her spiritual home. She loved the weather. After the war, the family returned to their native country but on the journey back, Adcock felt an abiding sense of loss and a bad case of homesickness. In New Zealand, Adcock attended Wellington University where she met her husband and fell pregnant. Falling into a life of routine as a suburban housewife didn't naturally agree with her and she soon became bored with her life which led to her having an affair and a second son. She left her husband, leaving her first-born with him and moved to Dunedin, where she worked but felt ostracised as a young divorced mother. She had no idea how unhappy she was until one day she found herself standing by the wall in her kitchen, waiting for the kettle to boil, with unstoppable tears pouring down her face. Well-meaning friends introduced her to Barry Crump, who she fell in love with, but, after marrying him, Crump soon started hitting her. As a result, the marriage lasted five months. By way of a divorce, Crump agreed to pay her passage to England and she ran away from New Zealand and ran towards England.

This early nomadic existence has had a major part to play in her poetry, which she freely admits to basing on her own personal life and experiences, and her struggle with a sense of national identity. Many of her poems are written from the viewpoint of an outsider.

Stewart Island

Linguistic		Structural / Form
<p>Abstract noun: 'beauty' connoting that the island is visually appealing.</p> <p>Verb: 'bear' as though the island grates on her and she can't</p>	<p>'But look at all this beauty' said the hotel manager's wife when asked how she could bear to live there. True: there was a fine bay, all hills and atmosphere; white sand, and bush down to the sea's edge;</p>	<p>Single stanza: mirrors the subject matter – an island</p> <p>Free verse: means the tone of the poem is conversational and direct, without feeling being restricted by a rhyme.</p>

understand why others are so enamoured by it.

Adjectives to describe the island: 'fine', 'white' – fine meaning beautiful and the image of pure white sand helps to connote an area of serenity and peace.

Nouns to describe the island: 'hills', 'atmosphere', 'sand', 'sea', 'oyster-boats', 'Maori fishermen' – the use of nouns help to convey images about what island life is like – implication of a beautiful landscape and a peaceful, simple, serene life. However, the way in which Adcock dismisses the island by stating 'all hills and atmosphere' without bothering to describe it shows how dismissive she is about it.

Adjective: 'cold' – the poet's attention always errs to the negative. Metaphorically could represent her coldness / detachment to the island.

Adjective: 'mad' – contrasts the serene image of the natural environment earlier suggesting risk and harm – danger.

Aggressive verbs: 'bitten', 'jetted', 'jab', 'beak' – represents how Adcock views the environment as hostile and unwelcoming

oyster-boats, too, and Maori fishermen with Scottish names (she ran off with one that autumn). As for me, I walked on the beach; it was too cold to swim. My seven-year-old collected shells and was bitten by sandflies; my four-year-old paddled, until a mad seagull jetted down to jab its claws and beak into his head. I had already decided to leave the country.

Direct speech: 'But look at all this beauty' – the hotel manager's wife is so incredulous that someone might not find Stewart Island as beautiful as she or feel as at home there.

Colon: 'True: there was a fine bay' – the colon signifies a reluctance to admit that the island is beautiful. You can imagine the poet sighing where the colon is and a real reluctance to admit how 'fine' the bay is.

Parenthesis and injection of humour: (she ran off with one that autumn) – the irony in the sense that the hotel manager's wife considers Stewart Island beautiful but has run away and left the island – a sardonic tone

Declarative: 'I had already decided to leave this country.' A strong statement at the end of the poem to encapsulate her utter detachment from the country as though there is no going back from this decision, she will leave.

Key questions:

1. To what extent do you feel Adcock's personal circumstances have influenced her feelings towards Stewart Island?
2. Evaluate how successfully Adcock has used language to present the contrast between the beauty of the island and her own vision of it.
3. Justify the statement that follows using evidence from the text: Adcock's tone is sarcastic, full of contempt and resolute.
4. Compare and contrast the poet's feelings towards place with another poem where feelings towards place are shared.
5. Compare and contrast the poet's feelings of identity with the feelings of identity in another poem.