



The Zulu Girl – Roy Campbell

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CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION Roy Campbell was born in Durban in South Africa, in 1901. He was educated in Durban and then spent a year at Oxford before returning home, where he established a satirical literary magazine, entitled <i>Voorslag</i>. Campbell used irony and humour to expose and criticise people, often targeting Afrikaners and their racist practises. He lived in France and Spain and served in the English army in World War II. Campbell eventually settled in Portugal, where he died in a vehicle accident in 1957. His writing is highly satirical and shows him as a fine observer of people and context. On the surface, this poem is simply an observation of a Zulu woman feeding her child. Upon closer consideration, however, it becomes clear that the poem is about oppression, specifically of women. The speaker provides us a detail of the plight of the Zulu girl. The observation made by the speaker is minute and influential.	IMAGERY METAPHOR – line 1; ‘the hot red acres smolder’ - these lines suggest that there is an undercurrent of anger that is building up amongst the oppressed people in the country. Line 3; ‘A girl flings down her hoe,’ – this action is indicative of the defiant mood amongst the oppressed or even the resistance that women started to show in the quest of their own liberation Line 5-8 – reflects the mother’s caring nature of her child seeking the coolness of the shade to make it more comfortable for her child. She grooms the child carefully, lovingly and protectively, her ‘sharp nails’ and the word ‘prowl’ make her appear fierce like a predator. SIMILE - ‘tugs like a puppy’ – this comparison is almost derogatory in meaning as the child is compared to a lowly dog – a reference to the value attached to the value of life of the African population. METAPHOR - lines 13 – 16 reflects the anger that is passed on through the generation, a collective memory of oppression and defeat, that feeds the growing anger and discontent amongst the oppressed, ‘Yet in that...their defeat’ SIMILE – lines 17 – 20 ‘Her body looms ... the coming harvest in its breast’ the mother’s presence is both protective and ominous indicating the undercurrents of resistance that was brewing ONOMATOPOEIA – ‘grunting’, ‘clicks’ and ‘sighing’ are sound words that reflect the protective nature of the mother and also her fatigue of having to work under such harsh conditions, but they are also indicative of the sounds of resistance.
STRUCTURE • 5 stanzas of 4 lines each • Simple rhyme scheme (abab cdcd efef etc.) • Metre = most lines consists of ten syllables • The regulated structure reflects the repetitive and mundane nature of the life of the girl	THEMES • Suffering and hardship of South African people • The grace of the Zulu Nation and their quiet dignified strength • The undercurrents of a pending uprising against oppression

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TONE/MOOD

Mood: Almost subdued with an underlying simmering anger in the images from line to line depending on the diction used e.g. '*When in the sun the hot red acres smoulder*'.

– the mood here is **oppressive/unforgiving/foreboding/unbearable/stifling** because of the extreme heat and discomfort experienced by the girl.

Tone:

The tone changes from stanza to stanza

Stanza 1: **neutral** – simple description of working people

Stanza 2: there is an underlying **threatening** feeling

Stanza 3: calm and **intimate** – the mother lovingly feeding and grooming her child

Stanza 4: there is a hidden **menace** and passion – the past defeat and oppression is described and how the passion to resist is fed like mother's milk to the child

Stanza 5: the mother's looming body creates a paradox, she is **protective** of her child, but at the same time it creates an **ominous** mood of a bitter fight for freedom that is to come.

DICTION

The title is a derogatory reference to the subject of the poem: A young Zulu 'girl' and is almost like a title to a descriptive essay. But like the content of the poem, the title has an underlying complexity to it.

- 'girl' has a derogatory connotation as it was common practice for whites to refer to black people as 'boy' or 'girl'.
- This young woman is however old enough to have borne a child and do adult work in the fields.

The title does however not hint at the deeper underlying, complex themes, mood and tones found in the poem.

It is, therefore, of extreme importance to note that while the mother is breastfeeding her baby:

- She NOT ONLY provides him with the nourishment that he needs to one day become a fierce and fearless warrior that will restore the Zulu people to their former glory, BUT that she also transfers her personal feelings of anger, frustration and resentment towards her oppressors into his veins, AS WELL AS her pride in her culture, values and beliefs.

The word choice used is almost paradoxical as the description of the woman breastfeeding her child is almost derogatory and mocking of the lack of moral and principle from a Western point of view, but from the African point of view it is a beautiful description of a mother protecting and bringing her child up to grow up strong in his culture and to prepare him for a future that is better and more hopeful than hers of being indentured.