



The Zulu Girl

Roy Campbell



The Zulu Girl



When in the sun the hot red acres smoulder
Down where the sweating gang its labour plies
A girl flings down her hoe, and from her shoulder
Unslings her child tormented by flies.

She takes him to a ring of shadow pooled
By the thorn-tree: purpled with the blood of ticks,
While her sharp nails, in slow caresses ruled
Prowl through his hair with sharp electric clicks.





His sleepy mouth, plugged by the heavy nipple,
Tugs like a puppy, grunting as he feels;
Through his frail nerves her own deep languor's ripple
Like a broad river sighing through the reeds.



Yet in that drowsy stream his flesh imbibes
And old unquenched, unsmotherable heat-
The curbed ferocity of beaten tribes,
The sullen dignity of their defeat.



Her body looms above him like a hill
Within whose shade a village lies at rest,
Or the first cloud so terrible and still
That bears the coming harvest in its breast.



Roy Campbell:



- Ignatius Royston Dunnachie Campbell, better known as Roy Campbell, (2 October 1901 – 23 April 1957) was a South African poet and satirist.
- He was considered by T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas and Edith Sitwell to have been one of the best poets of the period between the First and Second World Wars.
- Campbell's vocal attacks upon the Marxism and Freudianism popular among the British intelligentsia caused him to be a controversial figure during his own lifetime.
- It has been suggested by some critics and his daughters in their memoirs that his support for Francisco Franco's Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War has caused him to be blacklisted from modern poetry anthologies.

Roy Campbell:



- Campbell left Oxford for London in 1920.
- In 1922 he married without parental consent and forfeited, for a time, the generous parental allowance.
- His wife was Mary Margaret Garman, eldest of the three they had two daughters, Teresa (Tess) and Anna.
- Roy Campbell died in a car accident near Setúbal, Portugal, on Easter Monday, 1957, when a car driven by his wife hit a tree.
- At the time of his death, he was working upon translations of 16th- and 17th-century Spanish plays.



Summary:



- The poem Zulu Girl is a powerful yet pathetic recreation of the hardship and endurance of the South African people.
- Roy Campbell makes the masculinist equation i.e. male is equals to culture and female is equals to nature.
- It poses an immediate problem of how miserably the poor South African people are forced to work on the farm.
- The poem is powerful both in sound and in effect.
- The poem has a four line stanza.
- The speaker provides us a detail of the plight of the Zulu girl.
- The observation made by the speaker is minute and influential.



The speaker then focuses on a girl who flings down her hoe to unsling her child.

Stanza One :

Creates the image of an unbearably hot environment. "Sun", "red hot acres smoulder", "sweating"

When in the **sun** the **hot red acres smoulder**
Down where the **sweating gang** its **labour plies**
A **girl flings** down her hoe, and from her shoulder
Unslings her child **tormented** by flies.

This shows us the terrible conditions under which these people worked.

They seem to be forced to work – treated like prisoners

This can be seen as an act of defiance – she does not care about the authority.

She is hot and tired and "flings" down her hoe. The child is "tormented" – another link to the environment, but the mother has no choice but to bring him to the field.



Again describing the environment: the area is so hot, yet there is no shade for the workers and there are ticks around, but nobody seems interested in protecting the workers from them.

Stanza Two:

"pooled" = a contrasting image to the heat

Parasites: anything to do with who is living off who's blood. Tick/farmer/colonial powers?

She takes him to a ring of shadow pooled
By the thorn-tree: purpled with the blood of ticks,
While her sharp nails, in slow caresses ruled
Prowl through his hair with sharp electric clicks.

The dried out blood turned purple

A harsh image, not usually associated with coolness and shade

The words/phrases: "sharp nails", "slow caresses", "prowl" "sharp electric clicks" all convey an image of a strong, protective mother.

Despite her tough life, she still cares deeply for her child.



L9-10: SIMILE: the child is compared to a puppy because of how he is feeding. This emphasises the baby's innocence and helplessness "frail nerves".

Stanza Three:



The mother's deep tiredness and low energy "languor's" flows through her into her child.

The baby is anxious and needing food

His **sleepy** mouth, plugged by the heavy nipple,
Tugs like a puppy, grunting as he feels;
Through his **frail nerves** her own deep **languor's** ripple
Like a broad river sighing through the reeds.

The child feeds at his mother's breast – but there is more than milk that he is taking in...

L11-12: SIMILE: The milk flowing through mother and child transmits her "languor's" – this is compared to a river that flows slowly "sighing through the reeds"



Stanza Four:

YET = this word conveys the idea that it is not only the mother's languor's that the child is taking in...

The milk makes him sleepy and relaxed

*The child also imbibes (absorbs)
"an old, unquenched, unsmotherable heat –"
This is another feeling/form of energy that the child takes from his mother – a strength "heat" that is unable to be extinguished by anything...*

Whilst they are "defeated", the workers are still violent, but they are keeping it in check.

*Yet in that drowsy stream his flesh imbibes
And old unquenched, unsmotherable heat-
The curbed ferocity of beaten tribes,
The sullen dignity of their defeat.*

This refers to the African tribes that were "beaten" into submission by the colonisers.

Despite their current oppressed state, these tribes are still ferocious and they keep their dignity even though they are defeated "sullen dignity".

Begs the question are these people really defeated?



Stanza Five:

The mother stands above her child, but she seems more imposing and stronger than she was at the beginning.



SIMILE: The mother standing over her child is compared to a huge hill that protects a village.

She stands guard over her child against anyone who would dare hurt him.

Her **body looms** above him **like a hill**
Within whose **shade** a **village lies at rest**,
Or **the first cloud so terrible and still**
That bears the coming harvest in its breast.

These lines refer to storm clouds, which look harmless, but bring intense weather that eventually benefits the land.

This METAPHOR compares the mother to a cloud. Just as you cannot predict when a storm will arrive, it is the same with this woman and her tribe. They are gathering strength and one day will unleash a huge storm on the people and will bring a "harvest" of war just as the rains help bring in a harvest of crops.



Questions:

1. How does the tone of this poem change in the course of the poem? Justify your response? (4)
2. Discuss how the poet helps the reader visualise both the weather and the workers in stanza one. (4)
3. From the language used how does the poet regard the girl and the workers? (4)
4. How is the young girl "humanised" in the second stanza? (2)
5. The two comparisons in stanza three are important to the creation of a picture of the scene. Discuss these two comparisons. (4)

Questions:

6. What is the poet saying about the oppressed workers in stanza four? What words or phrases underscore this description? (5)
7. What is the image of the mother in the final stanza? (2)
8. Discuss how the image of a storm fits in with the message of this poem? (3)
9. Why does the poet focus on this baby? (2)
10. What is the theme of "The Zulu Girl"? Give reasons from the text supporting your answer. (4)