The Zulu Girl
Roy Campbell (1901–1957)
Modern/South African Poet

Setting: Description of a hot landscape where labourers work. Simply an observation of a Zulu woman feeding her child. Closer it becomes clear it’s about oppression of women.

Theme: Triumph over exploitation PATHETIC recreation of hardship of endurance of SA people

Form: Regulated form
5 stanzas with 4 lines with same rhyme pattern ABCD EF/EE/GHGH/JJ
Stanzas relate because of pattern
Rhyme scheme: ABAB / CDCD / EFFE / GHGH / JJ

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

5. She takes him to a ring of shadow pooled
6. By the thorn-tree: purpled with the blood of ticks,
7. While her sharp nails, in slow caresses ruled

8. Prowl through his hair with sharp electric clicks.

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

13. Paradox: he drinks milk/she drinks from the river
14. Yet in that drowsy stream his flesh imbibes

15. And old unquenched, unmotherly heat.
16. The curved ferocity of beaten tribes,

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

Life has value: important life process
Looking up at her from child eyes
Impressive statueque—shielding + protecting

Words relating to heat:
→ Sun
→ Hot
→ Red
→ Smoulder
→ Sweating
→ Unquenched

Land is almost to hot to bear + could burst into flames.

Sympathy/admiration
Epithet—adjectives of similar meaning
Not a wife—lost tradition to modern world
Gang = people instead of individuals/no identity/forced to work/no individuality/dentity.

Metaphor: coolness of a shadow + pool
The care that the mother shows for her child: looking for ticks + lice = emphasizes the poor condition in which they’re forced to live.

Onomatopoeia

Prolonged sound of a child:

Paradox: he drinks milk/she drinks from the river
Yet in that drowsy stream his flesh imbibes
And old unquenched, unmotherly heat.

The curved ferocity of beaten tribes,

The sultry dignity of their defeat.

Gloomy silence
Not alone/abandoned
Tradition of human struggle + survival

Cloud that brings the rain that lead to a harvest.
Metaphor: children of the oppressed will one day reap the harvest of their suffering they’ll overcome their oppression with the help from their mothers like the ‘Zulu Girl’ in the poem.

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Men = culture
Women = Nature