

[The Zulu Girl](#)

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The poem can be found on page 83 of your textbook.

The Zulu Girl is a poem we can all identify with in some way.

It is about the plight of a young Zulu girl who does hard work during the day under the hot sun. She carries her baby on her back as she works which adds to her burden.

Tutorial Question:

Find examples of lines within the poem that describe how hot it is and how hard the work is.

What can we discern about the workers from how they are described in the poem?

Why do you think this poem is considered a "postcolonial" writing?

Analysis

From line 3 of the poem, the speaker focuses on the girl: she "flings down her hoe". The word "fling" suggests a defiant, rebellious action. She is no longer working like the rest of her "gang", as they are described in line 3. Rather than work, she goes to feed her baby whom she has been carrying on her back. The child is "tormented by flies". This is an image that is ever associated with Africa. How many times have you seen photos of African children on TV surrounded by flies. It is a symbol of poverty. The girl takes the baby to the shade to feed him. As the poem goes on, we get a closer look at the mother and her body, and at last, she looms above us as if we, the audience, are the baby. It is as if we see her through the child's eyes. She is a protective figure. She is imposing. Look at these lines: 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. Tutorial Question: How does the speaker make you feel about the girl at the start of the poem, and how do you feel about her at the end? Do you think she becomes a symbol of strength?

Questions

There is significance in the word "girl". She is not a woman and also not a wife. It can be interpreted that the Zulu girl is a young, single mom, still a child herself. This could suggest that she has lost her tradition and has been caught up in moral degradation of the modern times. See "A Red Blanket Addresses Christians" for more on this theme. Central to the poem is the relationship between mother and child, highlighted by the intimate act of breastfeeding. There is a 'sense of familiarity'

between the speaker and the girl. I would say that the speaker, first of all, sympathizes with the girl and makes us sympathize too. He also pulls her out of the crowd. At the start of the poem, she is one of the gang of workers. The word "gang" makes them seem like prisoners. They each don't have a personal identity but are rather seen collectively. Therefore it is significant that the speaker signals the girl out. He also gives us an intimate look at the geography of her body, and not in a sexual way, as the male gaze often does. It is rather in a protective and maternal way. We feel for her and see her as the child sees her. Thus the sense of familiarity. Can you think of any other reasons?