

Warsan Shire



Somali British writer and poet

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/warsan-shire>

Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth
Her Blue Body

Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head

the inaugural Brunel International African Poetry Prize
the first Young Poet Laureate of London
youngest member of the Royal Society of Literature
included in the Penguin Modern Poets series.

Wrote poetry for the visual album *Lemonade* &
the Disney film *Black Is King*
(in collaboration with Beyoncé Knowles-Carter)

Wrote the short film *Brave Girl Rising*
(about Somali girls in Africa's largest refugee camp)

Backwards
by Warsan Shire,
for Saaïd Shire

The poem can start with him walking backwards into a room.
He takes off his jacket and sits down for the rest of his life;
that's how we bring Dad back.
I can make the blood run back up my nose, ants rushing into a hole.
We grow into smaller bodies, my breasts disappear,
your cheeks soften, teeth sink back into gums.
I can make us loved, just say the word.
Give them stumps for hands if even once they touched us without consent,
I can write the poem and make it disappear.
Step-Dad spits liquor back into glass,
Mum's body rolls back up the stairs, the bone pops back into place,
maybe she keeps the baby.
Maybe we're okay kid?
I'll rewrite this whole life and this time there'll be so much love,
you won't be able to see beyond it.

You won't be able to see beyond it,
I'll rewrite this whole life and this time there'll be so much love.
Maybe we're okay kid,
maybe she keeps the baby.
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Step-Dad spits liquor back into glass.
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The mirror structure of the poem

Speaking voice?

The idea of

- reversing (time)
- healing
- therapy

Free Verse

The poem can start with **him** walking backwards into a room.
He takes off his jacket **and sits down for the rest of his life**;
that's how **we** bring Dad back.

I can make **the blood run** back up my nose, **ants rushing into a hole**.

We grow into **smaller bodies**, **my breasts** disappear,
your cheeks soften, **teeth sink** back into gums.

I can make us loved, just say the word.

Give them **stumps for hands** if even once they touched us without consent,
I can write the poem and make it disappear.

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Maybe we're okay kid?

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The Difference of Repetition

Moving backward
As moving forward

You won't be able to see beyond it,
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- ◇ The form of the poem
 - ◇ Resetting events, images
- ◇ Reworking Time/temporality
- ◇ The Work of Memory, Trauma
- ◇ Writing: Its Need, Purpose, Power

The “Ketek”

a “fictional” form of poetry in Brandon Sanderson’s fantasy world Stormlight Archive

A ketek reads the same forward and backward (allowing for changes in verb form)
It is divisible into 5 sections, each of which also expresses a complete thought

Above silence,
the illuminating storms
—dying storms—
illuminate the silence above. ”

“Radiant
of birthplace
the announcer comes
to come announce
the birthplace of Radiants. ”

Thanks to Priyanth Elango for suggesting this reading

◊ Other “palindrome poems”

◊ Also, “Reverse Suicide” by Matt Rasmussen (Thanks to Avani Bhagdikar for suggesting this as a reading)

