WARSAN SHIRE (1988 -)

LIFE

Somali background

Born in Kenya to Somali parents – family emigrated to London fleeing the civil war – BA in Creative Writing – first chapbook of poems & choice of the not-for-profit ***flipped eye publishing***.

Prizes & recognition

Awarded the Brunel University African Poetry Prize – selected as **the first Young Poet Laureate** for London – two new collections of poems on female mutilation – moved to Los Angeles.

Active commitment

Marriage (two children) – the first collaboration with Beyoncé – elected **Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature** (the 40 under 40 initiative) – continues collaborations & social activism.

WORKS

First poems

2011: *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, about women, love, loneliness & war.
2015: *Her Blue Body* (female mutilation) & *Our Men Do Not Belong To Us* (female exploitation)
2016: verse which formed the backbone of Beyoncé's album *Lemonade* on family, infidelity….

A short film

2019: *Brave Girl Rising*, the story of Nasro, a 17-year-old Somali girl who, like many others, has been living for most of her life in Dadaab, one of the world's largest refugee camps,.

Latest works

2020: the poetry for the Disney film *Black Is King*, directed and produced by Beyoncé.
2022: *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head*, full-length debut poetry collection.

KEY POINTS

A spoken-word artist

Creator of **poems intended for performance**, characterized by rhyme, repetition, improvisation, and word play, & **dealing with issues of social justice, politics, race, and community**.

Social commitment

Her Somali background with the horrors of the war *on her skin, in her memories and childhood* have made her feel that she has **a responsibility to use her voice for those who don't have one**

Cathartic writing

Shire: "*I'm telling other people's stories to remove stigma and taboo, so that they don't have to feel ashamed… them being able to share their stories is cathartic*".

HOME (2009)

GENESIS & CONTENT

Genesis of the poem

In **2009** she visited the **abandoned Somali Embassy in Rome** which some young refugees had turned into their home: she realized **how difficult it is to be a refugee**.

Part 1 (stanzas 1-4)

No one leaves home unless it has become unrecognizable: the attachment to your home is so strong that you leave sobbing & face the dangers only if they're worse than what is behind you.

Part 2 (stanzas 5-8)

No one wants to be beaten, pitied, deprived of their dignity, humiliated, insulted, & for women it's ten times worse (rapes): we all want to go home but we can't if it is no longer a safe place.

FEATURES

Originality

8 stanzas of **irregular length - no punctuation/capitalisation – no rhyme scheme/set meter – unstoppable flow** of *speaker's considerations, realistic descriptions, offenses heard by refugees*

Tradition

Literary devices: *personification* (home a persecutor), *metaphor* (**home the mouth of a shark**), *anaphora* (no one, than, unless…), *metonymy* (city for citizens), *enjambments, repetitions.*

Language

Effective, at times **crude** with **chillingly realistic images** (ex. *fourteen men between/your legs…*),

OUTCOME

Compassion/empathy

The poem provokes the reader's **compassion** by revealing the emotional side of the refugee crisis and creates **empathy** by highlighting the enormous difficulties of refugee life. .

A call to action

We need to *""promote peaceful and inclusive societies"* founded on *"respect towards people of different ethnic origins and religions"* to *"guarantee a life of dignity for all"* Agenda 2030: Goal 16

The "downside"

Shire: *"Whenever I see it's being shared, I know it's because something really horrible has happened"* (ex. Donald Trump's ban on accepting citizens from Muslim countries…).