

## POISONWOOD PALINDROMES

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Barbara Kingsolver's best-selling novel *The Poisonwood Bible* was published in 1998. The story is told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Congo in 1959. One of his twin daughters, Adah, was born with hemiplegia (paralysis on one side) and is believed to be slightly brain-damaged.

Adah walks with a pronounced limp and rarely speaks, but she thinks deeply and writes prolifically, often in palindromes. Her sisters call her Ade (*elapsed or esteemed, all Ade meets erodes pale*), but she'd rather be plain Ada. 'I prefer Ada as it goes either way, like me. I am a perfect palindrome.'

She imagines others consider her *damn mad (nod nab abandon)*, and cynically suggests her twin sister could *draw a level award* for being their father's favourite Bible student (*star pupil. Lipup rats*).

Adah doesn't like religion much. She calls 'the Reverend's' weekly purge (sermon) his *amen enema* and makes up her own *snmyhymns*, perverse hymns that can be sung equally well backwards or forwards. She is also scornful of love (*Eros, eyesore*) and aware of the power of evil: *Evil, all its sin is still alive* and *Live was I ere I saw evil*.

During the drought that sucks the life from everything in their region, Adah implores *Sun, o put o not upon us!* She also thinks about dreams and spells: *Eye on sleep peels no eye* and *Evil peels no eye on sleep. Live!*

Finally, here is a poem with palindromic lines that Adah writes after spying on the witch doctor.

*Lived a tune, rare nut, a devil,  
Lived a devil!  
Lived a devil!  
Wets dab noses on bad stew,  
Evil deeds live!  
Evil deeds live!  
Sun! opus! rat! See stars upon us,  
Eye level eye!  
Eye level eye!  
Warn rotten Ada, net torn raw,  
Eye did peep did eye.*