

Classic Poetry Series

Raman Mundair
- poems -

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Raman Mundair(-)

Raman Mundair is a British poet, writer, artist and playwright. She was born in Ludhiana, India and came to live in the UK at the age of five.

 Early Life and Education

Raman Mundair, Shetland author resident at Walls, was born in Ludhiana, India and grew up in England.

She studied History at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She has taught Creative Writing and South Asian Literature at Loughborough University.

Raman Mundair's primary language is English and she has included Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Shetland dialect within her poems.

 Literary Life

Raman is a poet, playwright, live artist and visual artist who has appeared at venues throughout the world, including the National Theatre of Namibia, the Royal Festival Hall in London, the Commonwealth Institute, and the Museum of Modern Art in Finland. She was formerly British Council Writer in Residence at the University of Stockholm and is currently Scottish Arts Council Writing Fellow at Glasgow Women's Library.

She has featured on BBC Radio 4's Women's Hour, BBC London, BBC Asian Network, and the BBC World Service; and has taught at The Open University, Florida International University, University of Aberystwyth, University of Portsmouth, and Roehampton University. In 2004, she took part in the ArchiTexts project, writing a commissioned piece in response to the Chattri Memorial near Brighton.

Raman Mundair's first poetry collection was *Lovers, Liars, Conjurors and Thieves* (2003), and her second collection, *A Choreographer's Cartography*, written partially in Shetland dialect, was published in 2007. She comments that her poetry is multi-lingual and although the primary language is English, she uses Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Shetland dialect to create an inter-textual narrative within the poems – something that she refers to as 'windows into worlds within worlds'. As an artist, she makes work that represents text and narrative in a visual form. Her play, *The Algebra of Freedom*, is in development.

She took up the post of Writer-in-Residence in Shetland in 2003, a role which she performed with great success.

Raman Mundair is also an artist and has exhibited at galleries in Scotland, England and Ireland. She makes work presenting text and narrative in a visual form.

"She is constantly sensual...tempered by a delicate care for detail, a quality of consideration that engages in the philosophical in sometimes complex ways... Her poems grow with her, spilling out on the streets, in her food, in her bed, and across the landscapes she inhabits... As she expands her own sense of the world, these poems, with their elastic mutability, have found a way to assume her shape and to beautifully capture the sensibilities of Raman Mundair. This is why I look forward to reading more of her work: I want to see where she will take her poems in the future." Kwame Dawes.

Her Poetry

Her poetry has been featured in Acumen, Poetry Scotland, Kavya Bharati and widely anthologized. She is the author of two volumes of poetry, 'A Choreographer's Cartography' and 'Lovers, Liars, Conjurers and Thieves' – both published by Peepal Tree Press and 'The Algebra of Freedom,'(a play) published by Aurora Metro Press. Her collection of short stories 'In the Light of Other' will be published in 2009. In 2007 her play 'The Algebra of Freedom' was produced to great acclaim by 7:84 Theatre Company and in 2006 she collaborated with the National Theatre Scotland and Òran Mòr - A Play, A Pie, A Pint on 'Side Effects', a one-act play. As an artist she makes work that represents text and narrative in a visual form. Her work has been exhibited at the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, City Art Gallery, Leicester and Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin. In 2008 Mundair was nominated for the prestigious Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative. In 2008 Mundair won a Robert Louis Stevenson Award and became a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellow at the Hotel Cheillon in Grez-sur-Loing, France. In this same year she was invited to become Scottish Poetry Library Poet Partner for East Dumbarton. In 2007 she was awarded the highly sought after Arts Council England International Fellowship at the India International Centre in Delhi and in 2006 Mundair was runner up in the Penguin Decibel Prize for Short Fiction. The Independent newspaper wrote in a review of her work "Raman Mundair is a rare breed: a poet whose writing works on the page and the stage. Her readings reveal the secret music of the poem... Mundair is literature at its best: thoughtful, provocative and sharp."

Raman has been Writer in Residence in Stockholm, New Delhi, Glasgow and the Shetland Islands and has represented The British Council as a writer, workshop facilitator and performer internationally.

As an artist she makes work presenting text and narrative in a visual form. Her work has been exhibited at the Gallery of Modern Art Glasgow, City Art Gallery, Leicester and The Generator Gallery, Loughborough.

Raman Mundair's poetry can be contextualized as part of the pioneering contemporary Black British poetry scene that includes Patience Agbabi and Dorothea Smartt, both of whom read at the Barbican Centre (London) launch of Mundair's first collection of poems 'Lovers, Liars, Conjurers and Thieves' in 2003.

Mundair writes across genres: poetry, prose and plays. Her writing is iconoclastic, challenging and political in nature but rendered with a keen sense of poetics. She has described herself as an 'outsider writer' and that she has come to appreciate her various states of 'unbelonging' as they allow her to transcend the limits of boundaries and choose to 'belong' anywhere.

Mundair's poetry has tackled varied themes including the deaths of Stephen Lawrence and Ricky Reel, the Iraq war, domestic violence, sexuality, gender, migration, immigration and the idea of 'hidden histories': where she imagines Queen Victoria's relationship with her Sikh man servant, India maid servants in British India and Indian soldiers in the trenches during World War One. Equally she writes sensitively about intimacy, loss and the small, quiet but significant moments in life.

Mundair's poetry is multi-lingual and although the primary language is English, she uses Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Shetland dialect to create an inter-textual narrative within the poems – something that she refers to as 'windows into worlds within worlds within worlds'. Her work also flirts with traditional form and structural constraints. Mundair writes poetry that she says is designed to work on the page as well as to be performed on the stage.

Mundair's work for theatre is often philosophical and political, engaging and questioning. Recurring themes include loss, faith, loyalty, redemption and compassion.

Awards

Raman Mundair won a Robert Louis Stevenson Award in 2008 and became a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellow at the Hotel Chevillon in Grez-sur-Loing, France.

In the previous year she was awarded the Arts Council England International Fellowship at the India International Centre in Delhi. Raman Mundair was runner-up in the Penguin Decibel Prize for Short Fiction in 2006. She has been writer in residence in Stockholm, New Delhi, Glasgow and the Shetland Islands. In 2008 Raman Mundair was Scottish Poetry Library Poet Partner for East Dumbarton.

An Elegy For Two Boys

[In tribute to Ricky Reel, Stephen Lawrence and their families]

I

Ruptured concrete suburban skin holds
taut the poison that is paved within
feet are sweet against the sting
You're cushioned so(u) l/e up
the cartography of the metropolis
A-Z veins re-route via fingertips clutch
Have travel card will travel.
zones 1-6,
The world is your oyster
but London killed you.

II

It was like any other day
Nothing unusual, just the same:
walking to the bus stop/walking into town...
after a while it's a blur
kingstonelthamkingstonelthamkingstoneltham
just the same, nothing unusual
just the same, nothing unusual.
It was my mate who saw them
he said RUN!
I said no, we haven't done anything wrong.

III

Battery acid tongues siren
their unavoidable existence
internal morsic heartbeat screams; FLIGHT!
trained feet cease up in a fit of dignified pride
thoughts like 'but they're as human as me'
translate into reasoning syntax that escapes like gas
into the dense onyx sky and zeros
into the void between their eyes.
A breath later
You are running like the hunted,
a breath later
You are kissing blood into water,

a breath later
You are kissing blood into concrete.

IV

When it comes it's not like the movies
when it comes it's like a joke.
But you're not laughing, can't believe
that it's really happening, for real you know?
And I didn't see my life flash in front of my eyes
I just heard my mother's voice
'Ricky, Beta... Tu kider gay-a? Mai karh tinu ureekdi hai...',
I just heard my dad's voice
'Stephen, son... Where you go? Me still waiting at the door for you to come
home.'

Raman Mundair

Blood Season (4)

Today the children
left their desks,
and asked questions

outside, in the streets
their mouths open,
their voices strong

Raman Mundair

In Between Days

In between the days
I am waiting
for the rain to stop,
the fruit in my kitchen ripens,
then rots. While the clothes
in my wardrobe
wait for me to lose
weight. The novel
inside me waits, while I
try to unblock
my fear. The womb
waits to be filled.
My insomniac self waits
for sleep to come.
In between days
waiting,
buses arrive,
planes take off;
summer comes and fades.

Raman Mundair

Sheep Hill, Fair Isle

I begin sheepishly,
feel with fingers
attempt to roo

your softness taut
in struggle. I soothe
with lullaby

you settle. In no time
at all the shear's song
reveals your baby skin

you free yourself
of me. Hoof it away. My fingers
lanolin soft with your memory.

[Published in The New Shetlander, Hairst issue, 2003]

Raman Mundair

Smoke Wings

In your dreams you had wings,
butterfly wings, wet whispers
emerging from a cocoon.

In your nightmares you fell,
wings aflame like the painting
you saw made in memory

of Hiroshima. In my life, you
blazed. The smoke of your wings
brought water to my eyes.

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