

Introduction to 'Bandanna'

I wrote the first draft of *Bandanna* during the summer of 1997 and it represents the first real attempt on my part to meld a realist urban youth aesthetic with a sense of spiritual immanence. I had long been experimenting with drawing on themes derived from South Asia and the Middle East and trying to infuse these into a contemporary Scottish diorama, with limited success. Until *Bandanna*, I hadn't really found the right tonal structure.

I had been attending a writers' group in Paisley for some six years and was very fortunate because the group was packed with talented writers. [Agnes Owens](#) and then Gerrie Fellowes were the writers-in-residence when I attended and they had been preceded (before my sojourn there) by [Tom Leonard](#) and Jim Kelman. And so the members of the group included people like Graham Fulton, Marion Arnott, Margaret Fulton-Cook, Brian Whittingham and Raymond Soltyssek - all of whom went on to become published and highly-regarded creative writers. The dominant voice of the group was contemporary urban realist and so for several years I was steeped in this powerful and self-consciously political idiom at a time when, as a style, it remained exciting and ebullient. But I also became conscious of the potential limitations of a single type of voice.

For several years, I had been trying to write novels and in the January of that year, had had my first acceptance, by the London-based [Creation Books](#), for the literary erotic fiction, *The Snake* (published in November 1997 under the pseudonym, Melanie Desmoulins). In March of the same year, I visited Pakistan and bought (literally) a case-load of books, which I proceeded voraciously to read. In South Asia, it is possible to obtain many books which are long out-of-print in the UK, tomes penned by ghostly colonial nutters and fat volumes from the hands of contemporary students undertaking PhDs on the subject of jinns. I returned to the short story genre, partly to re-charge my creative batteries, drawing on some of this illuminatory and sometimes near-psychotic material, and partly to allow myself complete freedom to experiment with a variety of styles, voices, themes and settings. I deliberately read Kelman's short stories and related works by other Scottish writers in order to imbibe - almost in the manner of a method actor - the appropriate sensibility. As a consequence, over a period of around eight to nine

months, I penned the majority of the stories which later went to make up my anthology, [The Burning Mirror](#) (Polygon, Edinburgh, 2001). One of the stories, *Rabia*, later that year (1997) won 3rd Prize in the Bridport Competition. Of course, I was still working full-time in inner-city Glasgow, so I had daily access to proletarian voices, not to mention the voices of the people amongst whom I had grown up. But I adapted the 'Glasgow working-class' voices I'd heard or read to approximate more closely the 'South Asian Glasgow working-class voice', a construct into which I wanted to breathe life.

Bandanna is about the redemptive, illuminatory power of music as entheogen for the altered consciousness of history.

When I first read *Bandanna* out loud in front of a public audience, in November of 1997 at the large theatre in the Tramway, Glasgow and a year later, to a packed house in Waterstone's bookshop (the story having been accepted for publication by the ASLS in *The Glory Signs*, the 16th in the series of their excellent annual *New Writing Scotland* volumes), there was complete silence as though everyone had been rocked back on their heels. Nothing remotely like this had ever been written - or spoken - before. During those fifteen minutes, I sensed that I was passing through an epochal, and perhaps almost shamanic, moment in Scottish literature. Not that it was anything to do with me. I am merely a plumber of words. The moment, and the story behind it, were conjured up by a fruitful conjunction of lunacies set in Middle C.

Peace.

References & Further Information

Read [Bandanna](#), with Suhayl Saadi's comments for *The Bottle Imp*. The story opens in a new window.

Read Suhayl Saadi's new novella [The Spanish House](#). The novella is a pdf file and opens in a new window.

(c) *The Bottle Imp*