

Three Poems by Sabina Kim

This work responds to news reports of racist policing practices in Saskatchewan which came to light in early 2000. It consists of three linked poems that are part of a larger cycle. As a whole, they react to the so-called “Starlight Tours” which involved the police abandoning First Nations men on the outskirts of a city after forcing them to hand over a jacket or shirts or shoes—all this during bitterly cold winter weather. One victim reported the incident; the two accused police officers were convicted of unlawful confinement. Though the practice was evidently widespread and systemic and three men were found frozen to death (in separate incidents) and two others found dead shortly after having been in police custody, neither the RCMP task force, nor a provincial court, was able to determine the cause of the five deaths as linked to the “Starlight Tours.”

These poems think through issues concerning lyric voice, agency, representation and appropriation. Out of a desire to negotiate, on the one hand, the necessity of telling the story, and on the other hand, a concern to not appropriate the story, I use a cut-up method. The cut-up displaces the totality of meaning and opens the syntax of the sentence up to permutations of meaning. For two of the poems, I took several news stories, broke them into fragments and put them together in a different order. This is an attempt at forcing the record to speak.

I wish to problematize the inherent limitations of the formula of the news story, which presents facts without inquiring into the cultural production of agreement on what constitutes facticity. At the same time, this series of cut-up poems considers ways in which stories can be told as a commentary.

The second poem is mostly formed from the words of one of the police officers himself and quotes him according to a news story in *Western Standard*. The poem re-imagines the policeman’s words in such a way that they become defamiliarized. This deliberate act of estrangement mirrors the loss of control and the cutting up of authority that the First Nations men and their communities may have felt when these stories about the policing practice began to circulate in the media. On the one hand, making the stories public had a positive effect in that it galvanized public protests and produced solidarity among First Nations and non-First Nations groups and individuals. On the other hand, journalistic practices of “objective reportage” and “balanced coverage” occlude not only the violence and implicit assertion of unilateral power relations displayed in the policemen’s actions, but also the broader societal injustice.

The third poem is a loose palindrome. The basis is a news report that the two officers had dumped Darrell Night (who survived his “Starlight

Tour”) and told him to “Get the fuck out of here, you fucking Indian.”
They testified in court that they didn't say any such thing.

This form allows reading backwards and forwards. Thus it might say something left unsaid in the news stories.

An earlier version of these poems was presented at the regional North Eastern MLA conference in 2005.

On Starlight

The RCMP are investigating the deaths of three native men / This is an old story / Shortly after being held by police / Rodney Naistus Lawrence Wegner Neil Stonechild / The West was won / On starlight / The RCMP are investigating / How we deal with the Indians / The RCMP are investigating whether Saskatoon police / On the backs of the poor, the forced landless / Dump them on the edge of the city / Arrested for creating a disturbance / *On starlight* / The hemmed in and drummed-up others / How we live with the Indians / Indeterminate / The last person who saw him alive / *Tour* / Handcuffed in the back of the cruiser / This story is dated 2000 / The cause of death / How we deal with the Indians / Saw him screaming / Help me / The court has ruled / They're going to kill me / The court finds no evidence/ The last person to see him alive / Neil Stonechild, 17 /

Record-breaking cold weather can freeze the entire surface of the lake / *Tour* / Get the fuck out of here you fucking Indian / Left near / *Tour* / Time of arrest: three oh eight aye em / Approximately three miles from the city centre / *Tour* / Constable Ken Munson, Saskatoon Police Service / Exposed skin can freeze in five minutes / Constable Dan Hachen, Saskatoon Police Service / "*Starlight Tour*" / *On Starlight Tour* / Seventeen years of keeping the peace / The police services board is continuing to pay the officers, pending the verdict / No evidence/ The court has found two Saskatoon police officers guilty of unlawful confinement /

What I Say

apprehended

“I was afraid” /

“I didn’t expect to survive jail” /

“One of my friends was one-quarter Native” /

handcuffed

“I wanted to stand against the bad in society” / “and to help people in trouble” /

“I pray every day the lawsuit will clear up” /

“I have lost my faith” / *driven to the outskirts*

“I pray every day” /

Reports that

“One of my friends was one-quarter Native and I didn’t even think about it”/

Reports that /

“He’d come at some other car that didn’t have two cops in it” /

“Two hundred and fifty pounds, hammering on the car” /

“We were afraid” /

“One of my friends” / “and I didn’t even think about it”/

“I pray every day” / “glass in my eyes” /

“I was afraid” /

dropped off in a deserted area

“I wanted to help” /

“We were afraid he’d come at some other car that didn’t have two cops in it.”

Reports that

“I have lost my faith in the justice system” /

early hours of a bitter cold / winter morning

“in my eyes” /

“I was afraid” /

Reports that

He had no hat, gloves or scarf.

NOTE: The phrases placed in quotation marks are the words of Ken Munson. He is one of two police officers who was convicted of unlawful confinement after driving Darrell Night, a member of the Cree Salteaux First Nations in Saskatchewan, to the edge of the city and telling him to find his own way home. Munson's police partner Dan Hatchen was also charged and convicted on the same charge.

Munson is quoted from a news story written by Candis McLean. The report was published in *Western Standard* on Monday, 12 April 2004 under the headline "Rush to Judgment." *Western Standard* is a Calgary-based "news and views" magazine that in February 2006 reprinted several of the racist Danish Mohammed cartoons.

The words in italics have been changed to present tense but are otherwise taken in unmodified form from a decision by Court of Queen's Bench Justice Eugene Scheibel setting out reasons for denying Munson and Hatchen a Native sentencing circle in place of a jail term, given that neither man displayed the acknowledgment of wrong-doing which is necessary for such a healing process. Text of decision:

<http://www.injusticebusters.com/index.htm/HatchenMunsondenial.htm>

a palindrome: negation and reversal

the two officers /

denied /
saying this /

you fucking indian /

the two officers /

get the / indian /
denied saying /

indian /

you /
denied /

the fuck /
you /

denied / saying /
You /

denied /

saying /

You /

you / denied /
Indian / *you /*

denied /

You / You / You /

the two officers /
denied /

Indian /

denied /

denied, /

Indian /
denied / the two officers /
You / You /

You /
Denied /

You /
Indian /

denied / You / You / denied saying /

the fucking indian / denied /
you / *indian* /

saying /
Indian, /

get the /

(denied), saying /

you fucking indian /

saying
this /

denied /

the two officers /

NOTE: According to the *Washington Post*, the two police officers allegedly told Darrell Night when they forced him out of the police cruiser: "Get the fuck out of here, you fucking Indian," something which they later testified was untrue.

Brown, DeNeen L. "Left for dead in a Saskatchewan winter." *The Washington Post*. 22 November 2003. June 9 2006. <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/3540725/>

See also for a more detailed account:

Justice for Us Too. 10 January 2005. 9 June 2006. (Cached link):
http://72.14.221.104/search?q=cache:jnP_nl0OBcJ:www.nativesweb.com/cgi-bin/justice/index.pl%3Fb%3D1105395574+%22fucking+Indian%22+and+%22Darrell+Night%22&hl=en&gl=ca&ct=clnk&cd=2

Rebar, Suzanne and Robert Renaud. *Starlight Tour: The Last, Lonely Night of Neil Stonechild*. Toronto: Random House, 2005.