It is only when Wendy meets her grandfather's friend, Anna, and learns more about her grandfather that she starts to gain a broader perspective on her experiences. The knowledge that her grandfather was queer and may have been transsexual—as well as the realization that Anna, a strict Mennonite herself, loves women—becomes a turning point in Wendy's life. Although there are no easy answers in this novel, Wendy acknowledges that despite the fact that she is not fully accepted within her Mennonite community or large parts of the broader society, she has the chance to live her life as a woman. She seems to come to terms with the instability of her own identity, appreciating that she enjoys more freedom to realize her transgender identity than her grandfather did.

Casey Plett's novel *Little Fish* is part of a flourishing queer Mennonite literature that has become ever more visible, as is witnessed by the *Journal of Mennonite Writing*'s recent issue on queer Mennonite literature. The novel succeeds in presenting queer and particularly transgender characters as increasingly visible within Mennonite and non-Mennonite communities. Significantly, it emphasizes that transgenderism does not only present issues within a Mennonite setting, but within Canadian society at large. Although readers will enjoy *Little Fish* without any knowledge of the Mennonite community, the juxtaposition of traditional Mennonite culture and queerness is an important aspect of the novel. Indeed, Mennonite culture underlies the story and surfaces time again throughout the novel, both through individual characters as well as with references to Low German expressions, the "Mennonite game" of looking for relatives, intertextual references to Mennonite literature, as well as the choice of setting – Winnipeg during the winter. The use of words like "cis" may require some readers to do some basic research in queer terminology, and the novel's explicit and sometimes detailed portrayal of sexuality may not be well received by all, but *Little Fish* is a powerful story and important chapter in a growing field of writing.

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Katherena Vermette, *river woman.* Toronto: Anansi, 2018. Pp. 118. Softcover, $19.95.

I need to hear
the stories of the river
about when she was young

and her brown water
clean
loved

- Katherena Vermette, "riverstory"

The Red River, the focus of Katherena Vermette's second book of poetry, *river woman,* begins its journey north at the confluence of the rivers Bois de Sioux and Otter Trails. As it twists and turns through industrial, urban, and agricultural lands, it both forms borders and flouts them, tracing out the line that delineates Minnesota and North Dakota before pushing its way its way into Manitoba. Mussels, clams, snails, and crayfish, as well as walleye, northern pike, channel catfish, burbot, and crappie, make their home in its brown waters, and its banks are lined with willow, cottonwood, Manitoba maple, and bur oak, amongst other flora and fauna. Measuring roughly 885 kilometers in distance, the Red finds its eventual home in Lake Winnipeg, whose waters sit in relation to the Nelson River and the Hudson Bay. It is a storied river with a starring role in the history of colonization, its watershed having helped to mark the territory which, for one-hundred years, was owned by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC).

The Red, of course, is also intimately connected to the Métis people, whom the poet and novelist Vermette identifies as kin. The first Métis settlement was established where the Assiniboine meets the Red, and Métis families anchored their lives to her banks through the long plots of the French seigneurial system. Métis traders worked her waters to connect their furs to both the Hudson Bay Company and the North West Company, headquartered in Montreal. As Vermette demonstrates, the Red is many things to many people:

she is
border
road
source
saviour

- "ziibiwan (like a river)"

river woman is a series of meditations on the Red River. Vermette, who shook the literary world with her 2016 novel *The Break,* lovingly depicts this river as mother and sister. She reflects on its powers as a lover, healer, and most importantly, as a living being.[1] In her careful reflections on the Red as kin, these poems are rich in their exploration of the space between simile and meta-

phor, calling out to the ways in which the water mirrors human relations and then pivoting to meditate on the ways in which it founds and nurtures community as relation: "she is / river / like / and not," the narrator informs us in poem two of the "ziibiwan" series. "she is / the knowing / not unknown."

With gentle, staccato lines cushioned within a rich imagery of love and longing, Vermette slowly and purposefully guides her audience to read *with* the Red. Her narrators call for us to interpret its waters beyond the grammars of colonization and towards a decolonial relation with the natural environment. In these readings, the Red is not a trade route or a border; it is an articulation of the land and a founding centre of Indigenous relationships and poetics. Vermette perhaps most succinctly establishes this in the book's longest and most pointed poem, "this river":

> …this river
> doesn't need your attention or your inquiry
> this river is too busy
> doing what she has always done—
> kicking ass and taking care
>
> …
>
> this river is full
> this river is family
> this river is forever
> because this river
> of course
> is red

"Red," the word that punctuates, "this river," can be interpreted in a number of ways. First, symbolically, in how it connotes Indigeneity and therefore in how it formulates the river as kin. Yet, received aurally, "red" can also articulate itself as the past tense of "read." Consider how deeply the Red—in its relation to the HBC and state removal of Métis people—has been interpreted into the history of settler colonialism in Canada. Vermette's narrators, however, refuse the axiomatic nature of colonial interpretation, striving instead to read the brown body of water towards Indigenous histories, presents, and futures, towards a signification of land-based knowledges. In this sense, *river woman* reaches to articulate the Red against the centripetal pull of colonial signification, bringing meaning back to rest within the waters and shores themselves.

Fittingly, *river woman* ends with a poem about reading through and beyond the colonial narratives that have been inscribed on sto-

len Indigenous land, towards a resurgence that is always already present in the river's currents. And while settler narratives may, at times, seem indelible, Vermette concludes by reminding us that "this country has an other story," a story that resides in the land and water waiting patiently to be heard:

> this country has an other story
> one that is not mine
> or yours
> but ours
>
> it is sung
> from the mountains
> danced in the sky
> every star
> a story
> that teaches
> hold your head up
> wisdom
> descends

Like all of Vermette's work, *river woman* sparkles with the intimacy of place. Within the delicate frames of each poem in this book hang richly complex tapestries of love and language that speak to tenderness, community, and Indigenous relationships to land and water. I read *river woman* three times in a row, and with each new reading Vermette's poetic control and expositive flourish opened me to new relations between land, language, and poetics. For those who love nature poetry, aesthetic interventions into politics, or the Red River, I can only offer my highest recommendation for this book. As a significant tributary to Indigenous literary production, and as a river of meaning unto itself, *river woman* is a stirring reminder invocation of love poetry written through the aesthetics and politics of land and water.

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Notes

1 Rivers are now being legally recognized for their human rights. In 2017 the Māori tribe of Whanganui won a court decision in New Zealand to have the

Whanganui river recognized as a living entity. Eleanor Ainge Roy, "New Zealand river granted same legal rights as human being," *The Guardian,* March 16, 2017.