

**Katherena Vermette** (b. 1977)

On November 13, 2013, Katherena Vermette won the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry.

Katherena Vermette is a Métis writer of poetry and fiction. Her work has appeared in several literary magazines and compilations, *Home Place 3*, *Prairie Fire Magazine*, and *Heute Sin Wir Hier / We Are Here Today*, a collection of Canadian Aboriginal writers, compiled and translated into German by Hartmut Lutz and students of Greifswald University. Most recently she has been published in, *The Exile Book of Native Fiction and Drama* (2011), *Other Tongues—Mixed Race Women Speak Out* and *Manitowapow: Aboriginal Writings from the Land of Water*. She is a member of the Aboriginal Writers Collective of Manitoba, and edited the anthology *xxx ndn: love and lust in ndn countr* in 2011.



Vermette was the 2010-2011 writerscollective.org Blogger in Residence and recently began graduate work in the prestigious Master of Fine Arts Creative Writing program at the University of British Columbia. A member of the Aboriginal Writers Collective of Manitoba since 2004, Vermette lives in Winnipeg.

**Winnipeg poet wins prestigious literary award**  
**Winnipeg poet Katherena Vermette wins Governor General's Literary Award for 'elegant'**  
**book of verse about much-maligned area of city**

By: Kevin Prokosh  
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Vermette has been writing poetry since she was 10, long enough to know that poets can't expect much public acclaim or big paydays like the \$25,000 that came along with her win.

"The nomination came as a complete surprise," says the West Broadway resident. "The win is insane. I didn't think it was in the cards. It wasn't even on the radar. I don't know what to think of it yet. I'm kind of basking in the glow. It's a good day."

The 108-page collection, published by J. Gordon Shillingford, focuses on Vermette's experiences growing up in the North End as a teen, and dealing with those memories when she moved back to the neighbourhood as a mother of two daughters. Her verse is spare and quiet, yet powerful.

"I wanted to look closer at the place and say I know it doesn't look the best on the outside but if you look closer it's really beautiful and amazingly strong," she said. "What appears to be broken is not broke at all."

The first section of poems is dominated by pieces about birds, which she linked to women she knows in the North End.

"The bird is a great image for a North End girl or indigenous women, because they appear fragile but birds are intensely strong," said Vermette, who is completing her master's degree in creative writing at the University of British Columbia. "They have wide wings and can take off at any moment."

"I'm definitely a bird, maybe a squawking chicken at times. I like to stretch my wings sometimes and fly away."

Her literary output extends beyond poetry to a just-completed children's picture-book series called *The Seven Teaching Stories* and a collection of short stories. Winning a prestigious award with her first book has heartened her about her writing future.

Vermette, Katherena. *North End Love Songs*. Winnipeg : Muses' Co., 2012.

Vermette, Katherena, Irene Kuziw, illustrator. *The First Day: A Story of Courage*.  
Winnipeg: HighWater Press, 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Kode's Quest(ion): A Story of Respect*. Winnipeg: HighWater Press, 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Singing Sisters: A Story of Humility*. Winnipeg: HighWater Press, 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Just Right Gift: A Story of Love*. Winnipeg: HighWater Press, 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Amik Loves School: A Story of Wisdom.*: Winnipeg : HighWater Press, 2015.

\_\_\_\_\_ *What is Truth, Betsy?: A Story of Truth*. HighWater Press, 2015.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Misaabe's Stories:A Story of Honesty*. Winnipeg: HighWater Press, 2015.