

**Jolly, Joanna. (2019). Red River Girl: The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine.
Toronto: Viking Press.**

Reviewed by: Robyn De Wet, MacEwan University

Through police reports and individual accounts, Joanna Jolly presents in her book, “Red River Girl: The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine” a description and review of the occurrences that led up to the death of fifteen-year-old Tina Fontaine, as well as the proceedings that followed. From the moment of the discovery of Tina Fontaine’s body in 2014 to the very end of the trial of Raymond Cormier, Jolly provides an understanding of every aspect of the life, death and investigation of the murder of Tina Fontaine. Throughout her book, Jolly focuses on the theme of Indigenous injustice in Canada, while providing quotes from individuals who recognize and personally understand the problem. While recording the accounts of Tina’s family members, friends, as well as police officers and chief members, Jolly provides us with insight into the views that are held when it comes to the ongoing cases of Indigenous murders in Winnipeg, as well as across Canada. Along with this, Jolly also provides us with the captivating details of evidence in Tina’s case, as well accounts of the long and painstaking investigation into her murder. Altogether, Jolly provides raw insight into all the events and reports that have been recounted from the very beginning to the very end in the case of the death of Tina Fontaine.

In the very beginning pages of her book, Jolly makes it clear that Indigenous women in Winnipeg have become the targets of violence and mistreatment, Jolly states, “The reality was that in Winnipeg young Indigenous women often disappeared into the underbelly of the city.” (p. 8) Jolly makes it clear to us that there is a persisting problem in the city of Winnipeg, and that more

often than not, these problems are swept under the rug. Jolly continues in the early stages of her book to explain countless cases of Indigenous murders across Canada, and how they are oftentimes not treated with the highest importance by the police. Jolly introduces us to Nahanni Fontaine who is an activist for Indigenous peoples, and she provides several examples of Indigenous women being brutally murdered and having unfortunately witnessed the police force turn a blind eye towards the problem most of the time. Fontaine also notes that most of the time, people don't seem to blame the murderer when it comes to these cases, she states that instead, "We victim-blame." (p. 25) After giving us a sense of what the underlying theme is within her book, Jolly moves on into describing the twists and turns of Tina Fontaine's extensive murder investigation.

Jolly introduces us to the individual whose presence is resilient and unwavering throughout the entire investigation from start to finish. John O'Donovan was the main detective assigned to Tina's case, and from the very beginning he makes it clear this case is one of great importance and deserves utmost respect, he states, "I think society would be horrified if we found a litter of kittens or pups in the river in this condition." (p. 17) Throughout the next few chapters, Jolly accounts for every detail that O'Donovan and his investigation team uncover while searching for the individual that murdered Tina Fontaine. Jolly makes it well-defined that O'Donovan recognizes the uproar that this case has created, and that it seems that it was the murder which was the tipping point for many people across the city of Winnipeg, it boldly highlighted the persisting problem of Indigenous murders. Jolly indicates that rallies took place across the city to show support for Indigenous peoples, she states, "The anger and compassion for a dead Indigenous child that O'Donovan had so clearly articulated in his press conference was beginning to be felt across the

city.” (p. 26) We see here that this problem clearly sticks out to the Canadian public, and it is an issue that has not yet been fully solved. According to Jolly, after extensive investigation into small pieces of evidence, and countless hours of trying to piece together the events that led up to Tina’s death, O’Donovan and his team finally seemed to have enough evidence to point out the most likely subject in the murder of Tina Fontaine.

Jolly introduces her audience to Raymond Cormier, and for the latter half of the book, Cormier becomes the main topic of discussion. A while into the investigation, Jolly begins to explain how O’Donovan and his team first learn about Raymond Cormier and his possible connection with Tina, after this, the evidence seems to build up and Cormier becomes the main subject of attention. After going over a web of evidence and navigating their way through the complicated twists and turns of Tina’s case, we see that O’Donovan and his team finally find enough evidence that leads them to believe that Raymond Cormier is in fact the individual responsible for the murder. Jolly provides us with the extensive evidence that the investigation team have collected against Cormier, as well as providing the reports of the times that other people have been around this individual. Jolly creates a compelling picture of Cormier’s thoughts and beliefs, and also a riveting vision of the events that unfold as the investigation goes forward.

All the evidence that get presented to us in Jolly’s book comes extremely close to being able to be used to finally charge Raymond Cormier of the murder of Tina Fontaine, but as O’Donovan and his team realize, it is not quite enough to pin against him for a charge. Jolly creates a suspenseful feeling in these chapters describing the evidence found against Raymond Cormier

that leaves her audience on the edge of their seats. At this point, Jolly has already instilled the feeling of justice that is sought after for the murder of a fifteen-year-old Indigenous girl, so the engrossing evidence and information presented to her audience creates a feeling of anxiousness to finally receive justice for Tina's death.

In a final attempt to get Raymond Cormier to confess to the murder of Tina Fontaine, Jolly provides us with the work and details that went into O'Donovan's expensive and final investigation scheme, called, "Project Styx." (p. 174) Jolly includes every detail that goes into this extensive and detailed operation, after creating a feeling of restlessness throughout her retelling of events, we finally see the investigation come to an end in Whistler, Alberta and we come to the long-awaited charge against Raymond Cormier. Jolly closes off the retelling of this broad operation by talking about what Cormier seemed to be feeling during his questioning, she states, "For the first time since leaving Whistler, Cormier looked defeated." (p. 235) Jolly now leaves the reader with a feeling of relief for the justice of Tina Fontaine, but still with an essence of uneasiness because of the fact that there was no fully concrete evidence that could be used against Cormier in his trial. The last few chapters are possibly the most compelling and riveting, Jolly describes the retelling of the trial of Raymond Cormier, as well as the surprising conclusion that was unexpected.

After many months of a long and intricate investigation, as well as a much-awaited trial, the jury decided to find Raymond Cormier not guilty of the murder of Tina Fontaine, a decision that created a stronger feeling of injustice within the individuals that supported Tina, as well as those who rallied and stood up for Indigenous support. Jolly created a very compelling retelling of the events that led up the death of Tina, she told it in a way that leaves the audience captivated and

curious while instilling a feeling that leaves one wanting justice for Tina, as well as the other Indigenous murders that go without proper justice across Canada. I believe that Joanna Jolly does an excellent job throughout her book of shedding light on this problem and bringing awareness to the injustice against Indigenous peoples in Canada. She creates a sense of concern for the audience that is needed in order to understand that justice must be given for all the lost Indigenous murder cases that have fallen between the cracks. Jolly's book would offer insightful information to an academic audience that studies and focuses on Indigenous inequality and injustice in Canada, this book provides a helpful understanding of that topic specifically. In conclusion, Jolly's book is a powerful one, and provides a strong and passionate message for all individuals across Canada.