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**DAVID GROULX, *IMAGINE MERCY*.
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David Groulx, an Aboriginal poet currently living in Ottawa, protests labelling his poetry as “protest” literature. “My writing was recently quoted as ‘protest poetry’”, he says in an interview. “What the fuck is that? I only write what I know. It becomes frustrating, exhausting to be an Indigenous person living in this country called Canada. Fighting against racism and stereotypes is taxing and tiring on the mind” (<http://blackcoffeepoet.com/2012/01/18/interview-with-ojibwe-poet-david-groulx/>). Similar sentiments are developed in the two poems—“He’s Native. He Writes Protest Poems” and “Protest Poem”—included in *Imagine Mercy*, his sixth volume of poetry. If I understand his outrage at the label correctly, then it is motivated not only by the more general desire writers often express not to be constricted by labels, but—most importantly—by the fact that connecting Nativeness with protest has become an excuse to dismiss and marginalise claims of Native writers. What Groulx makes eminently clear in many of his texts in the volume is that his “protest” ranges beyond the often sad realities of Native life in Canada. He is not a “protest” poet because he is Native; rather, his sensibilities are attuned to a broader sense of justice, which makes him focus also (though not exclusively) on the abuses that Native people often suffer in Canada—the reality he lives. His protest is political, but it is also existential (“I protest death / and I protest wherever we go / when we die / and I protest the darkness”, p. 13).

Giving in to the desire to compare, contrast, classify and label that critics and reviewers tend to harbour, I would like, however, to indicate that there exists a generic label (broad as it is) that clearly applies to Groulx’s poetry: that of “resistance literature” as Emma LaRocque conceives of it. “(...) [A] simple assertion of one’s (Native) humanity,” writes LaRocque in *When the Other Is Me: Native Resistance Discourse 1850-1990* (U of Manitoba Press, 2010)

is a form of resistance, given the magnitude of dehumanization over a span of 500 years. In this overarching history of colonization, Native peoples have developed a collective sense of relationship to the land and to each other, and to the common cause of decolonization. In this sense, every politically aware Native teacher, scholar, writer, artist, filmmaker, poet or activist is ultimately a producer of resistance material (23).

Imagine Mercy includes poems that constitute such “assertion of one’s (Native) humanity” and prove that the author is, as he declares he intends to be, “a witness, a witness to the living. A witness the lives around me. That part of this country that breathes, sweats, bleeds and dies” (<http://blackcoffeepoet.com/2012/01/18/interview-with-ojibwe-poet-david-groulx/>).

The volume is divided into two parts. In both Groulx relies on short free verse poems and on imagery drawn from everyday life. Part One, “There Will Be Light”, focuses on “witnessing” by exploring difficult social and political themes, in particular the war, the life of Native peoples and racial relations in Canada. In Part Two, “Know This Earth”, the stress falls on witnessing of a different kind: on what it means spiritually and emotionally to be a Native person—or perhaps simply on what it means to be a person attuned to every aspect of the surrounding world. The poems in Part Two seem to form a counterpoint to the bitterness, anger and sadness of Part One, and while the nitty-gritty of the mundane still intervenes from time to time, the reader finds in these poems love, warmth, awe in the face of natural beauty and a bit of humour (as in the poem “Boiled Moose Nose Soup”). Together the two parts form a well-balanced volume.