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Review of *Before the Country: Native Renaissance, Canadian Mythology.* By Stephanie McKenzie

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Before the Country: Native Renaissance, Canadian Mythology. By Stephanie McKenzie. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. xi + 233 pp. Notes, works cited, index. C$60.00 cloth, C$27.95 paper.

In *Before the Country*, Stephanie McKenzie examines Canadian literature of the 1960s and 1970s "to identify mythological patterns that are likely to become formulas when critics assume that Canada is like any other nation to have emerged since the breakdown of Charlemagne's empire." A time when Canadians were struggling to invent a collective identity, the years surrounding Canada's centennial were critical for the development of Canadian literature and culture.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Indigenous people, in contrast, were experiencing what McKenzie terms "the Native Renaissance," and their literary output caused a crisis for settlers: "a nationally inspired myth, which had set out as early as the nineteenth century to fulfil its own prophecy, buckled." McKenzie challenges the settler myths of "the new world" and "the empty land" by drawing our attention to the ancient mythological codes present in contemporary Indigenous literature in English. Settler myths, she contends, ignore the Indigenous peoples and "[loom] long and hard in Canadian literature," seeming "to resurface when fervent nationalism is in need of something."

McKenzie argues the settlers tried, through literature, to create a mythology of the Canadian nation-state based on the principles of romantic nationalism, but, when juxtaposed with Indigenous literature, these myths revealed "a lack of relationship between speaker and location." In contrast, the histories, heroes, and creation stories featured in Indigenous literature were not imported but, instead, originated in this land. McKenzie illustrates how Indigenous literature influenced Canadian literature when, "in a formal, mythological manner, Canadian history shifted shape in a corpus of 'postmodern,' mythological texts published after this Native Renaissance."

Although Northrop Frye's critical approach is no longer fashionable in many quarters, McKenzie draws heavily on Frye's theories of myth and, ironically, his prediction that the centennial year would be, in fact, Canada's "Day of Atonement." McKenzie also employs J. Edward Chamberlin's work with Aboriginal storytelling to illustrate the connection between myth and land and charts parallels with the Australian experience by drawing on Adam Shoemaker's *Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal Literature, 1929-1988* (1988). Indigenous literature of the 1960s and 1970s is often dismissed as "protest literature"; McKenzie, however, believes that it constitutes "a literature of praise, resilience, hope, and instruction by example" and influence beyond its community. McKenzie's theories shed light on an important period of Canadian cultural history by using a study of myth to show Indigenous literature's influence on settler literature.

Although *Before the Country* is specific to Canadian literature and Indigenous literature from Canada, McKenzie's theories could apply to U.S. and Native American literatures from south of the 49th parallel. *Before the Country* is an invaluable text for anyone interested in better understanding the Native-settler relationships through literature and myth.

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