

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JULIE CRUIKSHANK, *Do Glaciers Listen? : Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination*. Vancouver: UBC Press. 2005 287pp Index.

When one finishes reading this book, one wants to say, emphatically ‘yes’, of course, glaciers listen, and it is a wide range of stories they hear. And one wants to also say in a more colloquial tone, ‘Yes!’, suggesting that in fact this is a book powerfully and insightfully written and argued, a ‘must-read’. “Glaciers appear as actors in this book...[t]hey are sensitive to smells and they listen...[t]hey make moral judgements and they punish infractions.” They are both “animating” and “animated.” (3). Cruikshank narrates both the real and the metaphorical lives of the glaciers in the Mount Saint Elias ranges over past millennia. Indigenous people from Alaska and Yukon are central players in the stories and experiences of the glaciers, and vice versa. This familiarity is positioned in relation to those of the explorers, adventurers, officials and others who in the last 250 years came into contact with the glaciers. This latter group, however, consistently fail(s) to notice that the glaciers were listening. North Atlantic individual visitors in a wide range of official and unofficial capacities wander in and out of this book collectively leaving, despite their personal transience, indelible impacts on this powerful natural and cultural landscape. The book is divided into three sections: Matters of Locality, Practices of Exploration and Scientific Research in Sentient Places. Indigenous narratives of glaciers and place are the focus of the first section. Paralleling some of her earlier works, Cruikshank centrally and sensitively privileges the voices of three Aboriginal women and the stories that they told her of the lives of, and their lived experience with, these glaciers. The textual representation of these narratives and the contextualization provided by Cruikshank offer them as an enduring backdrop against which the ‘other’ narratives of glaciers are told. In the second section Cruikshank takes one onto and at times up against (metaphorically and literally) the Yukon/Alaska glaciers with the 18th century French explorer La Pérouse, 19th century American environmentalist John Muir, and finally British adventurer Edward Glave, who managed to squeeze in two trips to the region while he sought to make a name for himself (dying in the process) in the Belgian Congo with Stanley. Cruikshank does a brilliant job of asking piercing questions about how Glave’s experiences in the Congo played out in the divergent tone and content of his reports written about his two trips to the Alaska/Yukon glaciers. He shifted from a positive and surprisingly (for the time) enlightened view of the Indigenous populations he met in 1890, to a rather

disparaging and racist tenor in his writing about his second journey a year later. The discussion in this second section makes these glaciers and the lakes and rivers that they alternatively nourish and starve seem far from remote. They have played on a global stage in complex and unexpected ways. Borders, boundaries and the nations they construct (and deconstruct) in the region are the focus of the final section. The unequal power relations embedded the creation of all of these 'realities' are a central theme of this section, if not the entire book. Cruikshank interweaves rich ethnographic and historical narratives, nuanced and sophisticated theoretical analyses, and a strong moral and political positioning about matters of cultural, environmental, and global significance in *Do Glaciers Listen?* This book speaks to a wide range of interests in anthropology, geography (both human and physical), environmental history and science, indigenous studies, and travel literature. Undergraduates, graduate, faculty and the wider community would find this book rich in content, and clearly and compellingly written. The stories the glaciers have heard have much to teach all of us.

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