



## Do Glaciers Listen?: Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination (Canadian Studies Series)

By Julie Cruikshank

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### Do Glaciers Listen?: Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination (Canadian Studies Series) By Julie Cruikshank

The glaciers creep

Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,

Slow rolling on.

– Percy Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” 1816

Glaciers in America’s far northwest figure prominently in indigenous oral traditions, early travelers’ journals, and the work of geophysical scientists. By following such stories across three centuries, this book explores local knowledge, colonial encounters, and environmental change.

*Do Glaciers Listen?* examines conflicting depictions of glaciers to show how natural and social histories are entangled. During late stages of the Little Ice Age, significant geophysical changes coincided with dramatic social upheaval in the Saint Elias Mountains. European visitors brought conceptions of Nature as sublime, as spiritual, or as a resource for human progress. They saw glaciers as inanimate, subject to empirical investigation and measurement. Aboriginal responses were strikingly different. From their perspectives, glaciers were sentient, animate, and quick to respond to human behaviour. In each case, experiences and ideas surrounding glaciers were incorporated into interpretations of social relations.

Focusing on these contrasting views, Julie Cruikshank demonstrates how local knowledge is produced, rather than “discovered,” through such encounters, and how oral histories conjoin social and biophysical processes. She traces how divergent views continue to weave through contemporary debates about protected areas, parks and the new World Heritage site that encompasses the area where Alaska, British Columbia, and the Yukon Territory now meet. Students and scholars of Native studies and anthropology as well as readers interested in northern studies and colonial encounters will find *Do Glaciers Listen?* a

fascinating read and a rich addition to circumpolar literature.

Winner of the Victor Turner Prize for Ethnographic Writing, 2006

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"In part a work of environmental history juxtaposing orally transmitted tribal memories and knowledge with modern scientific perceptions of climate change and landscape transformation, Cruikshank's text makes a strong case for the privileging of orally constituted local knowledge in present-day management decisions." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*

"Reading this book was as exhilarating as taking a raft trip down the Alsek River...Although this book will particularly delight those familiar with cultures of Alaska and the Yukon, it holds much interest for a broader audience." *American Anthropologist*

"Julie Cruikshank's book on the connections between glaciers and human history and imagination could not be more timely... Reading *Do Glaciers Listen?* is a thrilling and sobering experience. Cruikshank combines splendid scholarship and majestic descriptions in a cross-disciplinary tour-de-force. Readers will come away with a new appreciation of the meaning of glaciers." *Journal of Folklore Research*

#### Review

"*Do Glaciers Listen?* is an exploration of nature and culture in encounter that builds upon Julie Cruikshank's deep and unrivalled knowledge of indigenous tradition. It focuses on an area that is, by most people's reckoning, 'off the beaten track' and probably thus, by extension, unpropitious space for such an inquiry. But this is its triumph. It brings liminal space to the very centre of several important concerns of contemporary scholarship." Graeme Wynn, Department of Geography, University of British Columbia

#### About the Author

**Julie Cruikshank** is professor emerita in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of British Columbia. She is the author of *Life Lived Like a Story* (winner of the 1992 MacDonald Prize); *Reading Voices*; and *The Social Life of Stories*.

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