

of speech and mental processes of the main characters, more specifically, to cope adequately with Russian slang, profanity, outdated vocabulary, the abundance of bizarre metaphors, the occasional authorial neologism, and obscure allusions. The overall strategy to deal with these difficulties has been to tone down some rough turns of phrase, where, for example, “Nigde ne nasrano, ne Rossia” becomes “No vandalism. Not like Russia” (145); “pozhrat” is “to have a bite to eat” (145); “blyad” is “a bitch” (68)—where “a whore” would seem more contextually appropriate, and so forth. Unusual descriptions are mostly translated literally (“Tchernosvitoff. . . this Hispano-Russo-Franco-Slovak schismatic-anthroposophical loner,” 83) or left intact (ἄπειρος, 98). What may seem as the occasional slight mistranslation is, arguably, the translator’s conscious choice based on a wider context (“. . . on ne zaonanirovalsia . . .” translated as “. . . he had survived . . . without masturbation,” 159).

To give a foretaste of the translator’s verbal-syntactic calisthenics involving expert choice of words and combining and fragmenting sentences and clauses, here is a “transcreated” passage from the very beginning of Ch. 7:

O what an unholy pleasure it is to quarrel, to tear up the precious past and, giddy with malevolence, to utter irrevocable words. . . . Oleg remembered how Thérèse would tell him that people are like stones, stones that slowly and clumsily become entangled in a gold web spun by the heavenly insect of friendship, so that one day the thousand-threaded fabric becomes so strong that everyone together can be lifted up, as in a fisherman’s net, and dredged from the riverbed of impermanence. But at the slightest provocation, she said, the stones will suddenly begin to jerk about convulsively, casting off their splendid attire because it hampers their morbid, wild freedom not to exist—and yet, as soon as that flash of wickedness subsides, the golden insect of memory will carry on (149).

On the whole, the translator makes the text more reader-friendly by smoothing over its rougher edges and offering more digestible renderings of conspicuously unconventional turns of phrase.

The Notes section of the book provides an exhaustive explication of cultural and historical allusions in the text. Combined with Karetnik’s excellent translation, this makes the narrative—no less challenging than the original—more accessible, instructive, and enjoyable both for general and academic audiences.

## **Susan Alexandra Crate. *Once Upon the Permafrost: Knowing Culture and Climate Change in Siberia.***

**Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2021. xxviii, 327 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$29.95, paper.**

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What can be done when the increasingly unpredictable climatic degradation continues to affect people around the world, distorting their ways of engaging with and thinking about

the environment? In her ethnographically rich book about the Sakha from the Russian Far East, Susan Crate considers this question by exploring the entanglements between scientific and indigenous knowledge as they encounter one another in the presence of the Siberian permafrost thaw. Focusing on the Sakha concept of *alaas*—both a physical and a cultural phenomenon—the book traces the ways in which definitions and experiences of *alaas* have changed over the last century for both Sakha and Russian scientists. The book argues that to address the current climatic crisis a balanced approach, which includes both scientific and indigenous expertise, is needed.

The breadth and richness of ethnographic detail intertwined with the author's personal observations are the most compelling aspect of the book, as the narrative weaves through historical, transformational, and collaborative angles of the indigenous and scientific knowledge of permafrost. Opening with the history of Sakha origins, Crate invites her readers to get to know the Siberian environment and landscape by diving into the Sakha's fascinating knowledge of permafrost as exemplified in mythical, linguistic, and shamanic heritage. Offering an abundance of ethnographic detail focused on, for example, weather prediction practices, pasture making, and fishing, the book reveals the importance of Sakha's relationship with *alaas*. *Alaas*, situated on permafrost, refers to an open area filled with hayfields, pastures, lakes, and forests. While it is a physical entity, it also embodies relationships that Sakha maintain with humans and non-humans, including plants, lakes, glades, spirits, and ancestors. Stressing the importance of *alaas* for Sakha's identity, Crate effectively illustrates how climate change distorts the practices of managing *alaas* while, at the same time, revealing the breadth and importance of indigenous knowledge of the environment. This is further intertwined with scientific approaches to *alaas*, starting with Soviet perceptions of it as serving the goals of economic development to further studies of *alaas* as a specific type of permafrost ecosystem. Pointing to the dominant tendencies of scientific approaches, Crate clearly shows how *alaas* in scientific frameworks represents a technically defined landscape subjected to instrumental measuring and modelling, deprived of any cultural or spiritual recognition.

Moving on to the question of social, political, and ecological change, Crate proposes the concept of "complexity of change." This, the author argues, indicates how climate change cannot be understood without taking into account the diverse variables that communities recognize and prioritize. Offering a unique gallery of personal stories from the Sakha that span from the Soviet Union to current times, these variables are described as changes in intergenerational approaches, wider demographic and economic changes (such as the youth leaving villages to live in cities), changes in management practices surrounding *alaas*, and weather and climate changes. The complexity of climate change as a field of study is further reinforced by introducing scientific approaches to dynamically changing permafrost and *alaas* today, in the era of the Anthropocene.

In this way, the author brings the readers to the final theme of the book: a possible collaboration and exchange between scientific and indigenous knowledges on the matters of permafrost and climatic degradation in general. Through discussing a concrete event where such an exchange took place, the author reintroduces her key argument in the book. She stresses that in order to fully grasp the experience and implications of climate change, a better recognition of knowledge shared by the people affected by most climatic degradation must be established. This, in turn, should take place along with a scientific approach and a wider recognition that to address climate change we should finally acknowledge the inherent connection between dynamic biosphere and the interacting ethnosphere.

While the argument calls for collaborative interactions between scientific and indigenous knowledges, there is very little discussion dedicated to why such projects remain problematic, what kind of dynamics, tensions, and inequalities they evoke not only around the world, but also, specifically, in Russia. The way collaboration is presented in the book would benefit from a wider consideration of methods and mechanisms through which such productive

interweavements can be achieved or fail. Moreover, there is very little discussion on animism and, in particular, of recent debates and fresh definitions of animism, pivotal for the wider understanding of climate change and indigenous knowledges. Overall, however, the book's ethnographic richness and detail will be of great appeal to anyone concerned with climatic dynamics and indigenous communities in Siberia.