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Shandaa: In My Lifetime. By Belle Herbert, recorded and edited by Bill Pfisterer, with the assistance of Alice Moses

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## Reviews

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**Shandaa: In My Lifetime.** By Belle Herbert, recorded and edited by Bill Pfisterer, with the assistance of Alice Moses. Transcribed and translated by Katherine Peter. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska, 1982. 207 pp. \$10.00 Paper.

Published in Gwich'in Athabaskan with a running English translation, *Shandaa* is a song of a book. In the natural voice of a lyrical storyteller, the reminiscences of a life of tradition and change unfold as calmly and unforced as if one were listening to the speaker sitting in her cabin at fishcamp.

Belle Herbert was an Athabaskan woman who lived for well over one hundred years in the village of Chalkyitsik in north-eastern Alaska. Her remembrances span a period during which the technology, lifestyle and occupations of her community were subject to tremendous outside influences. Yet within the distillations of one woman's memory, a century's worth of events become personalized and manageable. In a single monologue she connects "Religion, fishtraps, the coming of airplanes, how a young man got a wife" (Section 24) with the ease of stream-of-consciousness. The events that impacted upon Belle Herbert were not necessarily the great upheavals and inventions of the history book, but the small, community-based yet no less crucial stream of daily life.

Belle Herbert's collaborators have done a fine job of translating the experience of listening into that of reading and seeing. The gentle, poignant photographs and line sketches draw us into the world of Chalkyitsik, past and present. The authenticity of the running translation, even for a non-Athabaskan speaker, is instructive. The free-verse presentation of the monologues emphasizes their poetry and simplicity.

*Shandaa* is clearly a labor of love, painstakingly collected and produced out of respect for an elder and for the life she alone recalls. It is also a valuable compendium of ethnographic information that will benefit the Gwich'in community, Athabaskanists

in particular and anthropologists in general. The Alaska Native Language Center is to be commended for a superb job of collection and publication. *Shandaa* is a testimony that can be savored and appreciated by people from all ethnic backgrounds. It is a memorial to the courage of long life in hard times, and, as such, it is unselfconsciously lovely.

*Michael Dorris*  
*Dartmouth College*

**Marxism and Native Americans.** Edited by Ward Churchill. Boston: South End Press, 1984. 203 pp. \$7.50 Paper.

Ward Churchill, the editor of this volume, claims that "For all the thousands of books on Marxism in print and available in the contemporary United States, not one clearly attempts to assess the Native American relationship to Marxism." My review of the literature substantiates this view. For this reason the authors of this volume had an exceptional opportunity to study an important issue. They were not restricted by existing constructions or rigidly established theoretical frameworks. They were free to explore and develop new approaches to the topic of Marxism and Native American societies. The title of the book suggests that Marxism, as a social theory, is to be used to analyze and advance new ideas and insights about Native American societies. Unfortunately, the contributors fail in this respect. A major weakness of the book is that it has no systematic framework or organized plan. This apparently encouraged most of the authors to ramble into various irrelevant topics with excessive wordiness that often degenerates into absurdities and trivia, all of which makes the book somewhat incoherent and lacking in sound intelligibility. Another weakness is that the authors focus on extremely simplistic criticisms of Marxism. It is quite difficult for the reader to follow such prolix discourses. A random quote from a contributor will exemplify this fault.

From the perspective of American Indians, I would argue, Marxism offers yet another group of cowboys riding around the same old rock. It is Western religion dressed in economistic clothing, and shabby clothing it is.