

Review of *Flight of the Goose* by Lesley Thomas

-- Fred Bigjim, Alaskan Inupiaq author, *Plants: A Novel*, and *Indian and Non-Indian Thinking, Listening and Speaking*

*Flight of the Goose: A Story of the Far North* is a novel about loss and loneliness, alienation and fear, acceptance and forgiveness, natural and supernatural. Lesley Thomas has carefully crafted a complex story set in Alaska at a time of rapid change, competing economic and social interests, and national crisis.

Her characters seem drawn from life. Both they and the circumstances in which they find themselves are believable, memorable, tragic, and hopeful. Although the novel is set in a time and place where inevitable conflicts must arise from clashes of cultures, communities, and beliefs, and from change itself, the real depth of Thomas' work derives from the way she examines conflicts within individuals themselves. To an even greater extent, she illuminates how we are all responsible, through our own choices and actions, for much of the tragedy and alienation that afflicts all of us, regardless of our culture, country, or religion.

One of the most interesting and thought-provoking aspects of *Flight of the Goose* is the portrayal of the clash of beliefs in the Arctic. We see there is little basis in the common idea that Christianity is a "white man's" religion, for none of the non-Native characters in the novel are practicing, nor even nominal, Christians. Instead, to find meaning in their lives, the bird man places his faith in scientific rationalism, the teachers in education and humanism, and the hunters in hedonism. Among the Native peoples, too, there are clashes of belief. Some families are Christian, some are not. Even those in the novel who are drawn to shamanism demonstrate an understanding of Jesus that is richer than that shown by any of the non-Native characters. We begin to realize that the real conflicts arise from individual choices related to exploitation, greed, selfishness, misunderstandings of others -- all of which have less to do with the precepts of any particular religion than with true practice of the precepts of these. Either way, we learn how dangerous it can be to delve into the supernatural carelessly, without understanding and preparation.

To a great extent, we watch tragedy unfold before us, brought about less by a clash of "great religions" than by refusal by all individuals involved to practice the moral precepts, common to these, to do good to one another. Instead, we find rejection of others, in both Native and non-Native settings, and as a result, alienation, confusion, and misunderstandings on multiple levels. These lead ultimately to loss of innocence, loss of culture, loss of family, loss of belief, loss of land, loss of life.

Yet, we are not left hopeless. Tragedy has not meant total destruction. This is also a novel about triumph over despair; maturity gained through pain; forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration made possible through acts of the will.

*Flight of the Goose* is a remarkable achievement. Its memorable characters, believable setting, and complex treatment of problems that face us all in a world of unavoidable change and contact, will haunt the reader long after the covers have been closed.

Short review:

**“A remarkable achievement.** *Flight of the Goose* is a novel about loss and loneliness, alienation and fear, acceptance and forgiveness, the natural and supernatural. Its memorable characters, believable setting, and complex treatment of problems that face us all in a world of unavoidable change and contact, will haunt the reader long after the covers have been closed.”