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PREVIEW

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Paradise Tossed: A Yuppie Creation Myth. [Original stories]

Murphy, Patricia Marie, Ph.D.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1987

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PREVIEW

PARADISE TOSSED: A YUPPIE CREATION MYTH

by

Patricia Marie Murphy

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Leslie Whipp

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1987

TITLE

PARADISE TOSSED: A YUPPIE CREATION MYTH

BY

Patricia Marie Murphy

APPROVED

DATE

Leslie T. Whipp

13 July 1987

Charles Stubblefield

16 July 1987

Paul A. Olson

16 July 1987

Stephen C. Behrendt

16 July 1987

Frances W. Kaye

10 August 1987

Tice L. Miller

10 August 1987

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

GRADUATE COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

PREVIEW

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PARADISE TOSSED: A YUPPIE CREATION MYTH

Patricia Marie Murphy, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1987

Advisor: Leslie Whipp

Paradise Tossed: A Yuppie Creation Myth is a work of fiction. The genre is myth, and the viewpoint is distinctly feminine. All the writing in the eight traditional short stories and seventeen poems is distinguished by its accessibility to the reader. The myth traces the journey of a female avatar who takes form in several female representatives at various stages in a symbolic night-sea journey sometimes associated with creation myth. The progression is from a pre-mortal innocence, to an attempted return to nature and innocence characteristic of the 1960's hippies who were part of the back-to-the-land movement. The avatar then seeks fulfillment in the pursuit of material wealth. Disillusionment follows her attempt to return to the innocence of childhood. The various avatars are delineated as distinct individuals; their situations and the men with whom they are linked are variations on similar themes. The stories dramatize the complexities of male-female relationships under the duress of the modern inevitabilities of war and materialism, and the dissolution of traditional values governing those relationships.

The form is myth, but the characters and the situations are grounded in reality. Tone ranges from lyricism in the beginning to cynicism in the middle of the work, and it ends in hope. Paradise Tossed winds down into a sense of mystery and awe. The reader will

find that all the pieces are connected, not in a sequential way as in the chapters of a novel, but in recurring motifs. The symbols of the nuclear bomb, barrenness, darkness, and natural unrest are set in contrast to a peaceful cosmos, water, sunlight, animal life, flowers, and the characters themselves.

PREVIEW

For Ben, who told me, "Go out and create
your own world."

I had heard the same words once before,
aeons ago.

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Introduction

"One can have only a small influence on the stream of things," a Shaman friend Ben Taylor once told me. But in my youthful ambition I did not quite understand his words of wisdom. I was part of a rising generation in the United States that was going to change the world. In the 1960's and 1970's my generation saw ourselves as saviors. We intended to drench the globe in a spate of peace and love, and to flush out old traditions that had failed mankind. To effect this change we borrowed from Native American teachings and values, and with copies of Thoreau's Walden tucked under our arms, we set out to woods, to ghettos, and to foreign countries to build utopia. We were the generation to whom, as John Kennedy put it, "The torch is passed." With love beads, mantras, stereos and goosedown sleeping bags, we turned our backs on the society that had made war and not peace. And we set out to create meaning in what we considered an insane world, a world of which Joseph Eppes Brown says, "When sincere attempts have been made by Native American people to adjust to or acculturate within the dominant society, they have become involved in a process of diminishing returns, or have reached dead-ends with regard to acquiring a meaningful quality of life."

A woman of my times, and having a predisposition for myth because of my studies in both Native American literature and Jungian psychology, I found myself writing about the movement that had its roots in myth—a genre that lent itself to a particularly feminine perspective.

Myth is conceived, gestates, and is born almost unconsciously in contrast to the linear, more masculine movement of most novels.

As my creation developed, I found that the central character took the form of a kind of goddess-everywoman, an avatar of return to the natural and basic rhythms of life. The avatar is represented by distinct individual women characters who move back to the land, wait for their men to return from Vietnam, find temporary solace and then disillusionment in both sexual encounters and consumerism, and who finally seek solace in the natural world under the threat of an impending Armageddon.

The Baby Boom generation was born as the smoke cleared to expose a blasted Bikini in 1946. And with the threat of atomic and then nuclear destruction came a fallout--an abandonment of traditional societal values. Although the bomb is not blamed for sterility in the fiction of Paradise Tossed, the bomb's fallout did call forth demons of darkness, a kind of sterile spiritual legacy: male/female relationships are transitory and do not produce children; fulfillment is ephemeral, and therefore is only fleeting illusion. In the creation myth of the night-sea journey, the hero is born again like the sun which rises again after having sunk into darkness to replenish itself for rebirth. The avatar of Paradise Tossed finds final solace in the creation of an inner peace through her attempt to return to her beginnings--to be reborn in the mystery of the sky.

There are, of course, many themes at work here to create myth: the battle between light and dark in both natural and psychological terms; nature images of river, earth, sky, vegetation, animal life; loss of innocence and an attempt to return to that innocent state.

The setting for the myth is the Midwestern United States, chosen because of its agricultural fertility, because of its technological

A final thanks to Professor Les Whipp, my advisor; a teacher and scholar, in whose presence I have always felt my best self. He believed and encouraged my vision. Under his gentle guidance it became reality.

"Firefly Will Call Me Sister"

Sit me down softly in a silver of moon
And I will twine shooting stars through your blonde hair
Bury me burning in deep restless sand
And I'll resurrect you with bright morning sun
One windless midnight in some sleeping field
We'll bathe ourselves silver with goldenrod sky
Gathering moments like wild chokecherries,
Curled up in the wind
We'll forget there will ever be Time
or Rocking Horses
or well tended rows of cabbages
Rainbow will know your Name
Firefly will call me Sister Sister
You can ride me all night long and then howl us home
On the tongue of the Great Blue Norther
Run till we're never Tomorrow
And laugh
While we shout NO to the darkness

"Wakan"

The Sioux called it Wakan and worshipped its Passage
their bodies molded to movement
accepting the seasons of all things
leaving their dead stilted up to wind and Skan

Against the sweep of Eternity
our puritan dead behind their staked fences
and close cropped acreages
portion out life in parcels
and paid up mortgages in ledgered lines--
tight minds a futile ploy against the rush of Time,
the sweep of Prairie.

This balleek shell, surviving the womb
of some Irish emigrant past,
Trembles in the season from then to then,
shatters, embraces Movement, and plunges on.

While those with squinting souls
whimpering in the void,
these flush behind

And in the shimmer of Passage
dim to darkness.

"Children of Dawn"

REFRAIN: We are creatures of Light
Children of Dawn
Burning away Night
Moving out to meet the Sun

Concrete creeping into us
Like dark and sifting sand
We sold all our belongings
And moved back to the Land

REFRAIN

While they're building Armageddon
With their nihilistic ways
We throw the frisbee, smoke some hash
And Robin Hood our days

For we never split the atom
But only split some wood
And the places, spaces that we build
We pronounce them very "Good"

REFRAIN:

We crash at outdoor concerts
In psychedelic painted vans
Clasp hands around the commune fire
Sow seeds in fertile land

We grow cabbages and carrots
And raise our own wheat
We grow our flour all by hand
Produce the bread we eat

"Children of Dawn" (continued)

REFRAIN

Come chant us your mantra
Try holistic health
Stage "sit-ins," sing Dylan
Experience is wealth

No rules or commandments
Just "Do your own thing"
"Enjoy" yourself always
At this huge "Happening"

Tomorrow is golden-
A new World to be
When all the Earth's children
Can be happy and free

REFRAIN: We are creatures of Light
Children of Dawn
Burning away Night
Moving out to meet the Sun

"Once Upon a Time"

Okay, Tiffie, here goes--twenty years ago--we haven't looked at this for ages, Tommy, and it was such a sweet thing, for you to do, to get it put onto video tape. Who was it that took the film? One of your friends; what was his name, Tom, you know the guy whose wife did body painting? No, not Cleo. He was the one who dropped out of grad school and moved down to Eugene to live in a pickle barrel. Silas. Yes, Silas. That was his name. He had a super eight movie camera and took these. A super eight is kind of like a video camera, Tiffie, only smaller, and it didn't make sounds, so Daddy had the music added to the video. Oh wow! Is that really you, Tommy? Your hair is so long, and you look so happy. Wouldn't they love to see you like that at the next board meeting! We were married in the hay field on the island where we were going to live. Your Daddy was already gardening there. Oh, look, there are Noelle and Sandy. Those were Mommie's bridesmaids. They were my friends, Tiffie. And Aunt Sandy is coming to see all of us in October. Tom, don't forget to try to get an extra ticket to the Husker game for 14 October? I know they are hard to get. Just try, please. I had forgotten how pretty they were in those yellow dotted swiss dresses. No, Tiffie, I didn't make those flowers that are in their hair. They are real flowers though. There I am!! That's your mommie! There we are walking up the lane to the field. And all those irises and daisies were wild, Tiff. I look like a gazelle. Am I really that thin? Was I that thin? My hair is so long. I look just like a gazelle, a wild gazelle. That's like a deer, Tiffie.

That's the circle we stood in, our friends all around. Who is that man over there, Tom? Is that your Uncle Ned? You're kidding.

I can't believe Ned ever looked like that. And there's Ben, wonderful loving Ben. No, Tiffie, your Uncle Ned can't come to see us anymore. He's gone to heaven now. We sang a song: "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel," and then we promised to help each other to "eternally progress." Now, I don't think that's so cute, Tom. It doesn't seem like its been an eternity with you to me. I look so thin, just like a wild gazelle, so fragile. Yes, Tiffie, you can get married in a hay field. Yes, I told you that before. Remember. It doesn't have to be in a church. Some of our friends got married on a cliff overlooking the ocean. There were lots of different kinds of weddings. We went to the giant redwoods to a wedding where the bridal party wore Renaissance gowns and danced down the aisle. That word means a gown like in your story-book. Think of Rapunzel's dress. Oh, there we are toasting each other with carrot juice cocktails. I am not getting too excited, Tom!! This is super to see again. And there we are running in the hay fields. What's his name made us do that, said it was, uh, what was that word? Camp. That's right. No, I can't explain that, Tiffie. Oh, I fell. I had forgotten that. Yep, I made that dress myself. On a sewing machine, Tiffie. That's how all dresses are made. You remember, don't you? Your Texas Grandma has a sewing machine. She made your cabbage patch baby a dress on her sewing machine. That was a beautiful dress. I designed it myself, even the puffed sleeves. Graduate students seemed to have a lots of time, to do things. Like that, making my own wedding dress.

Is that all there is? Hey, that wasn't very long. We should have taken more. It should have lasted longer, the whole thing. It

was over so quickly. We didn't get to be there very long. I remember I had trouble with the dress. It was too big. And I hardly recall that reception at the resort, except the carrot on the cake stood straight up when you cut into it. Ha! You do too remember that, Tom. Don't give me that! And it was raining outside when the banjo player was outside on the veranda. Like yesterday I can see it. And fuschia, red and pink, hanging in baskets. No, we don't have any videos of that, Tiffie. Why didn't we take more, Tom? Your hair was so long. I looked so fragile, like a stalk from the hay field or something. But I felt so strong. I mean, there was nothing we weren't going to do. Remember? We were going to be able to do it all--we would live forever. To be seventy when you're twenty-five is to live forever.

Well, I guess that's it. No. We'll watch it again some other night. No. It's way past your bedtime. Come on now. Up you go. I'll tuck you in. Yes, Mommie used to sew on one of those machines before she was a lawyer. Okay, yes, I'll tell you your favorite story about the island. Get into bed. No. It was once upon a time when your daddy and I were gardeners, after the wedding. It was after Jeremiah the scarecrow prophet had lost his right arm in the equinox storm. It was a hot summer day, soon after the wedding, and the weeds had grown up in the field because your daddy and I had been away on our honeymoon. Now, Tiffie, how can you remember what equinox means but can't remember that a honeymoon is a trip after the wedding? The grass had grown up waist high in part of the garden because it was late summer; I was going to pick some tomatoes for lunch. It was about noon. Yes, Tiffie, the grass was very tall. And there was lots of light, very

bright, because it was noon, and I was very, very happy because of the light, and because of living out there on the island with your daddy and not having to go in cars and hear lots of noise. It sounded almost as quiet as it does when you are asleep at night, like I hope you're going to be soon, except there you could hear the water running from the spring inside the garden.

And then suddenly I heard a new sound, a whirring all around me, and it seemed that it would grow very dark like it did that time I sat in the tin barn in the thunderstorm just to hear the wind play with the loose siding. But it didn't grow dark. Suddenly, there in our own private Jeremiah garden, I was surrounded by thousands and thousands of tiny golden birds; gold finches. Yes, Tiffie, there were thousands of these tiny golden things all rising together from the grass, and the sound of the rising shook the earth. There was so much light. They were so golden, thousands and thousands of tiny golden lights. I had seen hundreds of pelicans in the distance on a lake in the Malheur turn pink in the sunset, but these birds were all around me. I have never felt like that since. It was as if I were one of those golden birds. It was as if I were an enchanted fairy princess. And this was my special place. Forever. It was as if these birds were sent to me to make that moment special. Forever. It seems to me when I tell it to you, that it was forever, that the feeling could last and last and never go away, like happily ever after. Yes, honey, I'm glad you got to see Mommie and Daddy in the video. No, I don't have any pictures of the birds. Oh, yes, Tiffie, I understand. You would like to see them. Yes, I understand. Not too many people get