

“FREE FROM COMPROMISE”: MACLANE, DI PRIMA, WUORNOS, AND THEIR
PURSUIT OF MARGARET FULLER’S FEMINIST TRANSCENDENTALISM

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* Margaret Fuller refers to Queen Victoria as “the woman who shall vindicate their birthright for all women; who shall teach them what to claim, and how to use what they obtain” (104). However, Fuller’s analysis of the social restraints most women were subject to, her proposed solutions, and her deliberate appeal to her female audience make Fuller herself a worthy candidate to be such an inspiration for women. *Woman* serves as a proto-feminist manifesto in which Fuller outlines the restrictive nature of the institution of marriage, static gender roles that tether women and men to particular categories of identity, and the ways in which one can transcend those limitations and barriers. It is because of Fuller’s “sheer revolutionary daring... attempt[ing] both, to question existing gender hierarchies and to disrupt accepted sexual practices,” that *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is cited by scholars as her most important work (Kolodny 356). Furthermore, as a contemporary of some of the most famous Transcendentalists, Fuller’s legacy includes a reshaping of Transcendentalism through the philosophy of a feminine identity. Her challenge to patriarchy and calls to action have reverberated across the history of the feminist movement, and her influence can still be seen today.

There is no question of Margaret Fuller’s feminist perspective on Transcendentalism. In her book *Women Thinking: Feminism and Transcendentalism in Nineteenth-Century America*, Tiffany K. Wayne explains, “Transcendentalism offered a language of self-development, and a cultural critique of obstacles to that goal, that made it a viable site for thinkers, writers, and activists organizing around issues of equality of access and opportunity” (3). Thus, in spite of their seeming masculinist bent, the goal of

Transcendentalism also can be read as feminist pursuits, with Fuller at the forefront of what one might call a feminist Transcendentalism. Although in her preface to *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller writes, “I lay no especial stress on the welfare of [n]either” man nor woman, and “I believe that the development of the one cannot be effected without that of the other” (5), *Woman* offered a Transcendentalism that explored and complicated the role gender played in self-definition. For decades scholars have investigated her particular feminist response to patriarchy, and while there were several women—such as Sarah Ripley, Elizabeth Peabody, and Abigail Alcott—whose contributions to the Transcendentalist and feminist movements are now gaining acknowledgement, Fuller represents “an alternate, but solitary, female voice within a male-centered and male-dominated Transcendentalism” (Wayne 6). Her influence was instrumental, moreover, in that she “brought other women into conversation with Transcendentalist ideas and provided the foundation of a feminist Transcendentalist vision” (8). Her publications were an expression of her “feminist Transcendentalist vision,” the threads of which are woven into feminist theory almost two centuries later.

Scholars and biographers often portray Margaret Fuller as a protégé of Emerson; she “has often been perceived as a mere satellite of Emerson’s thought and thus relegated to the discursive periphery of Transcendentalist studies” (Hurst 3). For this reason, her close relationship with Emerson and her inclusion in the intellectual circle of the Transcendentalists could be interpreted as a sort of nepotism: it was only because she had Emerson’s ear that her ideas reached publication. Of course, for any woman at the time, an intellectual pursuit came with certain social obstacles. As Paula Blanchard writes, “the belief that because Margaret Fuller competed intellectually with men she must have hated

them was both widespread and untrue, and it provided, as did the notion that she ‘unsexed’ herself by her choice of a literary vocation, a convenient excuse for outbursts against intellectual women in general” (2). Despite the criticism she received, her relationship with Emerson seemed to provide a credibility that helped to sustain her influence. However, her private correspondence with Emerson, as well as her personal diaries, suggest that she was less interested in maintaining credibility, and more interested in her own self-development—the sign of her commitment to Transcendentalism. Indeed, it is only through the study of the contrast between Fuller’s public persona and her private persona that a more complete picture of who she really was emerges. A closer look at her life and works, both in relation to Emerson and independent of Emerson, shows that she became disillusioned with the incongruities between Emerson’s Transcendentalist philosophy and his not-so-Transcendentalist practices, particularly in his attitudes towards women.

Having first met Emerson in the summer of 1836, Fuller’s “aim was friendship with Waldo, whom she saw as her intellectual counterpart and potential soul mate” (Marshall 106). In the years following their meeting both their professional and personal relationships flourished. Fuller became a regular participant at meetings—with Emerson at the helm—held by ministers interested in reforming the spiritual direction of the Unitarian church, while also becoming a frequent visitor to the Emerson home. In one of her journal entries she writes that she “has been fairly intoxicated with [Emerson’s] mind” and is “not in full possession of [her] own” in his presence (Meyerson). Indeed many of her journal entries during this period are accounts of her visits, taking long walks with Waldo, or accompanying him on trips to neighboring towns for lectures. It is evident

that, in the first years of their friendship, Fuller greatly admired Emerson, and very much enjoyed having someone with whom to share her desire to live a more fully intellectual life than her sex traditionally had been afforded by society. Describing her friendship with Emerson, Fuller writes in an unpublished journal entry found in Harvard University's Houghton Library (Seq. 80-81¹) that, "I am bent on being his only friend myself. There is enough of me would I but reveal it. Enough of woman to sympathize with all feelings, enough man to appreciate all thoughts I could be a perfect friend and it would make me a nobler person" (sic) ("Nobler"). Fuller's words indicate that she felt she contained more than what was normally allowed her sex, more than what tradition would allow her gender; and that pursuing her truth, her self—which lived beyond those boundaries—would make her not only a nobler person, but also the perfect friend to Emerson in particular. Nevertheless, she felt that she could not reveal the truth of her soul to him.

It is this lack of fulfillment in her friendship with Emerson that Bell Gale Chevigny believes was the reason for Fuller's split from him and the Transcendentalist group. As Chevigny explains, the Transcendentalists' "support for her unconventionality was incalculable, but was support from which nevertheless she moved away" (75). Chevigny suggests that Fuller's dissatisfaction is what led to her dramatic separation from Emerson and ultimately her move to Italy. Emerson indeed acted as a mentor to Fuller, and their relationship had an undeniable intimacy. Emerson, however, felt that her impulses were not enlightened. Chevigny writes that Emerson saw Fuller "as alternately

¹ What I am calling the Fuller Papers are loose manuscripts of journal entries written by Fuller and found in the collection of papers used by Emerson to edit her posthumous memoir. They were not published with the rest of the memoir material, but were digitally scanned and sequenced by the Houghton Library. They will be referred to by the sequence numbers created by the Library, and titled for the Works Cited page using key words or phrases within the entry quoted.

ruled by two tendencies, her ‘broad good sense’ which he trust[ed] and her temperament which he [did] not” (80). The irony of this sentiment, of course, is that Emerson, in his editing of Fuller’s memoir for publication, explains that one of the tenets of Transcendentalism is to “surrender to the claims of natural appetite” (Emerson 2:183).

As Fuller’s relationship with Emerson progressed, she began to realize the inherent, and patriarchal, limitations in his understanding of what being a true Transcendentalist might mean. For Fuller, it meant exploring one’s capacity for multiple conflicting identities, perhaps allowing those identities not only to flourish, but also to work simultaneously in the process of self-expression. For instance, in some of her letters she claims the capacity to be both masculine and feminine in disposition, while working to navigate her way between the two, or trying to meld the two together. Frustrated by Emerson’s patriarchal narrowness, she requests a more “comprehensive friendship,” asking herself, “Why do I write thus to one who must ever regard the deepest tones of my nature as those of childish fancy or worldly discontent?” (Emerson *Memoirs* 2:82). Fuller’s expression of what she felt was her truth of self was, in Emerson’s opinion, “too much a force of blood” (1:305). In his introduction to her posthumous memoirs, he writes, “When I found she lived at a rate so much faster than mine, and which was violent compared with mine, I forboded a rash and painful crisis...She remained inscrutable to me” (1:305). For Emerson, Fuller didn’t preside within the cultural norms of the time regarding women—norms from which he was supposed to be escaping as a Transcendentalist and norms he either did not know existed, or refused to acknowledge. Because of her seeming incongruities, Emerson thought her to be “child-like”: as Judith Butler notes, “indeed, precisely because certain kinds of gender identities fail to conform

to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or illogical impossibilities from within that domain” (17). Of his disapproval, Fuller writes in an unpublished journal entry (Seq 81), “I would never indulge towards him that need of devotion which lies at the depth of my being. He measures too much, he is too reasonable. I could not be my truest child-like self. But I might be my truest manlike self” (“Child-like”). Fuller’s words are an indication of the disappointment she felt at not being able to express her true self around a mentor who preached the importance of that very pursuit. Her frustration is understandable: she felt unsupported by the one person she thought would understand her desire to work through these identities: the one person she thought would be able to comprehend her “manifold being” actually found it to be “violent” (Rusk 340n; Emerson, *Memoirs* 1:305)

It was Fuller’s discontent with this inability to express herself without judgment, to live her truth without boundaries, that ultimately led to her separation from the Transcendentalists and Emerson. In another letter to Emerson, she writes, “How often have I said, This light will never understand my fire; this clear eye will never discern the law by which I am filling my circle (Rusk 340n). Fuller’s reference to a “clear eye” is an incisive allusion to Emerson’s *Nature*, in which he insists that only within nature can one transcend, becoming nothing but a perceiving transparent eyeball open to possibility and insight. Fuller points to the irony in this metaphor, as we will see further in the introduction, because Emerson draws a distinct line between nature and the mind, a line that Fuller works to erase. With this allusion, Fuller suggests that Emerson’s mind is inadequate to comprehend her being. One might expect, given the edicts of Emerson’s Transcendentalism, that he would find Fuller the quintessential Transcendentalist.

Instead, for all of his beliefs, he was perpetually trapped within a “cultural matrix” of heteronormativity he could not transcend. Fuller is thus arguably a more complete manifestation of Emerson’s writings and philosophy than he is; she is more Emersonian than Emerson himself. Chevigny writes, “Ultimately [Emerson’s] refusal to comprehend her ‘wholly, mentally, and morally’ enabled her to understand herself in a more meaningful way, with her mental and emotional gifts in real historical action” (81). However, seeing Fuller’s achievements as merely a result of her relationship with Emerson undermines her legacy as a self-defining feminist Transcendentalist. Chevigny gives Emerson too much credit. Fuller radicalized herself, independent of him and the movement. It wasn’t *because* of him that she was able to become the feminist she is known to be, but *in spite* of him.

In her published works, Fuller reframes the social structures under which both women and men were living. She reestablishes the Transcendentalist’s relationship between Nature and the spiritual self, affirming that Nature exists to connect one to the spirit, and that one element cannot exist without the other. This relationship is foundational to the Transcendentalist movement in that Transcendentalists believed God created Nature for the purpose of embodying and communicating the truth of the spirit. Since the body is directly tied to Nature, it follows, then, that one must not ignore the impulses of the body, but rather try to glean what those impulses say about one’s true self.

By reaffirming the connection between the self and the body, Fuller is then able to deconstruct the incongruities of the social structures that would attempt to sever the connection. She asserts that the most pervasive social institution preventing half the

population from pursuing selfhood is marriage, explaining that the imbalance of power between men and women prevents women from finding their true selves. One of the main reasons for this imbalance, Fuller contends, is society's convention of assigning certain characteristics to gender based on the sex of the body, which creates a hierarchy of gender roles, and restricts the potential of one sex over another by limiting the choices one can make for herself. Each of the conventions Fuller outlines, and each counter-argument against these conventions, serves to build a Transcendentalist paradigm that is not only a feminist paradigm based on true equality, but is also a truer form of Transcendentalism itself—seeking to maintain the connection between Nature and the Spirit, the body and the mind—than that which Emerson proposed.

Fuller begins her deconstruction of the mind/body dualism by reaffirming the Transcendentalist notion that Nature informs the spiritual world; however, she maintains the connection between Nature and the body, and disputes the notion that one must slough off bodily desires, or deny nature, in order to transcend the physical world and truly know the spiritual world. She first recounts the latter when she writes, “While any one is base, none can be entirely free and noble” (Fuller, *Woman* 10). She then counters writing, “Yet something new shall presently be shown of the life of man, for hearts crave, if minds do not know how to ask it” (10). With this passage, Fuller introduces the notion that the craving of the heart and the reason of the mind are not mutually exclusive. The latter must examine the former in order to truly realize an authentic self. As an example of how one must explore the base of human desires in order to live an authentic life, Fuller uses the example of Orpheus' journey to the underworld in search of Eurydice. In a poem, she writes, “Each Orpheus must to the depths descend, / For only thus the poet can

be wise” (*Woman* 11). Fuller uses the story of Orpheus as an illustration of the necessity of the connection between the mind and the body. She believed the reasoned mind must not ignore the desires of the body, which Emerson prescribed, in order to transcend. Rather, the mind and body must act on one another—one exploring the depths of the other, while each keep the other in check. In other words, the instincts of the body are just as integral to knowing one’s authentic self as are the instincts of the mind, and each is tethered to the other. She continues by comparing Ulysses’ encounter with the sirens—“distrusting his own power to be firm in his better purpose” and causing “himself to be bound to the mast, that he might be kept secure against his own weakness”—to Orpheus “pass[ing] unfettered” through the underworld, “so absorbed in singing hymns to the gods that he could not even hear those sounds of degrading enchantment” (12). Fuller points to Ulysses’ lack of control or discipline, as compared to Orpheus, whose strength of will allowed him to explore the depths of the underworld unrestrained, and therefore, able to return not only unscathed but also wiser, having “trusted his own power to be firm in his better purpose” (12).

Fuller continues her parse of the analogy of Orpheus; however, she calls for the reframing of the tale when she argues, “that the time has come when Eurydice is to call for an Orpheus, rather than Orpheus for Eurydice” (*Woman* 12). With this statement, Fuller announces “that the idea of Man, however imperfectly brought out, has been far more so than that of Woman” (12), and she forms the foundation of her argument in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*: that just as the connection between the mind and the body is necessary, so too is the connection between women and men; that one cannot thrive without the other; that women are “the other half of the same thought, the other

chamber of the heart of life”; and that women “[need] now to take [their] turn in the full pulsation,” because the “improvement in the daughters will best aid in the reformation of the sons” (12). Fuller argues, in other words, reform can only happen if initiated by women. She begins with the institution of marriage, calling for a reshaping of the institution so that it offers women an equal partnership that would “give her legitimate hopes” and create a “standard within herself” in order to “ascertain the true destiny of woman” (18). This first component of Fuller’s Transcendentalism directly challenges the sexism inherent in the social structures at the time. Not only does she deconstruct the archetype of marriage, but she also appeals to her female readers to “take [their] turn in the full pulsation” of society. This rallying cry serves to create a Transcendentalist alternative where woman is an active and equal participant in the marriage contract—allowing women the ability to live an autonomous life by which they can develop a clear sense of self. The dismantling of the structure of marriage, as Fuller asserts, is foundational not only to the liberation of women, but also to the liberation of men, and is necessary to the process of self-definition for women. As we will see in the following chapters, rejecting traditional notions of marriage evolves to include outright rejections of marriage, the praise of polyamorous relationships, and the insights gained from homosexuality and homosexual relationships.

One of the advantages of employing a Transcendentalist approach to subvert conventional notions of marriage is that it then allows for the reexamination of traditional gender roles. Fuller is able to undermine the argument that women are weaker than men by referring to the manual labor many women, particularly minorities and those from the lower economic classes, perform, such as “the washerwoman [who] stands at her tub and

carries home her work at all seasons” (19). She points out the irony of a society that would think of her sex as delicate, and yet think nothing of women who are forced to do harsh manual labor in order to survive: “those who think physical circumstances of woman would make a part in the affairs of national government unsuitable, are by no means those who think it impossible for the negress to endure fieldwork, even during pregnancy, or the seamstresses to go through their killing labors” (19). In addition, she refutes the argument that women in politics would neglect their domestic duties because of the demanding schedule such a position requires by countering with a list of social duties already assigned to women that require the same demanding schedule. Fuller’s examples point to an inconsistency in the patriarchal logic that argues against equality between the sexes. Both her case for equal partnership in marriage, and her examples of the inconsistencies in the oppressive rationality of sexism, introduce her later interrogation of the constructs of gender, and her conflation of the concepts of man and woman.

It is because of Fuller’s consideration of these traditions and attitudes that some scholars, such as Wayne, argue that “Fuller grappled with the paradoxes of the Transcendentalist reformer: the connection between the life of thought and the life of action and the development of the individual self within community” (7). However, Fuller’s assertions were deliberately tailored to a particular audience—the general female population—that was perhaps unskilled in the investigation and deconstruction of social constructs such as marriage and other reified gender roles. According to Annette Kolodny, what appears to be a struggle is actually Fuller “consciously trying to fashion a set of rhetorical strategies appropriate to the emerging feminist consciousness of her era”

(361). Examining her published work shows that Fuller didn't *struggle* with the paradoxes so much as she *explored* them, expressing them in such a way as to have her ideas resonate with her female readers. As for *Woman* in particular, she asserts her decisiveness on the matter of reformation of social constructs when she argues for the concept of gender fluidity.

Whereas some of Fuller's male contemporaries connected gender and the body, current feminist theory asserts that the concept of gender is a social construct imposed on men and women by the hegemony. If Transcendentalism is the strict observance of one's truth and the refusal to adhere to hegemonic limitations and traditions, and if gender is a hegemonic construct separate from the body, then a Transcendentalist should ignore the limitations of socially constructed gender definitions when searching for selfhood. The self should be genderless. Of course, the most troubling obstacle one faces when engaged in a Transcendentalist pursuit of self-definition is the normativity of culture. As Judith Butler explains, "the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist'—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender" (17). Fuller suggests as much when she writes, "History jeers at the attempts of physiologists to bind great original laws by the forms which flow from them. They make a rule; they say from observation, what can and cannot be" (*Woman* 69). She, unlike many of her male counterparts, was able to comprehend the gender paradigm and its relationship to the investigation of the self and to identity formation. Even though male Transcendentalists in her community were espousing equality, they were doing so from a heteronormative view of enlightenment,

and the belief that desire was a bodily symptom—“the heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine,’ where these are understood as expressive attributes of ‘male’ and ‘female’” (Butler 17). Long before the notions of heteronormativity were delineated by feminists and queer theorists, Fuller understood the fluidity of gender. She writes, “There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman”; and explains, “Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid” (*Woman* 68-69). Fuller’s understanding of the connection between the conceptions and fluidity of gender and the self did not, however, ignore their connection to the body. On the contrary, her letters to Ralph Waldo Emerson—in which she asks repeatedly for a “comprehensive” friendship, and expresses her disappointment in his refusal to understand her “need [for a] manifold being”—are evidence that she embraced her energy, and conflated her passions with her reason. Furthermore, it was her reason, admired by Emerson, that realized the self-body connection essential to a feminist Transcendentalism.

Ironically, the moment Fuller broke free from the confines of Emerson’s prescriptions, she became a true Transcendentalist and ultimately paved the way for women to define themselves outside the limits of patriarchal definitions of truth and self. In his book *Nature*, Emerson advocates for a separation of the mind from the body. Transcendentalism, he proposed, should be sexless, as the mind should not be inhibited by the functions and restrictions of the body. He believed that true transcendence could only occur if one’s mind were free from any and all bodily constraints including desire

and gender—both of which he believed were bodily attributes. Indeed, his was a notion held for thousands of years, as Elizabeth Grosz writes, “the mind/body relation is frequently correlated with the distinctions between reason and passion, sense and sensibility...self and other...transcendence and immanence” and is a “separation which had already been long anticipated in Greek philosophy since the time of Plato” (4-6). In regards to Fuller, Emerson felt that he “had always an impression that her energy was too much a force of blood, and therefore never felt the security for her peace which belongs to much more purely intellectual natures” (Emerson *Memoir* 305). He could not reconcile the nature of her energy with the nature of her intelligence since he believed they were mutually exclusive.

Equating Fuller’s energy with the blood of the body, and his inability to reconcile these two forces in Fuller, is an indication that Emerson believed bodily desires and impulses had no place among enlightened minds. He believed the prescriptions of gender were strictly assigned to the sexes and therefore the body; whereas Fuller believed gender, rather than an impulse of the body, is actually an impulse of the socialized mind. Indeed, Fuller’s explorations of the fluidity of gender suggest a distance between the gender spectrum and the sex of the body. However, in the truest form of Transcendentalist pursuit Fuller advocated for a reciprocal relationship between an emancipated mind and the emancipated body when she writes, “What woman needs is not as a woman to act or to rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded” (Fuller *Woman* 20). With the impulses of an unrestrained body and the impulses of an unrestrained mind, one’s Self is allowed to move through and explore, “freely and unimpeded,” multiple possibilities of

actualization. Furthermore, such explorations would be incomplete without considering the “nature” of one’s body and the impulses that might arise during that exploration.

Fuller’s advocacy for a fluid freedom to explore one’s Self is mirrored in the multiple approaches she takes in her writing. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is not only a measured and reasoned argument for the equality of women drawing from classical sources—similar to the approach her male counterparts would take in their own writing—but, it is also organized in a way that has been suggested (and criticized) as more appealing to a female audience. In her manifesto Fuller lays out some of the edicts of Transcendentalism and its prospects of equality as designed by a woman, rather than appropriated from a man. In the beginning of the text, Fuller advocates support for everyone’s ability to reach spiritual enlightenment, regardless of education or station in life, by referring to Matthew 5.14-15 when she writes, “the candlestick set in a low place has given light as faithfully, where it was needed, as that upon the hill” (8). To establish an ethos that will reach and persuade her readers, she refers often to classical figures such as Orpheus and Ulysses, as well as revered political figures such as John Quincy Adams. However, since the publication of *Woman*, critical analysis has not been favorable to her style of writing. Kolodny recounts the many negative critiques of Fuller’s *Woman*. Much of the criticism focused on the organization, or the lack thereof, of Fuller’s manifesto. Despite such criticism, Kolodny argues, however, that “Fuller was consciously trying to fashion a set of rhetorical strategies appropriate to the emerging feminist consciousness of her era” (361). In addition to the feminist rhetorical strategies Kolodny reveals, it is evident that Fuller was also attempting to establish an ethos on the subject of women’s equality through some of the same rhetorical methods employed by many of her male

contemporaries: alluding to religious fables, classical heroes, and political activities. Indeed, one could argue that the number of such references borders on overcompensation in an effort to prove intellectual credibility. The two competing styles of writing—the masculine practice of establishing ethos, and a more feminine approach to organization—reflect her acceptance of multiple and conflicting rhetorical approaches. Moreover, these multiple references to classical texts in *Woman* suggest a certain amount of posturing, albeit posturing for the purpose of persuasion. This, of course, does not diminish Fuller’s credibility. On the contrary, it proves to her audience that she is more than qualified to address such radical topics. In fact, such posturing, when analyzed through the lens of Fuller’s feminist Transcendentalism, is one trait of a multifaceted female identity.

This multidimensionality is evident in *Woman* with Fuller’s use of the Miranda character to provide a persona for her own experiences. With Miranda, Fuller creates a fictionalized version of her self who “might speak without heat and bitterness of the position of her sex” (Fuller *Woman* 21). She goes on to describe Miranda as a woman who was respected by “not only refined, but very coarse men” who “approved and aided” her, and “in whom they saw resolution and clearness of design” (21). The persona of Miranda affords Fuller the ability to speak freely about the patriarchal restrictions inflicted on women. In the voice of Miranda, Fuller writes that “women are taught to learn their rule from without, not to unfold it from within” (22). She continues, blaming the patriarchal constructs in which women are caged, writing, “this is the fault of man, who is still vain, and wishes to be more important to woman than, by right, he should be” (22). Speaking through Miranda allows Fuller to be more candid than she could have been writing as herself. The persona of Miranda acts as a mask to protect Fuller from the

patriarchal assumptions that, because she is criticizing men, she must hate them. The performative nature of Miranda, subsequently, is necessary in that it allows Fuller a chance to express her true feelings in the public sphere, and attempt to maintain a certain amount of legitimacy to effect reform. Of course, her personal letters are predictably less strategic. Fuller had to establish a credibility in her public persona that she understood to be innate in her private persona. Thus, her public works were a template for women and men to pursue a Transcendentalist life, while her letters indicate stark differences between her public and private personas, illustrating the multidimensional approach she took in pursuing her own Transcendentalism. Furthermore, “the contrast between” her public persona “and the private personality revealed in her letters and journals is striking” in that “it suggests the enormity of her transgression and the depth of opposition it aroused” (Blanchard 2). For this reason, Fuller can be seen not only as a revolutionary figure and feminist icon in the fight for women’s rights, but also as a pure Transcendentalist: embodying multiple and varying forms of identity through her public and private personas, arguing for the existence of a fluid gender spectrum, and escaping Emerson’s restrictive practices of maintaining certain heteronormative standards—all in the aid of self-awareness and self-definition.

Although the influence of the Transcendentalist movement faded not long after Fuller’s tragic death in 1850, threads of the feminist Transcendentalism that Fuller conceived can be found in some of the most radical expressions of feminism published in later years. Women writers such as Mary MacLane at the turn of the century; Diane di Prima, who wrote on the threshold of the second wave of feminism; and convicted

murderer Aileen Wuornos all exhibit radical expressions of Self that can be traced directly to Fuller.

II. CHAPTER ONE

As we explored in the previous chapter, Margaret Fuller's personal letters were a way to explore and express her inner thoughts. The contrast between her public works and her personal correspondence illustrates her need to present different personae to different audiences. While it was necessary for her published ideas to be formal and structured, with copious examples from classical texts to establish her credibility, in her letters she was able to present her feelings without concern for social mores. Her intimacy and freedom of self-expression can be seen in the diary entries and personal letters included in her memoir and published posthumously. Her memoir can also be read as a precursor to more modern memoirs and diaries, forms many scholars now consider as useful media for women's self-exploration and expression. The threads of Fuller's self-exploration also can be seen in the controversial and sensational diary *I Await the Devil's Coming*, the infamous text by Mary MacLane. MacLane's diary is, the author explains, a portrayal "of womankind and of nineteen years" living in remote Butte, Montana at the turn of the century (3). However, MacLane's account of her life during a three-month period is not the day-to-day report of the life of a typical young woman of the mid-west. It is, rather, an in-depth expression of her innermost thoughts and desires, and is an example of the shift, as Margo Culley describes, "in the content, function, and form of the diary as created by American women in the last two hundred years" (18). Men, who had once dominated the genre, found it less and less acceptable to "[probe] and [express their] inner life in any but religious terms," thus rejecting the genre "as the secular self emerged as the necessary subject of the diary" (16). Within this newly available avenue of self-exploration women were able "to indulge full 'self-

centeredness” (16). However, because of the dominance men had held over the genre of writing about the self, a woman attempting such an endeavor presented a willful act of rebellion against patriarchal values. According to Cathryn Halverson, “women...[taking] their own souls as subject matter [was] a subversive act of nature fundamentally different from the self-writing of Emerson” and other male Transcendentalists (40). Furthermore, MacLane’s text offers a “parodic or even caricatured” look at what it takes to explore and realize one’s Self (40). Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that *The Devil’s Coming* caused a sensation. The diary was groundbreaking in its unrepentant portrayal of MacLane’s desires: as well for her criticisms of not only the patriarchal constructs of marriage, sex, gender and desire, but also women’s shared guilt in maintaining such constructs. MacLane uses the genre of diary as an iconoclastic platform, presenting multiple personae, hoping for fame and infamy while also elucidating an awareness of herself and the diary’s presentation of those personae. It is in MacLane’s willful and unapologetic self-awareness, and in her determined presentation and acceptance of multiple personae, that the influence of Fuller’s feminist Transcendentalism can be seen.

Mary Elizabeth MacLane moved at the age of ten with her family to Butte, Montana, leaving what would then have been the bustling metropolis of Winnipeg, Canada. Consequently, the small-town morals and desolate landscape of the Northwest town contributed to MacLane’s inward turn and self-analysis. Often living a life of purposeful isolation even beyond what one might expect to find in turn-of-the-century Butte, an exercise in Transcendentalist thought, MacLane introduces herself as a person “for whom the world contains not a parallel,” a genius philosopher who is “distinctly original innately and in development,” and in possession of an “unusual intensity of life”

(3). The diary depicts her innermost thoughts—her desires, her dislikes, her motivations, and intentions—as well as her thoughts on marriage, sexuality, love and the body. Like Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, *I Await the Devil’s Coming* is a manifesto of feminine thought. However, MacLane extends Fuller’s argument on the restrictions women face in the pursuit of self-actualization. Her manifesto is a stark portrayal of the truest, and at times most brutal, mind of a woman existing within a patriarchal society of restrictive moral standards, in a place with very little opportunity. Set against a heteronormative, patriarchal society, MacLane’s portrayal is a radical statement on the vistas the feminine identity can reach.

If *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is a deconstruction of heteronormative, patriarchal society, then *The Devil’s Coming* is an exercise in radical expression against such structures. One of the most frequently challenged social institutions in MacLane’s diary is that of marriage. Like Fuller, MacLane saw the institution of marriage as a system of repression. However, MacLane expresses her distaste for the custom not as a call for reform, but as a protest against a ritual she believes “is often used as a cloak to cover a world of rather shameful things” (38). She explains that marriage is a farce used by men and women to justify their virtue, or to disguise their vice—“so virtuous are they indeed that they are able to draw themselves up in the pride of their own purity, when they happen upon some corner where the marriage ceremony is lacking” (38). MacLane’s critique articulates the hypocrisy of asserting the sanctity of marriage when the nature of human desire fails to sustain such inviolability. She goes on to explain, “when a man and woman love one another that is enough... a religious rite is superfluous... And when a man and woman live together without the love, no ceremony in the world can make it

marriage” (39). While Fuller points to the incongruent roles of man and woman in marriage, she also critiques the institution in much the same way MacLane does, writing, “And so far as union of one with one is believed to be the only pure form of marriage, a great majority of societies and individuals are still doubtful whether the earthly bond must be a meeting of souls, or only supposes a contract of convenience and utility” (*Woman* 41). MacLane, too, dissects the foundation of marriage. Rather than address the patriarchal hierarchy present in the institution during the turn of the century, MacLane furthers Fuller’s ideas, focusing on how the notion of marriage works against the nature of desire and love. By illustrating the hypocrisy of an institution that claims sanctity, she exposes marriage as a social construct, as opposed to an ordained rite, and dismantles the paradigm. This deconstruction of the marriage paradigm allows for a reconfiguration of the hegemonic systems influenced by such a paradigm—systems like sex, gender, love and desire.

MacLane continues to upset the foundation on which marriage is built by associating marriage with prostitution. She explains, “the woman who [marries without love] need not feel the tiniest bit better than her lowest sister in the streets,” and is “indeed a step lower since she pretends to be what she is not” as she “plays the virtuous woman” (39). With this passage, MacLane illustrates a Transcendentalist pursuit of authenticity in that she equates marriages without the truth of love and desire with a relationship built on transaction—women who trade true love for comfort and the title of “virtuous woman.” Moreover, she asserts that virtue and marriage are not synonymous if there is no authentic love and desire. She counts herself lucky not to feel the need to have the title of virtuous woman, writing, “I am fortunate that I am not one of those who are

burdened with an innate sense of virtue and honor which must come always before Happiness” (15). MacLane’s comparison of marriage to prostitution attests that MacLane sees marriage and sex, by early twentieth-century standards, as little more than forms of currency.

Furthermore, her argument is a precursor to studies of kinship, which Gayle Rubin describes as in “idiom of social interaction, organizing economic, political, and ceremonial, as well as sexual, activity” (169). MacLane’s descriptions of marriage point to the incongruities between society’s presentation of marriage and the function of marriage, and illustrate the inauthentic nature of such a union. Her interpretations acknowledge the barriers that marriage creates in the participants’—namely the women’s—pursuit of an identity independent of society’s expectations. Although, according to Rubin, marriage is not the font of the patriarchal oppressive control of women, it is, as MacLane suggests, the veil that conceals the mechanisms of that oppression: “I can think of nothing in the world like the utter littleness, the paltriness, the contemptibleness, the degradation, of the woman who is tied down under a roof with a man who is really nothing to her” (39). MacLane’s protests are not necessarily against the union of two people; rather, they are about the contrivance of such a union for the purpose of social acceptance, at the expense of one’s own happiness.

MacLane’s happiness, as she repeatedly explains, rests on the fulfillment of her truest desires. Despite her condemnation of the institution of marriage—as she writes at one point, “I shall never make use of the marriage ceremony”—she continually expresses her desire to marry the devil, since she believes “the Devil owns and rules the earth and all that therein” (16). However, the conventions of traditional marriage are not her focus

when she confesses this desire. Rather, the devil “represents some temporary and terrifying fulfillment of desire” and a “temporary transcendence of the self” (Halverson 46). Subsequently, MacLane’s focus is on authenticity and Truth, and authenticity of desire is the only way to transcendence. Even so, the devil represents more than MacLane’s fulfillment of her desires. To her reader, he represents all that lies outside of the heteronormative, patriarchal system that requires of society, and of women in particular, certain standards of morality. In one entry, she asks for deliverance from such standards:

From the kind of people who call a woman’s figure her “shape”:
Kind Devil, deliver me.

From all the sweet girls; from “gentlemen”; from feminine men:
Kind Devil, deliver me...

From the soft persistent, maddening glances of water-cart drivers:
Kind Devil, deliver me.

From the lisle-thread stockings; from round, tight garters; from
brilliant brass belts: Kind Devil, deliver me...

From soft old bachelors and soft old widowers; from any
masculine thing that wears a pale blue necktie...Kind Devil, deliver me.

From people who persist in calling my good body “mere vile
clay”... from fools who tell me what I “want” to do: Kind Devil, deliver
me...(95-96)

MacLane’s request for liberation includes examples of all that is normative—including heteronormative dress and behavior, puritanism (referring to prohibition anthems), and

general standards of living. Furthermore, her inclusion of “feminine men” in her request indicates her wish to be delivered from all constrictions, even those that would designate gender qualities. She writes, “Truth is Love, and Love is the only Truth, and Love is the only thing out of all that is real,” and “the Devil is really the only one to who (sic) [everyone] may turn” in order to find Truth (25). In this way, the devil is the culmination of Truth and desire—the only path to transcendence. She admits that “Happiness for me would be sure to mean something wicked” when explaining that her desires—her Self—exist only within a realm of immorality and otherness (25).

By suggesting that the Self exists within a realm of otherness, MacLane presents numerous possibilities when it comes to the expressions of that Self. For example, as the trickster, the devil creates an opportunity for mischief when MacLane confesses her desire and longing for “badness”: in him, she senses a partner in crime. Of course, she has practice in the endeavor of criminality, asserting “I am a thief...It has been suggested that I am a kleptomaniac. But I am sure my mind is perfectly sane...I steal money, or anything that I want, whenever I can, nearly always. It amuses me—and one must be amused” (73). Her unapologetic confession illustrates her acceptance of her impulses, a foundational practice in a Transcendentalist pursuit. Indeed, this acceptance of “whim,” as Emerson phrases it, is something he prescribed in “Self-Reliance”; however, he seemed to have trouble following his own suggestions. Fuller expressed her desire to follow such impulses, as noted in the introduction, but Emerson was unresponsive to her requests for more expressive interactions, which was the catalyst for her escape to Europe. Fuller’s legacy is evident in MacLane’s admission of thievery because, like Fuller, MacLane takes an active role in acquiring her happiness, regardless of the social

costs. MacLane's happiness happens to lie in the wicked act of stealing. Reminding us of Emerson's words, she accepts that her "impulses may be from below," but defiantly cries, "if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil" ("Self-Reliance" 141).

MacLane supports her premise that Self-actualization can take multiple forms by giving several examples of the different ways in which she explores her own Truth. For instance, to illustrate what following one's Truth looks like, she connects the processes of the body with the explorations of the mind, going so far as to personify her bodily functions by giving them a voice and demonstrating their own Transcendentalist pursuits. She transcribes the thoughts of her stomach as it digests an olive: "Avant, pale, shadowy ghosts of dyspepsia!" cries her stomach, "I know you not. I am of a brilliant, shining world. I dwell in Elysian fields" (44-45). By personifying a bodily function, MacLane imbues her stomach with a Self, thus connecting the self and the body. She then explains that the Self of her stomach is transcendent in that its Truth lies within its senses—"the philosophy of [her] stomach" lives in the moment, thinking "not of the morrow, nor of the past," but living "voluptuously, in the present...content...in paradise" (44). With this passage, MacLane illustrates that, "if torn away from the workings of her mind...she'd be able to encounter some reality that lies beneath both consciousness and physical sensation," creating a foundation of desire and transcendence (Halverson 46). Starting with one of the most basic functions of the body personified and realizing its own existence, she then extends the transcendence of the stomach to her own transcendence when she writes, "every drop of blood in my passionate veins is resting. Through my stomach...my soul seems to feel the infinite...I am entirely satisfied" (45). With this she parallels the micro-desires with the macro-desires—"this body is no abstract, idealized

entity, but an individual organism containing real live and excellently functioning internal organs”—asserting that the desires of the organism of her body, and the desires of her Self, are tools necessary to the pursuit of Truth (Halverson 44). Like Fuller, MacLane understood the essential relationship of the self and the body. MacLane’s argument, however, encompasses the needs and desires of the body in tandem with the actualization of the Self, not only acknowledging the relationship, but also highlighting the importance of the body by presenting the desires of the body as another persona comprising that Self.

MacLane continues to acknowledge the relationship between the needs and desires of the body and the fulfillment of the self when she recounts her sexual attraction to her female teacher, whom she calls the “anemone lady.” She writes, “I feel in the anemone lady a strange attraction of sex. There is in me a masculine element that, when I am thinking of her, arises and overshadows all the others” (94). MacLane’s expression of sexual attraction for another woman is rooted in a “conception of gender” that Judith Butler explains “presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and gender reflects or expresses desire” (22). Stressing the fluidity of gender, MacLane assigns the sexual desire she has for the “anemone lady” as a masculine trait. She continues by delineating the qualities of her attraction, writing, “it is not the woman-love, but the man-love, set in the mysterious sensibilities of my woman-nature” (94). In other words, the type of love MacLane has for the anemone lady is not love in the form of companionship or adoration, but the kind of love most often associated with masculinity—aggressive, sexual love. MacLane’s acknowledgment of her “man-love” for the anemone lady suggests an understanding of the gender fluidity Fuller also addresses in *Woman*. Admitting that she

possesses the type of love and physical desire traditionally associated with masculinity indicates MacLane's willingness to share her Truth. Regardless of her intentions, whether they be fame and/or infamy, she gives a sincere account of her feelings for another woman; and in that act, demonstrates the complex personal exploration necessary for learning the truth of the Self.

What is equally important to MacLane's acknowledgment of her "man-love" for a woman, and what additionally illustrates an understanding of the fluidity of gender, is her repeated and insistent expressions of her womanness. She frequently refers to her "admirable young *woman's-body*, which [she] enjoy[s] thoroughly and of which [she] is passionately fond" (16). She describes herself as "young and *feminine—very feminine*," and sees her body not merely as a source of the senses with which to pursue a sensualist life, but also grasps "the art" and "poetry of [her] fine *feminine body*" (16). In another passage, MacLane refers to a biblical tale: "I have heard of a woman who went down to Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves" (65). Replacing the male protagonist with a female, she insists that she would rather "walk the earth an outcast" than face a future where "each and every one of [her] *woman-senses* should wear slowly, painfully to shreds" (65). Additionally, MacLane frequently equates her genius with her womanness, writing, "I am not a girl. I am a woman, of a kind. I began to be a woman at twelve, or more properly, a genius" (72). Her continued expression of a feminine body, and persistent acknowledgment of herself as a woman, suggest a celebratory response to her womanness. Coupled with her acceptance of her "man-love," these celebrations of her feminine body support the notion of gender fluidity when considering notions of love and desire. However, the frequency of her reverence for her feminine body suggests a belief

in a feminine essence connected to the body that is distinct and different from that of a male body. She writes, “A spasm of pleasure seizes me when I think in some acute moment of the buoyant health and vitality of this fine young body that is feminine in every fiber...the masculine body is merely flesh, it seems, flesh and bones and nothing else” (16). She continues to celebrate her feminine form while lying in the sun: “I lie on the ground...and meditate idly. There is a worldful (sic) of easy indolent, beautiful sensuality in the figure of a young woman lying on the ground under a warm setting sun” (18). Conversely, she explains, “a man has not a good young feminine body to feel with, to receive into itself the spirit of a warm sun as its setting” (18). Revering the magnificence of her feminine body while deriding the male form suggests an attempt to create significance that solely belongs to the feminine form. Rather than “awaiting the inscription-as-incision of the masculine signifier for entrance into language and culture” (Butler 147), MacLane reclaims the signification of her “feminine” body, affirming its symbolic nature, but reversing the masculine/feminine hierarchy: in much the same way as Fuller when she argues, “allow room enough, and the electric fluid [of woman] will be found to invigorate and embellish, not destroy life” (*Woman* 61).

MacLane continues to complicate her expression of “man-love” and her assertion of a distinct womanness by returning to her desire for the devil. Interestingly, her sexuality isn’t entirely focused on her former teacher. She imagines several conversations with him in which she pleads for a violent rapture:

“What would you have me do, little Mary MacLane?” the Devil
would say.

“I would have you conquer me, crush me, know me,” I would answer.

“What shall I say to you?” the devil would ask.

“Say to me, ‘I love you, I love you, I love you,’ in your strong, steel, fascinating voice. Say it to me often, always—a million times.”

“What would you have me do, little Mary MacLane?” he would say again.

I would answer: “Hurt me, burn me, consume me with hot love, shake me violently, embrace me hard, hard in your strong, steel arms, kiss me with wonderful burning kisses—press your lips to mine with passion, and your soul and mine would meet then in anguish of joy for me!”

“How shall I treat you, little Mary MacLane?”

“Treat me cruelly, brutally.” (50)

The violent nature of MacLane’s pleas, to be consumed by what is typically seen as a male figure, is a provocative declaration of her sexual desire. Given that the devil represents all that is Other—everything outside of the heteronormative patriarchy, all that society deems normal, and all that is outside of her Self—it follows that she desires to be physically consumed by what lies outside of her Self. The aggressive language she uses not only denotes physical violence, but also her desire for complete absorption into the Other. MacLane would have the Other “conquer” and “consume” her to the point of anguish. However, for her, this anguish would be joyful, a kind of transcendence, signifying a complete loss of control. In this way, MacLane’s Truth—her Self—implodes inward, discovering its innermost desires, then expands outward, calling for the Other to

subsume it wholly, and brings the Other back to merge with the Self. Furthermore, the physicality of MacLane's pleas is necessary—as Fuller insists when referring to Orpheus' journey to and from the underworld—in that the body facilitates the inward turn and outward expansions of the Self—in effect, grounding the Self for its return to the body. This cyclical process for which Fuller also argued is essential to a feminist Transcendentalist pursuit. It is also the process that makes exhibiting different personae necessary, in that different personae allow for different lenses through which one can view the world and interpret it.

The cyclical relationship MacLane longs for is the result of her isolation, through which she cultivates the practice of self-analysis. However, her environment lacked opportunities for her to examine her desires in any actual physical sense. She expresses the need for the merging of the Self and the body when she shares her frustration with her solitary existence in barren Butte: “I am weary of self—always self. But it must be so. My life is filled with *self*” (65). Her lament continues as she conveys her hope that “if [her] soul could awaken fully perhaps [she] might be lifted out of [herself]” (65). The expanse of her soul (Self), mirroring the expanse of her surroundings, is something she refers to regularly, writing, “this sand and barrenness forms the setting for the personality of me” (11). Thus, the isolation in which MacLane lived no doubt contributed to the development of her Self. As an unmarried woman, no longer of school age, and still living with her family, she was afforded ample opportunity to ponder her inner desires. Her confidence in knowing her Self is evident as she introduces Mary MacLane to the reader—she writes, “I am broad-minded. I am a genius. I am a philosopher of my own good peripatetic school....My brain is a conglomeration of aggressive versatility” (3).

However, her isolation also hindered the full actualization of her Self in that it failed to provide a physical, external conduit through which she could channel her bodily desires, interpret their meaning, and then internalize that meaning. Consequently, she writes, her soul “is crying out blindly after something,” but until her soul finds and merges with that something, “it can not *know*”; it cannot transcend (65). This unknown manifests in the yearning for an extreme figure of sexuality and otherness. Furthermore, her lack of opportunity to fully realize her desires facilitates and encourages the creation of different, and sometimes contradicting, personae—masculine lover, feminine sexual object, self-aware genius—in that she had to inhabit each one in order to fully transcend. Like Fuller with her Miranda, MacLane must inhabit and explore.

Despite her disillusionment, MacLane understands that physicality is necessary to transcendence, and her back-and-forth practice of inward analysis and outward expression is continuous, always in motion, and necessary to the feminist Transcendentalist pursuit. The confession of these desires from a “young woman of nineteen years” is as subversive an act as anything of the time. However, she states explicitly, “This is not a diary. It is a Portrayal” (40). Conversely, a major tenet of Emersonian (male) Transcendentalism is the sloughing off of everything external and physical in order to transcend. MacLane’s admission of performance, nevertheless, signifies a performative component to feminist self-actualization. She admits, “while all of these emotions are written in the utmost seriousness and sincerity, and are exactly as I feel them, day after day...there is in the warp and woof of my life a thread that is false—false” (68). Just as gender is a performance of certain societal constructs through the body, so too is the act of expression itself—“such acts, gestures, enactments, generally

construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler 136). The “acts, gestures, and enactments” Butler is referring to are those of gender expression. However, once the gender paradigm is disrupted, they open many new pathways to Self-actualization. Rather than a construction of “essence” or identity based on a narrow set of prescriptions, troubling the notions of gender allows for a redefinition of identity, and the Self; it does not necessarily dismiss the existence of the Self or identity altogether. Instead, it allows for the premise that perhaps the Self *is* performativity. That is not to say that there is no Self, because the expressions of the Self are performative. Rather, it is in performance that the Self manifests and exists. What Fuller and MacLane understood is that performance is necessary to the process of Self-growth; one must inhabit many personae, sometimes simultaneously, in order to find the Truth of the Self, and the Truth of the Self *is* the performance. Indeed, MacLane’s manifestation of the devil functions as one of her many performative acts. Her choice to use the devil as her conduit to self-actualization is not merely an act of rebellion against the conservative morality of a small town. She uses a Faustian trope to represent a performative paradigm that is as true to her identity as being a nineteen-year-old living in Butte, Montana. She assumes many masks—victim, lover, criminal, sexual object, and genius—each one signifying her Truth just as much as any of the others. It is in this way that MacLane’s diary represents a new form of Transcendentalism. Rather than a patriarchal form of Transcendentalism that would be just as restrictive as the society it purports to reject—in that one would have to deny the desires of the body, and therefore deny the Truth of the soul—MacLane’s form of

feminist Transcendentalism, an evolution of Fuller's, relies on the symbiotic relationship between the Self and the body, and accepts all the manifestations cultivating such a relationship may create.

III. CHAPTER TWO

As noted in the previous chapter, Mary MacLane's diary is a radical examination of the feminine self as a multidimensional performative entity. Its publication was revolutionary in that MacLane presented extreme expressions of self-analysis by upsetting the patriarchal, heteronormative notions of female desire and sexuality. While other women were fighting for a vote and a voice, MacLane was investigating gender fluidity, expressing explicit sexual desires, and acknowledging an aspect of performativity in her own social interactions. Over sixty years later, Diane di Prima's *Memoirs of a Beatnik* was published in the midst of another reformation of feminism. Like *The Devil's Coming*, *Memoirs of a Beatnik* presents a progressive look into the motivations and desires of a young woman. A movement that saw its participants foregoing most if not all social protocol for the sake of art, the Beat era existed during some of the most revolutionary campaigns of the 20th century in America, including the Black Power movement, the second wave of feminism, the sexual revolution, and the establishment and development of postmodern thought. It is interesting, however, how the male members of a movement founded on the usurping of social constraints often did not consider—moreover, perpetuated—the constraints their female counterparts faced. In “Mapping Women Writers of the Beat Generation,” Ronna C. Johnson explains, “Beat literature deliberately and inaccurately restricted women to ‘everyday practices’” (19). Women, however present in the movement, were relegated to the background of the most profound Beat endeavors, existing only as domestic facilitators, handmaids to male Beat artists, or observers. It is for this reason that di Prima's *Memoirs* is so groundbreaking. More so than any other Beat female writer, “Di Prima's representation of her life as ‘a

beatnik' forcefully undermines the assumption that beatnik women were mere possessions of beatnik men and that these women did not think or speak for themselves" (Carden 37). Furthermore, di Prima envisions a space for women within the movement, at times expressing basic Beat ideology more forcefully and graphically than the more famous male Beats.

Inspired by Transcendentalist thought, Beat principles encouraged an active refusal of social constructs such as heteronormative paradigms and traditional concepts of morality—anything to avoid living “lives of quiet desperation” (Thoreau 203). Indeed, male Beat writers examined and emulated the abject members of society, as well as the nitty gritty details in living a life of poverty and deprivation. Among the taboos they challenged, their art included examinations of sexuality; however, none of them was as explicit in their examinations as di Prima in *Memoirs*. The one exception, of course, is Allen Ginsberg, whose works were also sexually explicit, but whose homosexuality placed him in a liminal space—enjoying the privileges his “maleness” provided, while also allowing him to explore the nature of a submissive position within his sexual partnerships. In contrast, because of the explicit nature of the prose and the fact that the author is a woman writing of such exploits, *Memoirs* “is often disregarded by mainstream reviewers as ‘for hire’ pornography” (Quinn 177). Its explicit nature notwithstanding, Mary Paniccia Carden writes, “di Prima’s text challenges both the Beat mythos and the meaning of memoir” (29). In it she expresses a unique sense of femininity, evoking a feminine mysticism, as well as the Beat passion to break all the rules. For this reason, di Prima represents Fuller’s assertion that “women can express publicly the fulness (sic) of thought and creation, without losing any of the peculiar beauty of their sex” (*Woman* 19).

In addition, the conscious performative nature of *Memoirs* illustrates the multidimensionality of di Prima's feminine self—"fantasy dislodges truth, history vanishes, cool detachment mutates into passionate engagement, and Beat identity is constructed by a woman" (Carden 29), her female identity and her Beat identity merging to form a radical feminist representation of woman in the twentieth century.

Like MacLane and Fuller before her, di Prima addresses the social constraints challenging women; however, perhaps because of *Memoirs*' focus on sexuality, she introduces her experimentations with gender in the first two chapters. When describing her first sexual partner of the novel, Ivan—to whom she loses her virginity—she writes, "his shoulders were very slight—as slight as a girl's. For some reason this excited me all the more" (5). In her second encounter of the day, with a different partner (Robin), di Prima revels in her own androgyny. As they lie on the bed, Robin tells her she looks like "a beautiful young boy," a sentiment that reminds her of her "old longing to be a pirate, tall and slim and hard, and not a girl at all. He saw a beautiful young boy, and I lay still to listen" (24). Di Prima's admission of androgynous desires introduces the reader to a revolutionary troubling of normative gender traits. Homosexuality, however taboo, was not novel subject matter. Indeed, sexual experimentation was a frequent Beat endeavor, but for di Prima to admit to her longing to be a boy was not so common, even among her fellow Beats. More than only an attraction to the same sex, a desire to experiment with different gender identities upsets the interiority of gender itself. Furthermore, di Prima introduces to the reader the notion that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender" (Butler 25). Rather, it is the expressions themselves that form identity; a concept that was not explored in-depth until years after *Memoirs* was published.

As di Prima's encounter with Robin continues, it becomes apparent to her that Robin's desire for her is his attempt to get closer to Ivan, as he says to her "you are the veil...through which we make love to each other" (27). Using this as an invitation to experiment, di Prima decides to play his "trembling" body "like an instrument" (30). She mounts Robin from behind and penetrates him with her fingers. As she is penetrating him, she expresses both a desire "aroused by the power [she] was wielding" and an "anguish and frustration that [she] could not complete the act [she] was approximating" (32). In this instance, di Prima gets to act out her fantasy to be the "pirate" penetrator. Her frustration at not possessing a phallus seems to suggest the Freudian theory of penis envy. However, she notes that she was "suddenly...angry at Robin for desiring Ivan, for taking no pleasure in my flesh for its own sake" (32). Di Prima's shift from frustration at not having a penis to anger at Robin's lack of interest in her female body suggests a more complex acknowledgment and acceptance of myriad sexual desires. She can embody and enjoy the masculinist sexual trait of penetration in an act of passion, but Robin cannot offer the appreciation of her feminine body she also seeks. To conquer her frustration, and perhaps act on her resentment, di Prima "[digs] her nails into his shoulders," and forces him on his back, "riding him as he [turns] his head from side to side in pain and pleasure, seeking to bury his face once more in the pillow" (33). Di Prima's encounter with Robin illustrates her willingness to cross the socialized gender boundaries of sexual desire and pleasure. She plays with both; however, in her final act she asserts a feminine power that satisfies her more than the masculine power she explores. Di Prima's investigation of the act of penetration, an act traditionally associated with masculinity, embodies the gender fluidity Fuller introduced in *Woman of the Nineteenth Century*.

Furthermore, rather than merely embodying masculine features, di Prima is active in her pursuit of masculine behaviors and sensations. In her encounters with both Ivan and Robin—and in many other encounters portrayed in the text—di Prima “refuses passivity and submissiveness, presenting her various scenes as expressions of her will and desire” (Carden 36). While playfully initiating sex with Ivan, she writes, “his eager hands on my head now thrust me down...but I resisted...I was not to be hurried” (di Prima 8). Her refusal to be coerced into mere fellatio illustrates her desire to orchestrate the sexual experience, and hints at a power she wields regularly. Instead she chooses to take her time with Ivan, “trac[ing] the fine bones of his body with [her] mouth, studying the way the flesh, stretched taut, dipped into a hollow, smooth and sensuous as sand dunes” (8). The experience, to her, is a study in the sensations of pleasure for both parties. Furthermore, through her examinations of sexual behaviors of both traditional feminine desires and masculine desires, di Prima is able to identify for herself what her own proclivities are. Di Prima’s fluid sexual practices and her assertion of her own feminine power willfully asserts the “possibility of multiple identifications...suggest[ing] that the [paternal] Law” that says that identity is fixed and reducible to masculine and feminine binaries, “is not deterministic and that ‘the’ law may not even be singular” (Butler 67), signifying the evolution of Fuller’s feminist Transcendentalism.

This evolution can be seen in one of the more disturbing scenes in the novel, in which di Prima describes being raped by Serge, the father of her lover, Tomi. Early in the rape she has a realization that “[her] fear and horror seemed ridiculous.” She writes, “this was Serge, poor silly Serge, who never got to screw his wife, and if he wanted to throw a fuck into me, why I might as well let him” (68). She decides to yield to Serge, rather than

fight him and soon experiences a mix of pleasure and boredom as the “heavy sorrow in [her] turned into some crazed impersonal desire that cried out for appeasement” (68). It would seem in this instance di Prima is suggesting that giving into rape is an opportunity for pleasure—or, that because of her extreme sexuality she is justifying Serge’s aggression—perpetuating the rape myth that promiscuous women do not have the right to consent. However, di Prima’s inclusion of this scene suggests a philosophical assertion about willful internalization of power rather than a submission to assault. On a philosophical level, di Prima subverts male dominance by taking away the masculinized expected response of the woman being raped. She instead defines for herself what will and will not affect her. Furthermore, she presents the person of supposed power as an “absurd” and “ridiculous” bourgeois imbecile, illustrating the idiocy inherent in the masculinist notion of dominance. Later, on the boat ride home from the island where the assault occurred, as a storm rolls in and she realizes Serge has another erection, she writes, “it was as if the weather and I were in complete agreement. I sat there drinking it in, feeling for the first time in my life how much turbulence I could contain in quiet, what endurance was, being cleansed by the purity, the pure fury of the elements” (70). In this instance, di Prima realizes the chaos inherent in the pursuit of self-definition, the possibility of multiple and contradicting emotions that can surface in the process—horror, boredom, pity, pleasure, and desire—all surfacing in one moment. Furthermore, reflected in her symbiotic relationship with the tumultuousness of nature, she realizes her strength to survive and the power she possesses despite the patriarchal notions of female victimization. In broader context, this scene represents di Prima’s power to redefine masculine assumptions. Like Fuller’s rejection of patriarchal Transcendentalism, di

Prima breaks free of masculine signification, constructing her own meaning rather than remaining trapped within the confines of a patriarchal meaning.

In each of her sexual encounters, “she enters into spontaneous social arrangements that spring into being without rules, borders, conditions, or labels” (Carden 32): allowing her the ability to recognize and investigate competing emotions and desires and providing her with more sexual power than simply exploring sex with different partners. She sees sex as a reciprocal process of sharing desires with another. She revels in this, writing, “at any moment I could initiate the dance that would satisfy my own desire and bring delight to the creature beside me” (5). Di Prima carries this reciprocal approach to desire into her relationship with her own body, too. Like both Fuller and MacLane, di Prima nurtures the relationship between mind and body, finding intellectual enrichment through physical stimulation. This connection between nature and the soul is illustrated by her and her girlfriends’ frequent trips into the woods. As mentioned in the introduction, the philosophical thought on the separation of the mind and the body—and consequently the conflation of male to mind and female to body—has a long and familiar history. In addition to recognizing the desires of the body as necessary to the development of the mind, di Prima continuously returns to spaces of nature and natural images. Almost mirroring a passage in *The Devil’s Coming*, di Prima describes an afternoon in the woods with her best friend, Tomi, with whom she is also in love. As she and Tomi sit on a stone in a “clearing full of sunshine,” she could “feel the warmth from the stone soak into [her] body” (39). Tomi begins to undress on top of the boulder, and “making fists of her hands stretched them straight above her head, throwing her face back toward the sun and standing on tiptoe as she stretched out her whole torso in an almost

ritual movement...in narcissistic pleasure under the warm sun” (40-41). This scene invokes the bond between nature and the feminine body—mirroring the wonder, noted in the previous chapter, of “easy indolent, beautiful sensuality in the figure of a young woman lying on the ground under a warm setting sun” that MacLane describes—seemingly perpetuating the female/nature connection that Fuller advocated in her writing (18). However, shortly after Tomi’s invocation she and di Prima make love on the stone. This, coupled with the varied encounters di Prima has with members of both sexes, troubles the heteronormative qualifications of the gendered body and the socialized mind, giving them equal placement on a diverse spectrum of gender experiences. Additionally, the location in which she and Tomi make love plays an important role in both her Beat and Transcendentalist pursuit. The forest represents a place where they can explore—without judgment and away from society—their inner Truths of desire.

In another instance of retreating into the freedoms offered by nature, di Prima describes a trip to a cabin on the coast with a group of young college girls, a band of outcasts in search of a place “in which to form [their] own life form” (64). After a day of nude sunbathing on the beach, in which “the curves of [their] bodies” aligned with the “lines of the dunes, the varied pinks and browns of [their] flesh warm against the dull sand,” di Prima depicts an impromptu orgy in front of the fireplace (59). She writes, “there was a huge cloud of flesh and firelight, of loving sound and soft touch, and I was floating in it. I could feel myself melting” (62). Here di Prima describes a transcendent moment facilitated by a pilgrimage into nature and an acceptance of open sexuality—pursuing the desires of the body in order to transcend. Furthermore, “she portrays herself

as part of a group of young women who provide each other with intellectual, social, and sexual alternatives” best explored through a relationship with nature (Carden 33).

For di Prima, the relationship between herself and nature takes on a mystical quality. This mysticism is portrayed throughout *Memoirs* as a ritualistic symbiosis between her body (and sometimes others’ bodies) and her will. She describes an afternoon in a cemetery, thinking she was two weeks pregnant, when a “huge white dog came out of nowhere and laid his head on [her] lap” as she sat on a tombstone (104). Miscarrying at that very moment, she suggests to the reader that she chose to lose the baby, writing, “this is a method of abortion that I highly recommend” (104). As though she willed her womb to miscarry the fetus, di Prima insinuates a mystical sense of control over her own body—a relationship in which her psychology understands and communicates with her biology. Another example of the mysticism in *Memoirs* is di Prima’s account of a brief but passionate love affair with addict Luke. Of all of the sexual encounters in the novel, di Prima’s encounter with Luke invokes the most passion and mysticism: “summer night with all the noises of August backyards and August streets exploding around us, I made love” to Luke, “made love indeed, called love into being, coaxed it into fullness and feeling with my mouth—I was young enough and had magic enough to do that” (129). Again, di Prima suggests a power to manifest love into existence using her physicality. Additionally, she suggests a pleasure in taking him into herself, thriving off his life force when she writes, “and a great sigh that was the lifebreath itself escaped from Luke, and I drank in his seed, drank in his bitter, crystal seed in great eager gulps” (129).

This energy transfer facilitated by the physical act of sex is similar to the kind of reciprocal relationship Fuller sought in her friendship with Emerson—admittedly, not in sexual form, but in a more comprehensive exploration and sharing of desires. The life force Fuller hoped to share with Emerson, without judgment, is the same life force di Prima thrives off of in her sexual encounters. Through her physicality, di Prima finds a way to nourish her soul, a nourishment Fuller was denied by a branch of patriarchal Transcendentalism that would sever the connection between the Self and the body. As she contemplates her relationship with Luke, di Prima associates it with the popular Reichian psychology of the day: “‘pre-matter energy,’ I thought dreamily...realiz[ing] I had been touched at last, had been truly entered, that there was a dark core of mystery in our coming together that I would never penetrate” (126). Di Prima’s connection between her body and Self manifests in a form of mystical thinking, whereby she is able to take control of her body and define for herself what might cultivate her soul. Assuming, however, that the Self lies within the abyss of mystery eliminates any and all limitations of heteronormative systems. In this manifestation, di Prima has the freedom to explore identity formation through the desires of the body and from all the perspectives offered by those desires. The mystical manifestations of di Prima’s desires connect her with the longstanding tradition of aligning the feminine body with that of nature and earth. As Elizabeth Grosz writes, “philosophy has surreptitiously excluded femininity, and ultimately women, from its practices through its usually implicit coding of femininity with the unreason associated with the body” (4). Di Prima’s involvement in the Beat movement, however misogynistic the movement may have been, undermines this traditional exclusion in that she was equally devoted to the artistic and intellectual

endeavors that the male Beats were pursuing. Additionally, like Fuller, di Prima's pursuits were more Beat/Transcendentalist than her male counterparts, because she rejected the patriarchal notions of gender roles, sexuality, and the female body. Furthermore, it is precisely because of the movement's misogyny that di Prima's association of her sexual encounters and her identity formation is so radical. Coupled with her explorations of androgyny and the troubling of gender expressions, she subverts the chasm between man/mind and woman/body by bridging the mind/body connection while mystifying the confines of the man/woman dichotomy—further demonstrating the gender fluidity Fuller described.

Although di Prima complicates the binaries of heteronormative behavior and subverts the status quo of the Beat movement, she does not deny her female body's ability to create life. In the section entitled "Fuck The Pill: A Digression," di Prima shares her criticism of the different forms of contraception then available. Each kind—condoms, diaphragms, foams and creams—she writes, is a "drag," either reducing the passion of the moment; or, in the case of foams and creams, limiting the time one can spend enjoying sex before having to worry about reapplying. At a time when society asserted that pregnancy was the most frightening consequence of a woman having sex outside of marriage, these forms of contraception were meant to even the playing field, so to speak, and allow women some relief from the fear of pregnancy. The pill, of course, was promoted as the pinnacle of contraception for women. It meant freedom from worry for women who wanted to enjoy sex, perhaps with multiple men, without the fear of a life-long commitment; or having to find an underground abortion clinic/doctor, if a pregnancy were to occur. Indeed, the pill was revolutionary for women's sexual and

biological freedom. However, the burden of the pill and its side effects, just as with pregnancy, falls to the woman. Di Prima writes,

The pill, the pill, the pill! I'm so tired of hearing about the pill, hearing the praises of the pill! Let me tell you about the pill. It makes you fat, the pill does. It makes you hungry. Gives you sore breasts, slight morning sickness, condemns you, who have avoided pregnancy, to live in a perpetual state of early pregnancy: woozy, and nauseous, and likely to burst into tears. And—crowning irony—it makes you, who have finally achieved the full freedom to fuck, much less likely to want to fuck, cuts down on the sex drive. So much for the pill. (104-105)

Di Prima's objection speaks to the onus that still falls on the so-called "liberated" woman who uses the pill. She points to the list of physical ailments that plague her, and suggests that woman is in fact not liberated at all in that she becomes a slave to the pill. Di Prima's alternative: just have babies. She explains,

Having babies has certain advantages, not to be gainsaid. One is that you don't have to do anything about it—when you want to fuck, you just fuck...if you get knocked up, the discomfort of early pregnancy tends to last only two or three months—whereas with the pill it lasts forever...as for childbirth, having a baby is a matter of lying down and having it. After the first one, nothing could be easier if you forget the rules: forget doctors, hospitals, enemas, shaving of pubic hair, forget stoicism and "painless childbirth"—simply holler and push the damned thing out. Takes less

time, trouble, and thought than any of the so-called “modern methods of birth control.” (106)

Di Prima’s advice is revolutionary and subversive for any time period. She highlights the incongruities inherent in what is seen to be the ultimate symbol of women’s liberation—women no longer have to worry about getting pregnant out of wedlock, and can sleep with multiple partners if they choose. However, within the liberation the pill claims to give women lie deeper and more significant restrictions women face in gaining liberation. The first restriction assumes that the only situation in which a pregnancy would be accepted is one in which the woman is married. The second assumes further that the only acceptable pregnancies would be those by the same father—or, if by different fathers, occurring only through multiple marriages. Treating the pill as such suggests that any woman who wants to be a mother at some point must first be married. Rather than the pregnancy itself, di Prima argues the social expectations surrounding pregnancy are the real burdens women face. Furthermore, she “presents motherhood as a decision related simultaneously to bodily impulse and to her awareness of shifting social landscapes” (Carden 41). Like a true feminist Transcendentalist, di Prima suggests that genuine freedom for women means rejecting such restrictions by embracing motherhood as another experience available to women. Furthermore, she calls attention to the regulations involved with the act of childbirth—the socialization women have faced in the medical industry that established hard and fast rules women and their bodies should follow when giving birth. The alternative, as she says, is much simpler than the patriarchy would have women believe: “simply holler and push the damned thing out.”

Di Prima's rejection of the patriarchy's attitudes toward pregnancy speaks to her approach to motherhood in general. In many instances, di Prima conflates motherhood with sexuality. At one point she describes an affair she has with Jack—a fifteen year old to her eighteen years—the significance of which she decides lies only in that “he gave [her] a chance to thoroughly exercise both [her] sexual and maternal skills” (88). This merging of the maternal with the sexual subverts the notion of motherhood as an asexual endeavor, a notion present in the centuries-old Madonna/whore dichotomy. Di Prima assumes the merging of motherhood and sexuality, suggesting that motherhood does not preclude one from sexual desires, and that in fact female sexuality has an inherent maternal quality to it.

Di Prima exercises both her sexual freedom and her maternal urges when she lives for a short period in the country with three men. Her experience calls into question multiple normative roles women are often subjected to, including the “proper” roles of motherhood and domesticity. Each of the relationships fulfills a need within her: “Big Bill took care of my head...Billy was my fleshmate and comrade...my life-force matched him well...and Little John was brother and friend”—and for each of the men she provides the role of mother, lover, sister, and confidant (109-110). For all intents and purposes, di Prima seems to have found fulfillment in a domestic role, as she writes, “I lost myself in my new-found woman's role, the position defined and revealed by my sex: the baking and mending, the mothering and fucking, the girl's parts in the plays—and I was content” (110). However, her decision to take on such heteronormative roles does not undermine her subversiveness. On the contrary, “presenting herself as an unconventionally sexual woman engaged in heterogeneous and free-form relationships, di Prima evades the

constraints that repress bourgeois mothers by forcing them into singular, exclusive roles defined by service and submission” (Carden 39). More so than being content in her “woman’s role,” she is content in her own authority to choose what/who does/does not fulfill her, and what form her version of domesticity takes. In other words, her contentedness lies in her ability to make her own meanings for the roles she chooses.

Indeed, she notes that a main appeal of “being the chick to three men” is the rejection of monogamy. In her time with the men, “what is unfilled by one will be filled by another easily, no one hung up guilty and inadequate, no one pushed to the wall by demands that he/she can’t meet” (109). She continues this lifestyle when she moves back to the city and rents a “pad” for herself and several other friends, all of them sleeping together in a couch-bed in front of the fireplace. Not only does she continue in the role of mother to her friends—“It was a good feeling to settle down for the night with a full wood box and a book, keeping watch while the rest of the ‘family’ slept snug and content”—but she is also the breadwinner, often the only one bringing in an income and supporting the “family” (147). By this model, di Prima inverts the traditional family structure of the man supporting wife and children. Instead, she becomes both father and mother, working to support a group of artist-misfits nurturing, protecting, and feeding them while also pursuing her own writing—“neither dependent upon male authority nor answerable to patriarchal ownership, this improvised motherhood does not force her to sacrifice her artistic desire, her self-constructed identity as a writer, her sense of creative power” (Carden 39). She continues to invert the tradition, as the Afterword of *Memoirs* illustrates, when years later she supports a houseful of multiple families by publishing and selling *Memoirs*.

Di Prima's rejections of traditional notions of motherhood and the family culminate with her decision to have a child. She writes "it was nothing that I decided with my head, just a vague stirring and impulse in my body, some will to flower, to come to fruition—and something in my cells whispering that the scene as I knew it had gone on long enough, that there were many other states of being to explore" (180). Furthermore, the mystical connection she feels with her body, and her refusal to take birth control, aid in her decision—"for the first few years of my running around town I never used anything to avoid pregnancy, and never once got pregnant"—suggesting that now that her body is ready, she is ready. She chooses Ivan—who is by that time married with children of his own—to be the father of her child, and in doing so increases the chance that he will most likely not be present for the child. She admits as much in an interview, stating "I decided I wanted to have a baby, but I didn't want any man around" (di Prima 87). A month after conception, after which Ivan is never mentioned, she writes, "when the full moon shone on the fire-escape again, I didn't get my period as I should have. And as the moon waned, my breasts grew and became sore, and I knew I was pregnant" (187). This deliberate decision to remove Ivan from the narrative after conception rejects the notion that raising a child alone is an undesirable circumstance. Instead, di Prima embraces the feminine notion of motherhood, but rejects the patriarchal notion that a man must be involved after conception, thereby binding women to a system of domesticity and patriarchy. Like Fuller and MacLane, di Prima challenges the notions of marriage, but extends the challenge to notions of motherhood, thereby opening up a space for women to embrace the power of their bodies as well as the power they have to choose.

Fuller lays the groundwork for this space when she conceives her own child out of wedlock. Upon meeting her child's father, she writes in a letter published in her memoir, "I acted upon a strong impulse, and could not analyze at all what passed in my mind" (Emerson 3:230). Although she eventually marries her child's father, she struggles with the choice: "As to marriage, I think the intercourse to heart and mind may be fully enjoyed without entering into this partnership of daily life" (3:230). As for becoming a mother, she again struggles to adhere to traditional—and extremely strict Italian—laws of marriage, domesticity, and gender roles. She confesses, "it seemed very wicked to have brought the little tender thing into the midst of cares and perplexities we had not feared in the least for ourselves" (3: 231). Fuller's expressions of frustration and mistrust with the notions of marriage and motherhood establish the foundation out of which di Prima cultivates her radical subversion of the same institutions, allowing her the opportunity to define for herself how or if she would participate in such roles.

However revolutionary the notions about identity and sexuality presented in *Memoirs*, the explicit nature of the scenes and the author's own admissions about staging them begs the question, is any of this text an accurate portrayal of di Prima's experiences? Just as Fuller decides to introduce the persona of Miranda in *Woman*, and MacLane's diary is by her own admission a portrayal, so too is di Prima's *Memoirs* a performance. The performative nature of the book is revealed in the title *Memoirs of a Beatnik*. Di Prima's use of the derogatory term "beatnik" for those involved in the Beat movement suggests that the reader will be presented with certain cultural expectations and myths rather than an accurate retrospective of events that shaped the values of a Beat woman. Within the first few pages, di Prima elicits the involvement of the reader when

she asks the reader to “list your favorite [kinds of kisses] below” (6). As Carden writes, this request “comprises her playful but resistant address to dominant cultural myths about Beat identity, an address that demands the participation of the reader—as judge, interpreter, voyeur” (28). Furthermore, like the reciprocity she expects in her sexual encounters, “di Prima also imagines that a creative reciprocity exists in her poetics...where there is someone in response, looking back at her, reading, thinking, talking, writing” (Quinn 189). Indeed, she calls for a response from the reader, but more importantly she performs for the reader all the salacious expectations they might have about the Beat movement, and then makes them complicit in those expectations. One of the major examples of this is in the section entitled, “A Night By The Fire: What You Would Like To Hear,” in which she describes in detail an orgy between her and her roommates on the couch bed in front of the fire. However, in the next section, “A Night By The Fire: What Actually Happened,” she describes each person quietly working on their own artistic endeavor, reading, or falling asleep as the phonograph plays a jazz record. The second section points to the “parody [of] social expectations about over-sexed beatniks...formulated by and within a masculinized model of Beat identity” (Carden 35). In addition, di Prima suggests a manner of performativity by including an earlier chapter entitled, “Some Ways to Make a Living,” in which she poses for nude photos, “trying to be coy, or what [she] thought was coy” (78). In another scene in the chapter, she poses as the mistress to a man so that he and his wife can legally get a divorce. These sexual performances provide di Prima the money to fund her radical experiments in lifestyle and family and social structures. With each telling and retelling

of the life of a beatnik “di Prima repeatedly erects models for understanding female and beatnik identity, only to dismantle them at the next turn” (Carden 32).

Cumulatively, the instances of and illusions to performativity speak to the greater significance of *Memoirs*. For di Prima, the salacious and provocative *Memoirs* presents a calculated distraction for the public, while allowing her the independence to work on her real art. As she writes in the Afterword, “Gobs of words would go off to New York whenever the rent was due, come back with ‘MORE SEX’ scrawled across the top page...and I would dream up odd angles of bodies or weird combinations of humans and cram them in and send them off again” (193). She would then spend her remaining time on “play, and beads, and politics, and ‘real’ writing, and all the business and pleasure of those busy days” (193). *Memoirs* was thus a means to a Transcendental end. Furthermore, it not only represents but also helped to facilitate what di Prima desired, “that sense of absolute self-reliance” (Grace 99). Di Prima destabilizes norms that continue to dictate what is and is not accepted from and expected of women. As she says in an interview, she has “no regrets, but the times called and still call for a certain amount of action” (100). Paralleling the form of Transcendentalism Fuller developed, di Prima “presents her experiences as constantly shifting ‘scenes’ on and through which forms of selfhood collide, collude, and re-form themselves” (Carden 32). Where Fuller had to create the persona of Miranda in order to present her argument in the hopes for reform, and MacLane flirtatiously dons different masks as a personal form of self-expression and exploration, di Prima creates a performance in order to accommodate her subversion of traditional heteronormative roles and to facilitate her creation of alternative familial structures in which she is the leader. This constant process of exploration, amalgamation,

and redefinition is the purest form of Transcendentalism in that it follows no pattern, no rules, and is restricted by nothing other than the desire of the self to know its nature.

IV. CHAPTER THREE

As we have seen in *I Await the Devil's Coming* and *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, the path to transcendence for women, as outlined by Fuller, can be ambiguous at best. Both MacLane and di Prima move purposely through various taboo practices, upsetting many, if not all, patriarchal norms meant to suppress any form of women's self-definition, self-expression, and self-actualization outside of prescribed heteronormative behaviors. Fuller accepted that the only authority one should obey is the internal authority intrinsic to every person, regardless of the social effects of its actions, its moral ambiguity, or its potential for criminality. The social implications of such a creed are far-reaching and can be dangerous, especially when one experiences violent and abusive oppression. Luckily, each of these women possessed a privilege that afforded them a generally safe environment in which to follow such expressions of energy. Despite Fuller's lack of fulfillment within her community, and the pervasive misogyny within di Prima's community, both women nevertheless had positions as artists, which provided them a space in which to exercise self-exploration. MacLane's isolation afforded her much the same privilege. Fortunately, none of the women—with the exception of di Prima in her rape by Serge, which may or may not have been fictionalized—experienced such violent oppression. Thus, in order to understand the breadth of social impact possible when one pursues a feminist Transcendentalism, we must consider the potential responses one might have in an attempt to escape the systematic and abusive oppression of a woman's self and person that has occurred throughout history. One example of a woman pushed to violence by the patriarchy is infamous murderer Aileen Wuornos. She has been portrayed in film and through the news media as a cunning serial killer who preyed on her male

victims for the purpose of robbing them, as well as a psychotic, man-hating lesbian whose success as a killer prostitute relied on Wuornos giving her victims the false impression of her heterosexuality. However, a closer look at Wuornos' personal story and letters from death row—compiled and published in the book *Dear Dawn*—reveal a long history of subjugation and abuse, as well as a defiant self-reliance. Furthermore, as noted by the editors in their introduction to *Dear Dawn*, “Wuornos had told Dawn over and over that she wanted the truth—her truth—revealed” (Gottlieb 14). It is this request that prompted the publication of her letters after her execution. This desire also suggests an awareness of not only self-definition, but also knowledge that her words would be read by a wider audience. Wuornos' attempts at rebellious autonomy harken to Fuller's feminist Transcendentalism, but additionally demonstrate the chilling violent consequences possible in such attempts when they are continually met with abusive patriarchal control. Wuornos' life story is an example of a woman who effectively rejected almost every ancient configuration of patriarchal hegemonies. She exhibited her frustrations with repression through a systematic push against both moral and legal frameworks. She lived her life in defiance of those structures, took possession of her body at an early age, and refused to be defined by the conventions that violently tried to keep her in her prescribed place. By having a sexual relationship with her brother, becoming a prostitute, being a lesbian, and killing seven men, she essentially emancipated herself from almost every hegemonic barrier society constructed to control and define her.

Those barriers contributed to and perpetuated the kind of oppression Wuornos experienced, which stems in part from the eventual results of an ancient commodification

of women as barter between clans. With the advent of incest taboos, kinship structures, and human endowment exchange, women have been subjugated not only by being made into men's possessions, but also by having their agency usurped. The institutionalization of these taboos and relational procedures has effectively removed the space for women to define a morality apart from the structures already in place. Fuller suggests as much in her criticism of prostitution, writing, "where legislators admit that ten thousand prostitutes are a fair proportion to one city, and husbands tell their wives that it is folly to expect chastity from men, it is inevitable that there should be many monsters of vice," thereby acknowledging that prostitution is a patriarchal invention (*Woman* 87). She goes on to recognize woman's rights activist Lydia Child for her "straight-forward nobleness" in defending a woman who stabbed her "seducer" (87n). Fuller's praise of Child reveals an understanding of the possible violent resistance that may arise from the continuous objectification of women, and of the underlying patriarchal assumptions that perpetuate such violence. According to Fuller, the elimination of a patriarchal hierarchy would eliminate the demand for prostitution. The evolution of Fuller's feminist Transcendentalism, however, allows women the opportunity for self-possession, enabling them to be self-reliant, even if that meant using one's physical self as a product. Nevertheless, the concept of a woman's body as self-possessed—an entity she can commodify or share without judgment or prosecution—is one that has only recently been considered; and it remains a concept implicitly associated with morality, or the lack thereof.

 Wuornos' endeavors toward self-possession are ultimately what led to her criminality, in part due to the numerous social systems she transgressed in order to

maintain her autonomy. The most fundamental social construct Wuornos transgressed was what Gayle Rubin calls “inappropriate kinships” shaped at the advent of civilization. With the creation of a “sex/gender system— [which is] a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner”—not only were men and women placed into distinct and separate gender roles, they were also prevented from certain relationships through the creation of sexual taboos (165). Challenging these age-old traditions from a very young age, Wuornos lived a sexualized and abusive life. She was raped at age thirteen, which resulted in a pregnancy, and was sent away to give birth and give the child up for adoption. Subsequently, she was kicked out of her house by her grandfather, and became a teenage transient and prostitute, sleeping in the woods at the end of her street (Smith). Many of her sexual partners at the time were neighborhood boys; and many of the sexual encounters gained her a roof over her head, or money for food (Bloomfield). Wuornos’ unfettered sexuality at this time, by many social standards, would be seen as deviant and disturbing behavior. However, her sexual agency helped her to procure a place in the social group within which she had been raised. At the time displaced, Wuornos had no other resources than herself by which to live. She used the one tool she owned, her body, as a product to be sold in order to gain the necessary assets to survive. In this way, she is a physical representation of self-reliance. She literally relied on her physical body to earn a living.

The preclusion of women’s physical self-possession is founded on the regulation of the previously mentioned kinship systems. One kinship taboo that is instrumental to the construction of what is and is not considered appropriate is incest. Incest was

constructed as a taboo in order to secure relationships with other clans; as Rubin explains, “it divides the universe of sexual choice into categories of permitted and prohibited sexual partners,” precluding relationships within one’s own clan and encouraging bonding to another through marital exchange (173). One of Wuornos’ earliest admitted sexual relationships was with her brother, Keith; she writes, “Keith did have sex with me. But it was all mutual” (Wuornos 64). The encounters were also witnessed, and testified to under oath, by some of the neighborhood boys with whom she was also having sex. By having a sexual relationship with her brother and other boys in the neighborhood, she challenges a key social construct. Wuornos’ admission of mutual consent between her and her brother imbues her with the power of self-possession. Her freedom from the restrictions created by declaring incest as taboo affords her an ability to “carry [herself] in the presence of all opposition as if everything were titular and ephemeral”—purely existing for the sole purpose of her self-actualization (Emerson, “Self-Reliance” 142). Emerson’s words, however, define a form of Transcendentalism that Fuller followed more steadfastly than he. Wuornos’ rejection of hegemonic sex/gender systems mirrors Fuller’s feminist Transcendentalism in asserting the authority of the self over social norms.

The fact that Wuornos became a prostitute at such a young age served as another rebellion against the social forces set to hold her, and women in general, prisoner. One of the main functions of the exchange of women is kinship: “the result of a gift of women is more profound than the result of other gift transactions, because the relationship thus established is not one of reciprocity, but one of kinship” (Rubin 173). In other words, the exchange of women outside of their respective clans is not beneficial to the woman. It is,

rather, an exchange purely for strengthening clan relations. Consequently, “if it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it” (175). With this exchange, women not only lose possession of their bodies, but also the choice of placement in their community, and the power to be an active participant in the transaction. Arguing against such systems of exchange, Fuller writes, “Were woman established in the rights of an immortal being this would not be. She would not...be given away by her father, with scarcely more respect for her freedoms than is shown by the Indian chief, who sells his daughter for a horse” (*Woman* 41). As a prostitute, Wuornos is able to control her own exchange since reciprocity is the foundation of prostitution—she becomes a partner rather than a pawn, and “it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage” (Butler 175). Wuornos’ prostitution redefines her connection to the community while also helping her to maintain that connection for her own benefit.

Not only are traditional kinship systems structured to prevent women from being active participants in their own exchange, but the term “exchange of women,” Rubin writes, “is a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin” (177). Traditional kinship brands women as objects possessed by men to be promised, traded, and commodified at their whim. Women in this system are the possessed, not the possessors. The idea of the exchange of women as a fundamental component of kinship makes the subjugation of women essential to the present hegemonies. Wuornos acknowledges such subjugation, writing

“MALE DOMINATE SOCIETY, They will [treat] a woman, girls, teens, don’t matter, like shit...As if females are not human. Just Automations for their pleasures and commands” (74). The subjugation Wuornos addresses is such that “from the standpoint of the system, the preferred female sexuality would be one which responded to the desire of others, rather than one which actively desired and sought a response” (Rubin 183). Considering this component of female sexuality as merely a function of another’s desires, the implication for female sexuality is that women lack agency. Wuornos’ sexuality “desired and sought a response,” especially in the relationship with her brother. Admittedly mutual, the relationship was an act of actualized desire. Not only did it satisfy a physical desire, but it also satisfied a social desire to create a bond outside of the standard kinship connections. By participating in sexual taboos, and taking control of her own exchange, Wuornos challenges the most basic and most pervasive hegemonic restrictions. Her self-awareness of the power of challenging such restrictions is evident when she explains, “I turned to hooken (sic) to beat the [warrants]...I learned also, that I could survive like normal middle class” (90). She rejects what Emerson explains as “that divided and rebel mind” because her “arithmetic has computed the strength and means opposed to [her] purpose” (“Self-Reliance” 140). Accepting the patriarchal heteronormativity prevented Emerson from seeing the “strength and means opposed to” women’s, and ultimately men’s, self-awareness and self-reliance. Perhaps, having never experienced being possessed by another (i. e. woman, by man), Emerson didn’t understand that “the strength and means opposed” to the purpose of a Transcendentalist were especially opposed to the pursuit of self by a Transcendentalist woman.

Along with her self-emancipation from the incest taboo, Wuornos also frees herself from prescribed gender behaviors. As a prostitute, she solicited sex with men, but was—and had been for quite some time—in a long-term relationship with a woman. In Nick Broomfield’s documentary, *Aileen: The Life and Death of a Serial Killer*, Wuornos demonstrates what are often considered masculine qualities, such as aggression, anger, and vulgar language. Kyra Pearson comments on this, writing that throughout the coverage of her trials, “Wuornos [is] inscribed within a discourse of masculinity” (266). However, Wuornos claims to have exhibited feminine qualities when with johns, saying, “I never provoked them. I never showed any provocations whatsoever. I was very nice, very decent, very clean, very lady-like” (Broomfield). It is through these masculine/feminine transgressions that Wuornos lives free of restrictive gender behaviors—“as the site of the ultimately subjugated [woman], she represents an alterity that will not conform to gender expectations” (Karno 8). She exercises her capability to present different personae based on her particular needs at the time. Wuornos’ multiple and often conflicting personae, her contradictory expressions of her self, and her “unassimilable” character, parallel the performative aspects of Fuller’s feminist Transcendentalism (8). It was necessary for her to exhibit lady-like qualities for her johns in order to procure a transaction, since her body facilitated her survival. Furthermore, the masculine traits she performs in the documentary can be seen as a protective mask worn in response to aggressive manipulation by a male documentarian. Wuornos’ myriad self-expressions of dichotomous gender behaviors and their function as facilitator to her empowerment in the form of heterosexual prostitution suggest that “these [the mind and the body] are no longer either independent units each with their own internal cohesion,

nor are they unbounded relations with no specificity or location” (Grosz 209). Her gender performances, coupled with the use of her body as a product, indicate a necessary relationship between the two.

Indeed, her contradictions are a testament to the Transcendentalist principle of self-reliance and rebellion against social norms—she, as Walt Whitman proclaimed, “contains multitudes” (72). Interestingly, however, it is precisely because of her contradictory behaviors that she is read as mentally unstable rather than as a woman challenging the patriarchy through an assertion of her female self. In one of her letters, Wuornos criticizes a woman acting as her advocate for saying in an interview the she “is a child stuck in a woman’s body” (37). Upset by this betrayal by her supposed advocate, Wuornos writes, “Do you know what that means! I’m retarded, deranged, and not ‘fit’ to be reentered into society” (37). Like Fuller, Wuornos’ temperament is seen as unreasonable merely because it doesn’t fit into the patriarchy’s prescribed set of rules for acceptable social behavior. What becomes evident is the cycle of abusive oppression that elicits a violent response from the oppressed: a response that is then used as evidence against the legitimacy of the person who resists, which then justifies reestablishment of the initial oppression that provoked the response. Because of this cycle, Wuornos is seen “as a mad woman, unjustifiably angry and melancholic,” and “without actually being called hysterical...is indirectly made to assume the stereotypical image of the hysterical woman” (Karno 9). What lies at the heart of her vilification is not insanity but her overt and aggressive rejection of heteronormative behaviors and patriarchal power: “In her refusal to be abused as a prostitute, or scapegoated as the site of evil by the clients she claimed tried to harm her, she remains a symbolically decentralized narrative herself,

unassimilable and undefinable in gendered terms” (8). Wuornos’ unpredictability harkens back to Fuller’s acceptance of multiple personae in order to experiment with and ultimately fulfill multiple desires. Wuornos recounts to Dawn that she preferred to use the nickname Lee when on the job, writing, “in my 5 ½ years as a hooker...Everybody I met I introduced myself as Lee. Period. All clients only knew me as Lee” (163). She goes on to explain her need for multiple identities in maintaining two reputations for the purpose of survival; “A.C.W. had a bench warrant—a felony one—that I was runnin (sic) from...Therefore my strategy was to be—called by my Nick[name]” (163). This suggests Wuornos’ awareness of the necessity of donning multiple masks for the purpose of self-reliance. Not only did Wuornos exhibit multiple personae to skirt the system, but she also designated Lee as her professional persona, mirroring Fuller’s separation of a professional persona and a private persona. Together with her varied expressions of gendered behaviors, Wuornos’ professional and private personae help her to define herself in her own terms, and not within the terms society has created.

The prescribed gender distinctions and behaviors that seek but ultimately fail to categorize Wuornos as well as the three aforementioned women are founded on the male and female dichotomy perpetuated through references to biology, and the systems of socialization crafted around it. In order for kinship systems to function properly, they have to “dictate some sculpting of the sexuality of both sexes” (Rubin 183). Undoubtedly, there are more restrictions placed on women, as it is “a systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women and products” (159). Wuornos took possession of herself as a product for self-preservation, and essentially refused domestication in the patriarchal sense. She fought to free herself

from the confines of the exchange process of traditional kinships by exerting the masculine quality of aggression while participating in a typically feminine profession, prostitution. Subsequently, she takes up the fight on the frontlines of moral truth, saying, “those men are out of control, I’m sick and tired of those men out there thinking they can control us and do whatever they damn well please with our bodies and think they can get away with it” (qtd in Hart 68). She undermines the rules of engagement between men and women, prostitute and john, gift and exchange partner. Hart argues that “one of the ‘rules’ that Wuornos does not understand is that prostitutes in a patriarchy are both necessary and utterly dispensable” (69). However, Wuornos’ actions suggest that, to her, the men were also “both necessary and utterly dispensable.” Her transgressive sexuality afforded her the power to usurp the traditions of patriarchal control. She became both the feminine gift, and masculine exchanger—a representation of the infringed sexuality and gender fluidity for which Fuller argued.

Wuornos also refused to express any guilt associated with her confrontational sexuality. Of masculine women, Hart notes that “in order to reinstate themselves within the category of ‘woman,’ they must experience remorse. This is a symbolic mandate that Wuornos has refused” (Hart 69). Furthermore, “Wuornos’ persistent refusal to repent” only helps to confirm her simultaneous sex/gender roles (70). Her transgressive sexuality created, for her, a space in which she could control her position within the social kinship—“as an unrepentant prostitute, Wuornos circulated herself; and as a lesbian, she simultaneously insisted on controlling the terms of that exchange” (81-82). By being both prostitute and lesbian, Wuornos’ sexuality “forced a recognition of [a] paradoxical commerce, in which ‘woman’ is phantasmatically constructed as an object that must

submit to its status as a ‘real’ object of exchange while failing to disclose the object’s function and a cipher that holds open a space for the renewal of male subjectivity” (82).

Her transgressive sexuality and expressions of contradictory gendered behaviors “othered” her, to say the least, against the heteronormative patriarchal paradigm. Her status as Other, coupled with her tumultuous upbringing, created a perfect storm of violent rebellion. Wuornos’ troubled adolescence and history of prostitution was riddled with assaults and rapes. She writes, “around 13 to 14...I was gang raped twice...looking back I can only see that [it] was because I hung out with the guys...That doesn’t mean I was asking for it” (141). Furthermore, her form of prostitution was the riskiest kind in that she found most of her clients hitchhiking at truck stops or on secluded highways. As criminal defense attorney Abbe Smith writes, “Had Wuornos’ story ended there—had she been killed by a john, brutalized like the typical serial killer victim—she would likely have been regarded as just that: a victim” (376). However, her story did not end there, and the abusive patriarchal society that not only brutalized her, but also set her up for failure must define her as a “monster” lest they admit the injustice inherent in the very patriarchal structures that oppressed her—“It seems no accident that the intersection of rape law, and the efficacy of the self-defense plea and prostitution should occur at the site of a lesbian, who can be deemed an aberrational male-hating outsider, a figure who is marginalized from ‘normal’ women’s experiences” (Karno 9). In the same way that Fuller was proclaimed by male critics as man-hating, as noted in the introduction, Wuornos was also criticized by those who viewed her as too destructive for a woman.

Considering Wuornos’ history of abuse, it is no surprise that she resorted to violence to protect her autonomy. Paulo Freire claims, “those who have been denied their

primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression” (69). Wuornos reclaimed her right to speak her word when she killed her first victim, Richard Mallory. Mallory, as Hart explains, “had a history of violent sexual assaults and was incarcerated for ten years in a Maryland institute after posing as a repairman and sexually assaulting a housewife” (62). The murder of Mallory was Wuornos’ reclamation of her right to speak. The subsequent killings were her speaking the same word against patriarchal subordination, as she explained in her letters: “to kill anymore [down] the road as I hook, will only be the same as killing one” (74). She had to take back her freedom from Mallory, and subsequently from the other men, in order to remain free from the social restraints she had fought against all her life—because “freedom is acquired by conquest” not given as a gift (Freire 29). She rejects her traumatic history as being an influence, thereby rejecting not only her personal history, but also “the story of ‘vengeance,’” as vengeance would have been the expected response for one who had been so brutalized (Hart 81). Like a true Transcendentalist, Wuornos doesn’t let the shadows of the past hinder the truth of her soul, nor does she respond to her brutalization in a predictable manner—she reacts to it in the moment, but does not claim herself a victim. Similar to di Prima’s reaction to her rape in *Memoirs*, Wuornos subverts the expected response, choosing instead to refuse victimization in exchange for domination and autonomy.

Interestingly but perhaps predictably, aside from Phyllis Chesler, no feminists came to Wuornos’ defense during her life: according to Smith, “there is seldom an outcry by feminists or victims’ rights activists on behalf of women who are in prison, all of whom are serving longer and longer sentences, and the majority of whom have

experienced lives of victimization” (383). Smith goes on to explain, “only when battered women kill their abusive partners and are charged with murder do the activists make the connection” (384). This inconsistent reaction and lack of support for female criminals suggests that any form of victimization outside of the heteronormative victimization created by spousal abuse does not qualify as legitimate trauma, and therefore cannot be defended by feminists and victims’ rights advocates. Fuller, however, understood that for the majority of women in the prison system, an oppressive society was mostly to blame for their incarceration. She writes, “as to the position in the world of souls, we may suppose that women of the prison stood fairest, both because they had misused less light, and because loneliness and sorrow had brought some of them to feel need of better life” (*Woman* 86-87). She goes on to urge her fellow women to take up the fight for each other, especially those of lesser circumstances, rallying for a revolutionary form of feminism that is only now beginning to emerge.

Working against her own sorrowful circumstances for the majority of her life, Wuornos ignored the most fundamental kinship systems in order to emancipate herself from basic societal restrictions: she became a prostitute, gaining sexual autonomy and subverting the moral standards for female sexuality; she was a lesbian who also had sex with men, transgressing gender norms regarding sexuality; and, she effectively struck back, by killing seven men, at the patriarchal oppression that had established the restrictions she spent her life fighting against—indeed, “to no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it” (Freire 33). Her public personae were, at best, varying and often multiple masks of aggression, thoughtfulness, and paranoia. However, she was a woman who never participated in normal social behaviors. After all, if we

employ Friere's perspectives in investigating Wuornos' transgressions, her "fundamental objective [was] to fight alongside the people for the recovery of the people's stolen humanity, not to 'win the people over' to [her] side;" and I believe she was effective in the fight (76). Her story opened up a new dialogue about violence in prostitution, and still contributes to the discussion of gender roles, female killers, and the subjugation of women. Just like Fuller, Wuornos was on the frontlines of social change as she set about investigating her identity in a repressive society.

Aileen Wuornos forged her frustration into a violent rebellion in pursuit of the freedom she had been denied by the patriarchy all her life. She also used it to shed light on offenses against all women, as Hart explains: "how altogether fittingly ironic that a hitchhiking lesbian prostitute...has not only made this traffic in women apparent, but has also turned the brutality of this exchange back onto the primary players" (72). By surviving circumstances that were, at the very least, restrictive, and at times even horrific, with an unfettered, defiant attitude, Wuornos highlighted the paradox of the American philosophy of freedom, and the very real restrictions imposed on much of the American population. She emancipated herself from the patriarchy, societal restrictions, moral restrictions, and legal restrictions, and found for herself the fundamental elements of Transcendentalist concepts: higher truth, individuality, and freedom.

During the years of her incarceration on death row, Wuornos appealed her sentence of execution, expressed the failures of the justice system, and frequently spoke out against violence towards women. She didn't give up the fight for emancipation from subjugation until it became clear she would not be able to change those structures from inside a prison cell. She finally made peace with her imminent death. Near the end,

realizing that delays to her execution date would allow the legal system and the media to further exploit her story, Wuornos threatened to kill again. Even in prison she was able to gain control over her fate. Undoubtedly, her purpose for expediting her execution was to achieve another type of emancipation, that of death (Bloomfield).

Throughout her life, Wuornos lived by an entirely different set of rules. She pursued what she believed to be a higher truth, despite the fact that she was labeled a monster. Of course, Transcendentalists believe that everyone's essential nature is good: that everyone's higher truth is divine; and that bad behavior is either defined by social systems, or caused by them. Nevertheless, the implications of asserting Transcendentalist values in a murderer are worth pondering. What does it mean that these philosophies could manifest such violence? What methods of defiance are acceptable? How can someone be self-made when a system by its very existence will not allow for a true self? Wuornos rejected this system. Ultimately, the murders were Wuornos' attempt to break free from the last remaining chains binding her to society's repressions. She cultivated an individuality that was hard-matched, and relied almost entirely on herself to survive a life that at the very least would be a challenge for even the toughest vagabond. Indeed, Emerson explains the path to this Transcendentalist philosophy, writing, "to believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius" ("Self-Reliance" 138). Fuller, in what could be interpreted as a response, writes, "Then women of genius, even more than men, are likely to be enslaved by an impassioned sensibility... Those, who seem overladen with electricity, frighten those around them" (*Woman* 61). Wuornos' higher truth demanded freedom, and in pursuing it she fought for an entire repressed population. She says, "one of the main

reasons I so desperately want to be heard and trusted...is to help 100s of other women” (102). Her individual insight was not an anomaly. “Overladen with electricity,” she took up the fight—on behalf of a shared truth—on the frontlines of almost every despotic system, representing perhaps the purest feminist Transcendental philosophy, an unfettered and unrepentant search for and acceptance of the female self. If Wuornos frightens, we would be wise to look to the source of her frustrations, Fuller might suggest.

V. CONCLUSION

Scholar Jane Duran notes that Margaret Fuller's work "certainly could be from a much later point in the century; her insistence on male and female equality, and her understanding that much that was deemed inferior and weak about women was the result of social forces, seems so prescient as to come from a later point in time" (66). Her forward thinking, however, has generally gone unnoticed by scholars until recently. Similarly, the women whose texts I have considered in this thesis have either been overlooked as feminist revolutionaries, or their radical reputations have colored criticisms of their writing, each like Fuller, "symbolizing a threat not only to that male ego but to the family, and thus to the social order" (Blanchard 2). Ultimately, however, MacLane, di Prima and Wuornos each represent a distinct stage in the evolution of Fuller's feminist Transcendentalism. MacLane begins the evolution with the particularly Transcendentalist practice of inward interrogation and outward expression of one's innermost thoughts and desires. Moreover, in a time when women generally wrote about domestic and social duties, MacLane offers a refinement of Fuller's *feminist* Transcendentalism that focuses on a woman writing about her self. Di Prima's contribution to the evolution of Fuller's concepts was to highlight the central role of the physical in self-awareness. She practiced what MacLane only envisioned. As a final refinement, Wuornos, embodies and then delineates the potentially violent resistance a feminist Transcendentalist can muster when a woman is subject to abuses by the patriarchy.

Furthermore, by subverting multiple cultural configurations, each of the women illustrates the intersectional nature of oppression. Because of her work with the abolitionist movement and with female criminals, Fuller's feminist Transcendentalism

incorporates an intersectionality that the male leaders of the Transcendentalist movement failed to realize. She recognized the relationship between the different kinds of oppression and the multilayered social restrictions that existed for those outside of the white, heteronormative patriarchal structure. Indeed, the Transcendentalist leaders understood the importance of equality of race. Missing from their work, however, is an acknowledgment of the pervasive and inescapable social restraints women in particular were bound by. Moreover, their perpetuation of the notion of “two dichotomously opposed characteristics”—mind and body, soul and nature—failed to incorporate the necessity of the physical experience into the process of self-actualization and transcendence (Grosz 3). If a Transcendentalist pursuit for a woman means looking to nature and therefore the body for insight into her soul while rejecting patriarchal gender-normative behaviors and all social restrictions associated with normativity, then the notion of gender performativity may seem incongruous to Fuller’s reconciliation of the mind and the body. However, Fuller’s belief in gender fluidity provides a continuous movement on the spectrum of gender expression—“a radical proliferation of gender, *to displace* the very gender norms that enable” the perpetuation of the false foundations of gendered practices (Butler 148)—in order to find the truth of the self. This continuous movement implies that performativity is imperative to the process of self-actualization. Furthermore, rather than identity being subject to “socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility,” identity itself can also be fluid and indefinable (148). Perhaps, it is within the relationship between the mind (what lies within the soul) and the body (imbued with normative distinctions) that one’s identity can be found:

There can be a relation between two ‘things’—mind and body—which presumes neither their identity nor their radical disjunction... This shows that while there are disparate ‘things’ being related, they have the capacity to twist into one another... It enables subjectivity to be understood as fully material and for materiality to be extended and to include and explain the operations of language, desire, and significance (Grosz 209-210).

Each of the women mentioned in this thesis explored an identity within the liminal space between mind and body. They also explored many if not all possibilities of gender expressions, subverting the most basic social restrictions in an attempt toward self-actualization. Furthermore, each one used the pen in an attempt to define the truth of the self. The process of women’s writing the self is necessary for self-actualization: “By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display.... Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time” (Cixous 880). Mary MacLane personified her body, giving her organs autonomy and imbuing them with their own desires. Diane di Prima refused to censor any part of her body, reclaiming it as a stage on which to perform multiple expressions of desire. Additionally, Aileen Wuornos uses her letters to rewrite her own narrative, a narrative that was previously inscribed by the patriarchy. Furthermore, she reclaims her “confiscated” body not only from her johns, but also from the media and the patriarchal system that turned her into a “monster.” All three of these women are examples of the legacy Fuller began in her expressions of self to Emerson, and in her feminist manifesto *Woman of the Nineteenth Century*. Each of the

women also carries with her the same radical notions and efforts toward reform Fuller encouraged in her writing.

More than anyone in the Transcendental movement, Margaret Fuller forged a path for women towards the kind of self-empowerment Transcendentalism encouraged. She accomplished this despite great criticism from both Emerson and the public by living true to the Transcendentalist ideal. What she accomplished was a form of Transcendentalism that Emerson was not able to consider: an inclusive, and therefore broader, feminist Transcendentalism. When approached from a feminist perspective, Transcendentalism assumes many more possibilities for self-discovery than Fuller's contemporaries imagined. The revolution was not only in the Transcendentalist prescriptions Emerson outlined, but in the Transcendental feminist practice Fuller pioneered. Fuller, and the three authors I have examined here, refused to "fear any risk, any desire, any space still unexplored in themselves, among themselves and others or anywhere else" (Cixous 892).

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