INTRODUCTION

It was twenty years ago when Alice Jardine opened her powerful study of the rhetorical use of the female body within contemporary French theory with an invocation of Roland Barthes: “The ‘feminine’ has become,” she wrote, “a metaphor without brakes” (34). Nor did the metastatic growth of that metaphor appear at that point in history to be showing any signs of slowing down. In fact to the contrary, Gynesis examines the acceleration of “the transformation of woman and the feminine into verbs at the interior of [narrative]”: “To designate that process, I have suggested what I hope will be a believable neologism: gynesis—the putting into discourse of ‘woman’ . . . The object produced by this process is neither a person nor a thing, but a horizon, that toward which the process is tending: a gynema. This gynema is a reading effect, a woman-in-effect that is never stable and has no identity. Its appearance in a written text is perhaps noticed only by the feminist reader” (25). The “woman-in-effect” whom Alice Jardine studies signals “a certain ‘crisis-in-narrative,’” an increasingly angst-ridden self-exploration on the part of the presumed masculine subject who is searching for a “space’ of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control);” the stakes for this reconceptualization of the gynema are “survivals (of different kinds)” (25).

Luce Irigaray considers the nature of that survival, or those survivals, and writes of the preservation of the mythologized female body as the central ground for stabilizing what we have come to naturalize in the Western tradition as masculine subjectivity; in fact, ungrounded in what Jardine calls the gynema, the subject—defined generically as masculine—is unthinkable: “If there is no more ‘earth’ to press down/repress, to work, to represent, but also and always to desire (for one’s own), no opaque matter which in theory does not know herself, then what pedestal remains for the existence of the ‘subject’? If the earth turned and more especially turned upon herself, the erection of the subject might thereby be disconcerted and risk losing its elevation and penetration. For what would there be to rise up from and exercise his power over? And in? The Copernican revolution has yet to have its final effects in the male imaginary” (133). The subject
of Western history—of logical and metaphysical thought, of market, industrial, and imperial capitalism—exists in thought by virtue of the feminized other. Yet the stability of that masculine subject is also chronically at risk; anxiety accompanies the obsessive return to the gynema, and canonical representations of femininity suggest the narcissistic gesture that created them. As Mary Ann Doane puts it succinctly, “The claim to investigate an otherness is a pretense, haunted by the mirror-effect by means of which the question of the woman reflects only the man’s own ontological doubts” (“Film and the Masquerade” 177).

Thus, if Irigaray is correct in her claim that the “Copernican revolution” has yet to unseat Western man, it would also be true that the brakelessness and anxiety that distinguish the mythologizing of femininity suggest an inevitable instability at that presumably masculine center. And while the “new fictions . . . may, in fact, be satisfying a repressed desire in men (and women?) for what may turn out to be a very old, and, in any case, a very readable plot,” they also bring into narrative existence a “gynema” that is not old at all, rather, one that shifts in accordance to the survival needs of the masculine subject in its specific historical locations (Jardine 37). So while the woman in contemporary metaphor continues to be defined through the general attribution of passivity, productivity (without agency), and penetrability—qualities that reflexively delimit the nature of man as other than—this tired narrative is at the same time subject to a certain amount of variation, suggesting a metamorphosis in the masculinity that is its function to define and preserve. Indeed still dominated by “similar memories, similar allegiances, the same father, and the same laws”—what Ellen Friedman aptly summarizes as the same “backward, oedipal glance”—twentieth-century texts nonetheless reveal a significantly changed relationship of the masculine subject to the forces of politics, history, and economic formations (148). It is this tension between the “very old, and, in any case, . . . very readable plot” on the one hand and the metamorphosis that survival demands on the other which I am interested in pursuing. More specifically, I am intrigued by the persistence and the evolution of the rape narrative in twentieth-century literature—the old story of male power and violence, female passivity and penetrability. What accounts for its persistence? And how, precisely, has the story changed over the course of the twentieth century?

What is not open to debate is the sheer number of twentieth-century literary texts the plots, imagery, and themes of which are grounded in heterosexual rape. In the introduction to their edited book on rape and representation, Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver note that among the “profoundly disturbing patterns” their volume examines, one that stands out “is an obsessive inscription—and an obsessive erasure—of sexual vio-
lence against women (and against those placed by society in the position of ‘woman’)" (2). The obsessive return to heterosexual violence suggests, as Higgins and Silver argue, that “rape and rapability are central to the very construction of gender identity” and that this (in this case aestheticized) construction shares with rape law a bias toward masculine points of view (3, 2). The masculine point of view I want to examine here—as it influences the shape of the evolving rape narrative—pertains to the situatedness of the twentieth-century white masculine subject in relation to the shifting face of capitalism. The compulsive return to the rape story, I argue, articulates—among other things—the gradual and relentless removal of Western man from the fantastical capitalist role of venturesome, industrious agency. The metamorphosis of the twentieth-century rape narrative registers a desperate attempt to preserve traditional patterns of robust, entrepreneurial masculinity in the face of economic forms that increasingly disallow illusions of individual authority.

In a psychoanalytic sense, what is at stake in the fantasy of woman is the question of masculine existence in a world haunted by absence. The enduring presence of the gynema, in other words, shines an oblique light on the gendered nature of the symbolic order of language, full accession to which founds the—inevitably, in Lacanian thought—male subject upon a void. Inducted into the symbolic through language, the subject is constituted as a function of discourse and inhabits a world similarly composed: “There is born the world of meaning of a particular language in which the world of things will come to be arranged. . . . It is the world of words that creates the world of things. . . . Man speaks, then, but it is because the symbol has made him man” (Lacan 65). In a parallel that links man with the discursive system that formulates him—with the world of words that supports itself at the level of the signified alone—the subject is “a presence made out of absence” (65). The desire that obscures that absence, that defines and motivates the subject as presence, is like that which sets into motion the movement of the signifier; in both cases desire is a function of the structure of language and not an expression of a preexisting and prelinguistic real. The “object” of desire does not precede desire but rather follows from it: “The paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause” (i ek, *Looking Awry*, 12). Through that paradoxical operation, the absence upon which man is predicated as subject of language is disavowed.

The “man” who desires is not only man in the generic sense. Jacque Lacan’s figure of the lavatory doors—the “Ladies” and “Gentlemen” that represent the “two countries toward which each of their souls will strive on
divergent wings”—insists that the discursive constitution of the subject depends upon the primary differential signs of gender ( \textit{Ecrits} 152). Entrance to the symbolic coincides with, as it depends upon, the composition of a subject framed by polarized sexual difference. The lack (and the desire) intrinsic to the newly constituted subject is figured as symptomatic of those “divergent wings” of gender. Thus, for Lacan, the question of being and the eventuality of subjectivity are inseparable from the establishment of heterosexual identity: “The subject is presented with the question of his existence . . . as an articulated question ‘What am I there?,’ concerning his sex and his contingency in being, namely, that on the one hand, he is a man or a woman, and, on the other, that he might not be, the two conjugating their mystery, and binding it in the symbols of procreation and death” ( \textit{Ecrits} 194). The uncanny aura generated through the interweaving of sex and death finds its source in the coincidence of the subject’s entrance into language and sexual difference.

In the psychoanalytic tradition, the loss upon which subjectivity is founded has been figured in the traumatic discovery of the mother’s lack of phallus. Heterosexual desire thus masks even as it is compelled by the horror of castration. At another level, Lacanian thought maintains that it is the phallus itself—as opposed to female genitalia—that finally signifies the lack inaugurated through entrance into the symbolic order. Castration, in this sense, as Kaja Silverman puts it, is an “unavoidable” operation, one “which every subject must experience upon entering the order of language or signification” ( \textit{Male Subjectivity} 35). “Castration” anxiety thus layers gender identity upon subject formation, both of which contingencies are established in and through a preexistent discursive order. At several levels, then, the woman as fetish promises to “[plug] the hole of symbolic castration or lack” (Silverman, \textit{Male Subjectivity}, 22). She is, on the one hand, an ever-present reminder of the punishment that will follow from not, in a sense, punishing her—for not taking one’s place in the patriarchal order that has decreed her injury. A flare in the darkness, she gestures toward a subject position of power and agency. At another level, the woman fetish covers over the basic lack upon which access to language and being, as such, depends. The retroactively constituted loss of the real, “the self’s radical ex-centricity to itself”—all are disavowed in the fantasy of woman, which “translates the desire for nothing into the desire for something” (Lacan, \textit{Ecrits}, 171; Silverman, \textit{Male Subjectivity}, 4). Thus constituted as fantasy space, the gynema “functions as an empty surface, as a kind of screen for the projection of desires: the fascinating presence of its positive contents does nothing but fill out a certain emptiness” ( \textit{Looking Awry}, 8).

The extent to which that “certain emptiness” is filled through this “psy-
chotic projection of meaning into the real itself” (Looking Awry 35), however, is dubious; the obsessiveness with which the story of gender violence is retold suggests an ongoing instability in the project of fetishistic disavowal—a certain desperate incapacity lodged within the gesture that would establish heterosexual masculinity through the denial and outward projection of male castration. Following Freud, Silverman makes the case that sadism is the one perversion “most compatible with conventional heterosexuality” in a culture for which, “in utter disregard for western metaphysics, the ‘true’ or ‘right’ is heterosexual penetration” (Male Subjectivity 187; “Masochism,” 21). Furthermore, according to Silverman, the conflation of heterosexual penetration with the “true” and the “right” has been naturalized within Freudian psychoanalysis; she argues of Freud that he establishes sexual violence—male aggression in particular—as normal and perhaps even biologically necessary (Male Subjectivity 187, 271). As sadism and dominance are thus legitimized as extensions of basic male sexuality, so too does Freudian thought pronounce female masochism “an accepted—indeed a requisite—element of ‘normal’ female subjectivity,” a gesture that further naturalizes heterosexual violence and subordination while it eroticizes the mechanism whereby masculine lack is disavowed (Silverman, Male Subjectivity, 189). Heterosexual rape would thus seemingly reify the status of man as absolute subject, foregrounding the agency of the man on one hand and the passive objectification of the woman on the other. Following Freud’s logic, rape would serve, in fact, as a normative emblem for heterosexuality (itself, of course, the normative sexuality).

It is my contention, however, that the mastery explicitly portrayed in the spectacle of rape—and I am speaking in fact of the spectacle of rape, the seductively aestheticized vision staged for Western consumption—is almost inevitably undermined from within. The sadism to which it gives free rein seems in the end false to the rapturous promise of absolute subjectivity, that position which would hypothetically enable the reduction of the body of the other to object, an instrument for the satisfaction and pleasure of the self. The representations of rape I examine here, in fact, lend credence to Lacan’s redefinition of sadism, in which “it is the ‘sadist’ himself who is in the position of the object-instrument, the executor of some radically heterogeneous will” (i.e., Looking Awry, 108–9). Agency resides outside the duo of violator and victim, and the rapist is himself subject to an external gaze and a preexistent script: “The pervert does not pursue his activity for his own pleasure, but for the enjoyment of the Other—he finds enjoyment precisely in this instrumentalization, in working for the enjoyment of the Other” (109). As far as the representation of rape goes, I would argue that the aestheticization finally reveals the masculine subject to be serving rather than fulfilling the dominant and dominating
paternal function, which relationship does not cease to foreground the incommensurability of penis and phallus. Paradoxically, then, the violent intimacy of rape metamorphoses into an all-too-intimate relation with the lack that constitutes subjectivity—the lack that has been displaced onto woman and her anatomical wound. If the text opens a symbolically fertile “elision” (Silver, “Periphrasis,” 116) or “psychic elsewhere” (Silverman, Male Subjectivity, 271) through the oblique fashion in which it narrates rape, that interpretive space threatens the deconstitution of masculinity, even as it also repeats the story of feminine passivity and rapability.

The “radically heterogenous will” to which Lacan grants agency in sadistic fantasy gestures toward the disembodied paternal function, which is destined to remain out of reach of the individual masculine subject. It is that disembodied paternal will that establishes the tableau of violent heterosexuality, into which fantasy space males and females alike are inserted in the process of identity formation. For Lacan that paternal will has its source in the Symbolic in individual moments of inauguration into a gendered discursive order. The problem here, as is oft noted of Lacanian thought, is the seemingly random and absolutely exclusive connection between sex, gender, and the symbolic order—“there is nothing inevitable, and everything quite arbitrary, about Lacan’s conflation of linguistic difference with sexual difference”—and the originary power granted to that connection (C. Thomas 71). One factor clearly excluded from the Lacanian paradigm is the space of the social and its role in the formation of subjectivity. It is through fantasy, after all, that we inhabit a culture, a time, and a mode of production. It is arguably because of a particular social and productive order that specific ideological fantasies are formulated: as Louis Althusser famously points out, in ideology “the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that expresses a will (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary)” (234). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari go further, crediting the historical “will” with the production of the “lack” so crucial to the operation of the symbolic: “Lack (manque) is created, planned, and organized in and through social production” (28). Lack does not exclusively derive, in this reading, from the symbolic (or, following Freud, from anatomical difference and the Oedipal family). The subject’s relation to lack, as to the fantasy that disavows it, is primarily social and ideological in nature and obeys the “will” of the sociosymbolic order: “Thus fantasy is never individual: it is group fantasy [. . . , and g]roup fantasy is plugged into and machined on the socius. . . . There is only desire and the social, and nothing else” (30, 62, 29).

Social fantasy, in turn, is for Deleuze and Guattari generated specifically by the “capitalist machine [. . . , ] in all its violence” (33). The subject’s relation to that machine is lived through the ideologies of gender and sex-
uality (as well as race, ethnicity, and class), and the lived experience of both is scripted and rendered coherent through social fantasy in ways that naturalize and eroticize the conditions necessary for capitalism in its specific historical forms. Mechanisms like fetishism and sadism, for example, not only establish and position a gendered subject within the discursive order but mediate the role of individual subjects within the dominant mode of production. By the same token, as is my case here, the specific forms of violence historically associated with capitalism are echoed—and legitimized—within and through the long and kaleidoscopic history of the heterosexual rape story. Promising absolute subjectivity (and passivity), instrumentalizing the bodies involved, and finally undermining the masculine power and presence initially assured, the aestheticized rape tableau focuses one’s attention on sex and power, obscuring the extent to which it also prepares and maintains the ground for a predatory and increasingly abstract mode of production. In what follows, then, I will be conceptualizing masculine subjectivity and rape fantasy in ways that take into account the determinative roles of subject formation, the symbolic order, and mode of production. I will rely on R. W. Connell’s argument that “the entrepreneurial culture and workplaces of commercial capitalism institutionalized a form of masculinity, creating and legitimating new forms of gendered work and power” (247). There is much to be gained in linking the violent forms of subjectivity to the erotic and aestheticized images of capitalism; if nothing else, such an examination foregrounds the contingent nature of both. It is an intrinsically valuable exercise, similarly, to study the ease with which seemingly individual fantasies of lack, desire, and sexual dominance can be treated, as Jana Evans Braziel puts it, as “fragments functioning in social machines” (872).

In general terms, critical and theoretical analyses of the interconnections between gender and production in Western thought have concentrated on femininity and the extent to which the feminine has been represented as a function of reproductive capacity as it is managed under patriarchy—defined as passive materiality receptive to the father’s will and pattern. So for Jean-Joseph Goux: “While the male is associated with the transmission of a pattern, a model, the female braves the contradiction of a material reproduction and is merged with what is other in relation to constant ideal form: that is, with amorphous, transitory, inessential material . . . chaos, disorder, and the abnormal but also the sensory, the concrete, the nondeductible are identified with the woman (whatever the mythical or ideological version), and . . . permanence, order, organization, and law are on the male side” (222–23). This model has adapted easily to the ideological formations of early, industrial, and imperial capitalism, and both Irigaray and Goux have studied the close fit. Goux draws a parallel
between the child produced on the material, effaced body of the mother and the surplus value produced on the material, effaced body of the worker: “The value produced (children, goods) is a lost positivity, a ‘surplus’ that becomes estranged from the producer. The relation between mother and offspring, under the father’s control, is like that between worker and product under capitalist domination. There is an inversion of fertilities. As Marx writes, ‘This is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something alien and not belonging to him, activity as suffering (passivity), strength as powerlessness, creation as emasculation’” (233). The emasculation implicit in the alienation of labor under patriarchal capitalism is inverted in this ideological formation of gender to return value to the father. Masculinity is thus identified with ownership of the means of production and is closely connected to capital itself. Irigaray similarly remarks upon the parallel between mother and the alienated worker under capitalism—neither will be able to find a connection with the finished product. She also notes the proximity of the father to capital itself as a result of this alienation: “Woman is nothing but the receptacle that passively receives his product.” She is the “Matrix—womb, earth, factory, bank—to which the seed capital is entrusted so that it may germinate, produce, grow fruitful, without woman being able to lay claim to either capital or interest since she has only submitted ‘passively’ to reproduction. Herself held in receivership as a certified means of (re)production” (18). The gynema, then, is that space that allows masculinity to think of itself as not alienated, not effaced by the crushing wheels of capitalism. She is the bank that, although open to the one, will not be penetrable by any other; she will thus protect and increase the essence of his worth. And she will give physical form to that mysterious entity, capital, which the directive for circulation and the tendency toward accumulation within the hands of a very few keep otherwise hidden—like wind, visible only in its effects.

The disquiet that accompanies the reproductive, banking model for femininity is, unsurprisingly, associated with the fear that the value hidden within the material body of woman might not truly be marked with the name of the father, or might well be vulnerable to theft. Under early forms of capitalism, in cultures still managed by patrilineal descent, the father’s “function with regard to the origin of reproduction—is hence asserted as less than evident, as open to doubt. An indecision to be attenuated both by man’s ‘active’ role in intercourse and by the fact that he will mark the product of copulation with his own name” (Irigaray 23). Consider, for example, the violent anxiety that marks the question of chastity within Jacobean drama. Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s The Changeling in typical fashion establishes the moral horror of the unchaste woman as the central fulcrum of the dramatic plot, in this
case a plot that involves a fatherless son achieving a father-in-law along with a place at the top of the social hierarchy. The source of the horror Beatrice-Joanna evokes is distilled in her illegitimate tampering with the secret tests hidden away in her husband’s library: “‘How to know whether a woman be with child or no’ . . . ‘How to know whether a woman be a maid or not’” (4.1.26). These tests for virginity, chastity, and pregnancy are designed so that external signs (sleeping, “incontinently gaping,” “sudden sneezing,” and “violent laughing” [4.1.49–50]) will appear as accurate and transparent signifiers of internal status. But because Beatrice-Joanna can penetrate the secret chamber and disrupt this secret language of the patriarchy, she threatens the very social fabric of the play (as she also does through her adulterous affair). Her “moral degeneration” is remarked not only by her dramatic fellows but by over 400 years of critical response (Crupi quoting T. S. Eliot 142).1

By the same token, in a culture that depends upon the female vessel for the transmission of wealth from father to son, or father to son-in-law—or in a culture that symbolically defines the female body as source for the generation and propagation of capital—the aestheticization of rape can come to articulate, whether in celebration or fear, the ability of the man of powerful agency to erupt into the sealed transaction between father and son/son-in-law, to insert himself by virtue of violence into an otherwise frozen class system. In other words, the rapability that is so much a part of feminine representation articulates not only closure but openness and potential mobility. If the woman under patrilineal descent is indeed symbolically a “hinge . . . [s]et between—at least—two, or two half, men [ , . . . ] bending according to their exchanges,” she is also the access point for a third man—the entrepreneur, the up-and-coming member of the rising middle class, reinvigorating the system with new energy and the imperative to keep wealth circulating (Irigaray 22). Thus, a work like George Pettie’s *A Petite Palace of Pettie His Pleasure* returns constantly (and ambivalently) to the potential openness of the female body: the presumed audience of “gentle Gentlewoman” is beseeched by turns to consider adultery and to remain chaste, to be the active suitors in affairs of the heart and to be the passive recipients.2 It is upon the fantasy of this unstable and unnerving access point—this signifier of upward mobility—that the ideology of capitalism stands or falls. At the same time, the fantastical rapist hero of early capitalism also manages to embody Marx’s principle of “value in motion,” “the circulation of capital restlessly and perpetually seeking new ways to garner profits” (Harvey 107).

The questions I take up here have to do with what happens to the gynema under a system of advanced capitalism. What changes does the rape narrative undergo when only the barest ideological remnants of patrilineal
descent remain intact? What becomes of the rapist hero in the literary imagination when capitalism moves into its twentieth- and twenty-first century incarnations? Certainly the rape victim continues to be defined by her penetrability; there is a small enough swerve from the “rapability” that Catharine MacKinnon has argued has come to delimit the boundaries of “woman”: “To be rapable, a position which is social, not biological, defines what a woman is” (651). The material conditions of female existence remain obscured by the aestheticization of rape, a mechanism Laura Tanner has compared to “Marx’s unveiling of the way in which the laborer’s suffering body is rendered invisible by the machinery of capitalism” (8). Metaphor continues to render the female victim passive, still identified with materiality and chaos. The woman continues to be, as Tanner points out, “the object rather than the subject of violence, a human being stripped of agency and mercilessly attached to a physical form that cannot be dissolved at will” (3). On the other hand, as the European/American gentry system splits and gives way to new hegemonic forms, in turn displaced by advanced or late capitalism, the woman’s body no longer has the absolute prerequisite for chastity, nor is the purity of her reproductions centrally at issue. In fact rarely is the raped woman productive—of a child or a pregnancy, of a material product—in twentieth-century literary fantasy. In fact, to the contrary, except within the rhetoric closely allied to the ideology of fascism, the female body is obliterated through rape, shown, in shades of horror, to be empty and perhaps even absent.

Thus, in significant ways figurations of rape increasingly reveal the distance between twentieth-century masculinity and productive power, and between masculine agency and the ownership of capital. Further, the proliferation of raped female bodies seems more and more to articulate the effaced status of man himself under a self-organizing form of capitalism that appears to function without recourse to human agency—certainly without dependence on entrepreneurial initiative. Representations of rape thus mark, among other things, what Connell terms the emergence of “an array of subordinated and marginalized masculinities” (249). The reasons for these changes are admittedly complex, and the evolution is not linear, but it makes sense to accept the three general causal factors that Connell identifies: “challenges to the gender order by women, the logic of the gendered accumulation process in industrial capitalism, and the power relations of empire” (249). These material changes central to the fabric of capitalism have served to weave a tangled pattern of gender violence in literature. Even in a feminist era, writers return to the rape story with a tenacity seemingly born of sadomasochistic compulsion: those aestheticized images preserve the dream of violent agency while repeating the contemporary message of masculine failure and loss. If, then, what Sharon Marcus
terms the “grammar” of rape does indeed “[induce] men who follow the
rules set out for them to recognize their gendered selves in images and nar-
ratives of aggression in which they are agents of violence,” that semiotics of
self-recognition also acts in the twentieth century to contradict itself, relent-
lessly pronouncing the “absolute impotence of the wage earner as well as the
. . . dependence of the industrial capitalist” in that “fathomless abyss where
profit and surplus value are engendered”—the “semiautonomous organiza-
tion” of capital (Marcus 393; Deleuze and Guattari 238–39, 142).

If the history of European/American masculinity has been neither
coherent nor linear—even as it does follow a general trajectory in literature
that I hope to trace—neither can the masculine subject of any particular
historical era be understood to be singular. As Connell puts it, “dominant,
subordinated and marginalized masculinities are in constant interac-
tion, changing the conditions for each others’ existence and transforming them-
selves as they do” (254). Thus, as white masculinity cannot be thought of
as homogenous, neither can it be thought of, demographics aside, as nec-
essarily or wholly dominant; although it is true that “elite” white men do
in fact “control more resources and exercise more power” than others and
more than elite white men of thirty years ago, the profound economic and
social changes that have accompanied the evolution of global, corporate
capitalism—Newton lists “corporate downsizing, the reduction of well-
paid unionized jobs, the fall in men’s wages, the growing necessity of dual-
income families, cuts in worker safety nets, the further racialization of
poverty, and the growing division between the rich and the middle-class
and poor”—have radically revised the meaning of white, heterosexual
manhood (176). Michael Kimmel and Michael Kaufman make the easily
persuasive case that “[m]any middle-class, white, middle-aged heterosexual
men—among the most privileged groups in the history of the world—
do not experience themselves as powerful. Ironically, although these men
are everywhere in power, that aggregate power of that group does not
translate into an individual sense of feeling empowered. In fact, this group
feels quite powerless” (262). The white, European/American masculinity
under consideration here has always, not just over the past forty years, been
relational and contingent, and has always been haunted by powerlessness.
In spite of, and quite possibly because of, this contingency and instability,
however, white masculinity has managed generally to maintain a highly
aestheticized and politicized image—if not always a felt sense—of unity. It
has retained its position as natural, normative, and ideally human.

Many would maintain that the fantastical homogeneity of white mas-
culinity has been established in large part through its portrayed relation-
ship to racial and ethnic otherness, a point of view that many of the texts
examined here will explicitly support (e.g., Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* and
Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*). Just as it would be shortsighted to understand the connection between masculinity and violence to be purely personal or discursive, it would also leave too much uncovered to treat the culture of capitalism apart from its global and imperial rootedness, for, as Connell has noted, “European/American masculinities were deeply implicated in the world-wide violence through which European/American culture became dominant” (245). More famously, Homi Bhabha has called into question the originary status of the white European/American man—the hypothetical subject of capitalism—by arguing that his existence as such has been and continues to be dependent on the silent presence of the nonwhite other, who haunts the field just beyond peripheral vision: “the image of post-Enlightenment man [is] tethered to, not confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being” (44). The agency the violently phallic narrative promises is thus undermined not only by the woman, who confronts the masculine subject with the lack he has disavowed through and by entry into the socio-symbolic; it is also troubled by the dark other whose role it is to play the looking-glass role of masculine nonsubject, masculine being without agency, violent body without prerogative. In Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, for example, the breakdown of Slothrop’s penile quest is marked by hallucinations of being raped by black men, of having to escape by crawling down through toilet and sewers, reentering primal abjection; similarly, Blicero’s sexual sadism and the firing of the rocket are shadowed by the mythical African Herero and their campaign of self-extermination. The evolving genre of rape narrative I treat here, then, is precisely a white masculinist one. Its function is to define, maintain, and legitimize the systems of relation and differentiation upon which global capitalism depends.3

It seeks to do so, moreover, in a language that would deny the political stakes involved or even their placement in history. Unlike the type of rape story told within texts like, for example, *The Women of Brewster Place* or *Native Son*, the category of narrative I study rarely attempts an explicitly political commentary on rape and/or race. Few of the texts I study focus the audience’s attention on the psychological or physical reality of the victim or the impact of rape on her life. And few consider—at least centrally—the negative social and economic conditions that might tragically and/or horrifically incline individuals toward violence, sexual or otherwise. Rather, the literature here, a mere sampling of a vast humanist tradition, focuses almost exclusively on the spectacle of rape as a poignant occasion for sympathetic rumination on the status of (white) man in the face of (capitalist) existence. It is a genre given to contemplation, pathos, and
an aura of secular transcendence. It seemingly concerns itself with everything that would be opposed to politics, history, or economics.

In order to highlight the specific artificiality and political nature of the genre, consider in more detail the counterexamples above. Some contemporary writing by women, in particular by women of color, has overturned the mainstream form of the rape narrative by locating point of view within the mind of the rape victim. This is a resistant genre studied most notably by Laura Tanner, who argues, specifically here of The Women of Brewster Place, that this new form of the narrative “attaches the reader to the victim’s tortured body, subverting the scopophilic gaze of the reader by turning it inward to focus on the victim’s pain. By denying the reader the freedom to observe the victim of violence from behind the wall of aesthetic convention, Naylor disrupts the connection between violator and viewer. . . . The power of the reader’s imagination is not unleashed in a tumult of speculative violences but is channeled within the confines of the victim’s body” (x). This focus on the material body and experience of the rape victim undercuts the vision of woman as passive receptacle, troubles the image of pure agency distilled by the figure of rapist, and discourages speculation on the transcendent meaning of it all (Y. B. Yeats’s speaker wonders of Leda, “Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?”). Instead, one is confronted by a particularized image of the ways that constructions of race and gender intersect in the material bodies of women. In the final chapter, I discuss other forms of narrative resistance developed by women writers.

Twentieth-century literature written by African American men also returns repeatedly to the theme and image of rape, and in ways also qualitatively different from the tradition I am tracing. Texts by James Baldwin, Chester Himes, Eldridge Cleaver, George Wylie Henderson, Ishmael Reed, and, of course, James Wright foreground instances or metaphors of rape in order to explore issues of racial politics and black masculinity. A note of caution: In these texts, as in the ones I examine, the woman, white or black, is generally objectified and defined by her passivity. The difference is that in this group of works, there is a tendency for connections between public and private, sex and violence, and gender and race to be made relentlessly explicit, and there is no missing the political underpinnings of the rape story. In other words, the spectacle of rape—and it is spectacularized—is located firmly within its socioeconomic and historical context. Its explicit metaphoricity—or, as Eileen Julien puts it, of rape in some African texts, its metonymic content—tends to apply not so much opaqueely to a transcendent state of man but transparently to a specifically historical subject, and that subject is always in part a function of race as it has been constructed under Western patriarchal capitalism.
A discussion of rape in African American texts, no matter how brief, must necessarily engage the ongoing and ever deepening critical discourse surrounding the vexed issue of black masculinity and the ways it has been and continues to be associated with sexual violence and/or castration. There is to contend with the historical fact of slavery, a condition of being that would run counter to any Western definition of manhood. Frederick Douglass claimed that “A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity,” thus articulating the extent to which slavery prevented black men from experiencing a sense of manhood (as well as the extent to which ideal manhood involves force) (in Gilroy 63). At the same time, the myth of the black rapist that accompanied and followed slavery posited an animalistic hypermasculinity, to be “corrected” through castration and lynching. “Rape” is in this case necessarily associated with castration—at the level of fantasy and at the level of material experience. On a white man, thus (problematically) suggestive of the phallus, male genitalia have become for the black man “the depriving mark of a forced animality rather than a sign of masculine control and self-control,” as well as a part of the body and marker of masculinity rendered vulnerable to violent, and in fact sexual, destruction (M. Ross 319). Gender, then, in this case, cannot possibly be understood outside of the context of race and class, a fact manifestly clear to a writer like Richard Wright, for whom black male identity entailed the anomalous situation of being on the one hand fully cognizant of the idealized portrait of masculinity painted by an oppressive white patriarchal culture and on the other confronted by the subordinate social and economic position that guaranteed black men continued animalization and emasculation. Gilroy argues that the contradiction resulted in a “doubledness, what Richard Wright calls the dreadful objectivity which follows from being both inside and outside the West” (30). In Native Son, Bigger Thomas is caught in that double bind, quite aware of the idealized and specifically white image of masculinity, and yet constantly at risk of figurative or even literal castration. The result is escalating violence toward women, first the murder of Mary Dalton—the scene itself heavy with the suggestion of sexual violence—then the rape and murder of Bessie Mears.

There can be no doubt that Wright self-consciously figures gender violence within the novel—material, imagined, or figurative—as a function of an oppressive and violent race-class system. The point is made so explicitly as to border on didacticism, as in the following, in which scene Bigger realizes that he will be accused of raping Mary Dalton before killing her, even though he has not, because that is the only script available to a black man: “He committed rape every time he looked into a white face. He was a long, taut piece of rubber which a thousand white hands had stretched to the snapping point, and when he snapped it was rape. But it was rape
when he cried out in hate deep in his heart as he felt the strain of living
day by day. That, too, was rape” (214). Not only is the novel heavily seed-
ed with this type of self-conscious reference to the political nature of rape
and of “rape,” but Wright includes a foreword that further clarifies the
connection:

Any Negro who has lived in the North or the South knows that
times without number he has heard of some Negro boy being
picked up on the streets and carted off to jail and charged with
“rape.” This thing happens so often that to my mind it had become
a representative symbol of the Negro’s uncertain position in
America. Never for a second was I in doubt as to what kind of social
reality or dramatic situation I’d put Bigger in, what kind of test-tube
life I’d set up to evoke his deepest reactions. Life had made the plot
over and over again, to the extent that I knew it by heart. (xxviii)

The novel is thus an explicit challenge, a self-conscious refusal to partici-
pate in white patriarchy’s rape story. Rape here is no occasion for a meet-
ing with the transcendent. Rather, through this refashioned rape narrative,
“Wright dramatizes the parasitic nature of the class system” and draws
attention to “the wealthy Daltons’ participation in the systematic exploita-
tion and destruction of Bigger Thomas and his family” (Guttman, “What
Bigger Killed For,” 170). The rebellious struggle the novel stages is a polit-
cal one between white masculine oppressor and oppressed black male. The
female body serves as the token over which the battle is waged, and “both
Mary and Bessie—[the] two female bodies—are violently blotted out in
[that] struggle between white and black men” (177). One embodies white
capital, the other the obliteration of the black woman and the irrelev-
ance of her suffering in the face of that valuable whiteness, and so it is not sur-
prising both are “blotted out” by the overarching race-class structure and
its attendant ideology—just as Bigger himself is “blotted out” in “fulfilling
the role that the [rape] myth demands of him” (170, 179).

What *Native Son* and texts like it share with the white narrative tradi-
tion I treat here, of course, is that it is onto the wounded bodies of women
that the problematics of masculine identity are projected. Another shared
feature is that it is the raped *white* woman who comes to stand in for the
abstract forces against which manhood conceptually formulates itself. The
rape of the woman of color is hardly more than the occasion for the expres-
sion of excess masculine emotion. Bessie herself, for example, “is literally
frozen out of the story,” as Guttman aptly puts it; “With Mary, Bigger’s
actions are predetermined by the knowledge that what he does is one part
of a very public play of forces. He feels ‘strange, possessed, or as if he were
acting upon a stage in front of a crowd of people.' With Bessie, however, Bigger feels no one is watching. He is free to commit rape because he knows, subconsciously at least, that those in power don’t care what he does to her” (“What Bigger Killed For” 184). In fact, in a radical denial of historical veracity, given the fact, for example, that the “sexual access of white men to black women was a cornerstone of patriarchal power in the South,” the rape of women of color is not often represented or even referred to in literature written by men, particularly white men (J. Hall 332). When it is, it is not invested with the symbolic heft garnered by representations of raped white women. Thus we witness a strange continuance of the logic that supported castration culture as Guttman describes it: “While the white woman was cast as the desirable and inaccessible symbol of white power and culture, the black woman occupied the place of her opposite, the easily accessible symbol of the uncivilized, animalistic, black masses” (171). It has been noted that white feminism, particularly during the 1970s when the emphasis was often on constructing a unifying image of “woman,” has similarly sometimes overlooked the specific and historically driven nature of sexual violence against women of color. As with the unmarked universal man, the universal woman tends to be white, European/American, and middle- or upper-class. As Sujata Moorti puts it in Color of Rape, “the majority of feminist rape theories were formulated around the universal subject of Enlightenment, this time though she was female” (66).

The genre of rape story studied here presumes a white masculine subject and a white feminine object. This fantastical structure has only a tenuous relationship to local knowledge and has little to do with what a rape victim—any rape victim—might actually have experienced. Nor, I hope, does the predominance of rape fantasy suggest that all men—or all white men, or all people steeped in the idealizations of Western storytelling—imagine rape to be just the far end of the normative heterosexual continuum, although obviously one is given pause, particularly given the national numbers for stranger and acquaintance rape alike. Rather, I want to make the case that the aestheticized rape narrative is a significant part of Western fantasy, and that a study of that fantastical narrative reveals particular things about the way white masculinity represents itself. Like Laura E. Tanner (Intimate Violence) and Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (Rape and Representation), I am interested in what the story excludes, what it must elide in order to function, as I am interested in how certain retellings and revisions of the story seek to correct or at least draw attention to those exclusions. But more centrally, I am interested in what the story enables, what it generates. As does Sabine Sielke, I want to focus on “refigurations of rape as well as on rape as refiguration [, thus acknowledg-
ing] that texts do not simply reflect but rather stage and dramatize the historical contradictions by which they are overdetermined” (5). Like Sharon Marcus, I want to understand not only the language of rape, but “rape as a language,” one that mediates the relationship of the subject to history. The “rape script,” as Marcus puts it, takes its form from a “gendered grammar of violence,” and that grammar positions (“predicates”) white men as legitimate subjects; black men as subjects of illegitimate violence; (white) women as subjects by virtue of being (valuable and legitimate) objects of violence (392). Most specifically, for my purposes, the rape script fantasizes a believably powerful subject position in the face of historical, material evidence that would trouble it; it daydreams a potent relationship of white, mainstream men (or men identified with the white mainstream) to late capitalism. It does this by casting a “tremulous female body” opposite, in the position of “immobilized cavity” (Marcus 400).

It might seem incongruous that the choice here has been to focus upon constructions of masculinity rather than femininity in a study of rape narrative. Further, the explicit concentration on the representation of rape might suggest the perpetuation of a tradition that has at many levels depended upon the silencing of women. Marcus’s “linguistic” approach to rape has been critiqued for related reasons; Mardorossian accuses her of “downplay[ing] the ‘materiality of gender’ and ignor[ing the fact] that social inscriptions—that is, our physical situatedness in time and space, in history and culture—do not simply evaporate because we are made aware of them” (755). One must acknowledge the danger of “reprodu[ing] the cycle . . . —that is, erasing women as the routine targets of rape in order to metaphorize . . . violence” (M. Ross 314). At the same time, it bears saying, again, with Sielke, that “rape narratives relate to real rape incidents in highly mediated ways only. They are first and foremost interpretations, readings of rape that, as they seem to make sense of socially deviant behavior, oftentimes limit our understanding of sexual violence while producing norms of sexuality in the process. As they have evolved in historically specific contexts, these narratives moreover interrelate with, produce, and subsequently reproduce a cultural symbology that employs sexual deviance for the formation of cultural identities” (2–3). The feminist project of unveiling the mechanisms of patriarchy is worth the risks it entails. It is of crucial importance for a new generation of scholars to identify the ways in which masculinity has reconstituted itself in the face of the feminist challenges of the late twentieth century, because although such a collective project might seem vulnerable to its own practice of treating rape as (just) representation, it “at least enables us to expose [the] blindness at the heart of influential Euro-American psychoanalytic, gender, sexuality, and cultural theories” (M. Ross 312). If it is true that the social script does not “evaporate because we
are made aware of it, it is at least to be hoped that “we can locally interfere with it”: “By defining rape as a scripted performance, we enable a gap between script and actress which can allow us to rewrite the script, perhaps by refusing to take it seriously and treating it as a farce, perhaps by resisting the physical passivity which it directs us to adopt” (Marcus 392).

Equally useful is the exploration of the ways the rape script supports and is supported by specific forms of capitalism. These linkages help to destabilize in very concrete ways the common-sense notion that gender as we know it is inevitable, as well as the often-held but dangerous proposition that rape is somehow a natural consequence of anatomy. It is unfortunate that early studies of rape sometimes moved in this general direction; Susan Brownmiller’s 1975 manifesto can be taken as representative: “[I]n terms of human anatomy the possibility of forcible intercourse incontrovertibly exists. This single factor may have been sufficient to have caused the creation of a male ideology of rape. When men discovered that they could rape, they proceeded to do it” (14). Certainly a body-centered approach can have in its favor the acknowledgment of women’s lived realities, before this time written out of the legal, medical, and criminal theorizing of rape. But a model like Brownmiller’s also conflates rape, gender, and anatomy in ways as incontrovertible as the link the rape story establishes between sexual violence and transcendent meaning. Catharine MacKinnon’s work on rape, similarly, has come under scrutiny in recent years for defining women as “inherently rapable,” “objects” whose worth is determined by virtue of their patriarchally conceived “purity” (Marcus 387, Rooney 94). Situating the rape narrative within its enabling socio-economic context, on the other hand, denies the inevitability of forcible intercourse as the natural consequence of human anatomy. Plotting violent sexual fantasy on the grid of economic concerns, moreover, locates masculine agency in relation to an explicitly contingent material system of power, value, and order. It is in this way that the violent intimacy of the rape story finally discloses the increased desperation with which the body has been made to carry ideology under systems of advanced capitalism.

The turn of the twentieth century witnessed several marked changes in the economic forms of Europe and the United States, including the evolution toward finance capitalism, rationalized corporate control, and a new politics of labor management. In chapter 2, I set out to show that representations of the divinely raped female body enabled some “high” modernist artists and writers to conscript and eroticize entrepreneurial fantasies of invasion and empire to the service of the new ideologies of controlled cap-
italism and a managed working class. The aestheticized female body thus becomes in much high modernist literature a stand-in for material chaos generally and class, labor, and gender displacement and democratization particularly. The violent invasion of this body by some transcendent and/or abstract force, furthermore, articulates the attraction that writers like Eliot and Yeats felt toward totalitarianism. For all three writers, further, the rape is often a central metaphor for the hierarchic infusion of value even as the role of the implicitly or actually masculine protagonist and/or speaker wavers and gains strength in relation to the event. Thus masculinized and individualized “productivity” comes to exist side by side with feminine and anarchic subordination to homogenous and abstracted power. The repression of man that might otherwise be implicit in the vision of divine domination is more or less neatly avoided, even in the face of capitalism’s rape story excising from its own narrative the agency of the (human) rapist.

Chapter 3 investigates the parallel constructions of the rape victim in the Fordist model of labor and production and the ideological superstructure of fascism. Both models emphasize hierarchy, concentration, and control, and both ultimately move beyond turn-of-the-century rhetoric by validating themselves in the figure of the great man, whether the fascist leader or the heroic engineer. The idealized role of the leader in some ways resolves the split between the capitalist rhetoric of entrepreneurial agency and the twentieth-century reality of controlled capitalism. Writers like Ayn Rand and Ezra Pound yoke “factive” leadership to technological mastery and validate that conjunction through the image of the raped woman. As in Eliot, Yeats, and E. M. Forster, the raped female body suggests abstract value, but her presence speaks much more forcefully to the power of the factive personality to mobilize the dissociated elements of production into a model of humming efficiency that expresses his highly individualized will. The raped women in The Fountainhead and The Cantos ultimately speak not of divinity in all of its transcendent incomprehensibility but of the force of great human personality to reenergize production, thus to control the crisis possibilities endemic to capitalism. The victims speak not of their own effacement before the absolute—although certainly they are effaced—but of their now-increased (re)productive capabilities. Thus female (re)production is not only conscripted to the symbolic and actual service of the virile hero but is crucial in ideologically legitimating the force necessary for the unification and mobilization of economic and technological enterprise.

Not all mid-century figurations of white masculinity could participate fully in the triumphant rape story told by Pound, or Rand, or even Eliot or Yeats, however; nor could man always be so easily identified with the rising productivity of capitalism, with the tremendous concentration of state
and military power in the West, or with the explosive productivity and
new industrialization that accompanied and followed the world wars. In
fact, I argue in chapter 4, such factors as increasing automation resulted in
a mid-century reconstruction of masculinity often marked by nostalgia, or
even grief. In a sense, it was technological production itself—the engine
that powers capitalism—that was silently (and sometimes not so silently)
coming to be understood as the force that would displace the white man.
At the same time, consumable technology establishes the phallus as explic-
itly artificial and transferable, its power up for grabs and available to any-
one with enough money to buy it. In this context, the rape narrative pro-
poses a story of accessibility and inaccessibility in which the prerogative
for violence against women has been stolen in a gesture of mechanical
piracy. Rape is thus redefined as technological abduction—without
human or divine antagonist. In Tarr, published in 1918, Wyndham Lewis
crafts a machine to supplant man and usurp his prerogative for gender vio-
lence. If Lewis meets machined emasculation with bitter resignation,
many of his contemporaries greet the same nightmare of technological ca-
stration with rage, and the proliferations of the machine—first embodied
as phallic accompaniment, later as woman—become subject to increasing-
ly brutal displays of violence. In the work of D. H. Lawrence, for exam-
ple, rage against the machine is explicitly played out against the body of
woman. What the brutalized female body finally expresses, however, is a
lament, as in the case of William Faulkner, for the lost white gentleman of
the past.

The anxiety articulated in the work of writers like Faulkner and
Lawrence begins to investigate a masculinity explored more fully in chap-
ter 5: one defined not in relation to production but in relation to con-
sumption. As is often noted, after the Second World War, first-world
economies turned more fully toward postindustrial structures on one hand
and toward commodity production and consumerism on the other. The
commitment ideologically crucial in an earlier form of capitalism to the
notion of the individual who sells his labor to the market shifts more com-
pletely to a faith in the individual who freely consumes in a gesture of per-
sonal expression. The consumerist quest for what purports to be an expres-
sion of the true self is mapped onto the objectified female body (as it is
onto the commodity item). A novel like Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita, then,
is structured by Humbert Humbert’s frustration over Lolita’s increasing
removal and obscurity, an affective response doubled by the reader. The
text is itself draped in veils that do not ultimately reveal anything other
than the violent desire of the subject. Like the novel of the postmodern
striptease generally, Lolita speaks to commodity fetishism under late capi-
talism and to the ways in which consumer culture relies heavily on the vic-
timized female body to create the illusion of an abstract universal essence behind the material commodity. D. M. Thomas’s *The White Hotel* is similarly structured to bring the reader up against the blank wall of a feminine materiality which resists fetishism and the work of interpretation.

By most accounts, 1973 marked the decisive end of the postwar “boom” and initiated a new economy that would have a powerful impact on what would come to be called the postmodern subject. Chapter 6 examines masculinity as it is developed in postmodern fiction. David Savran argues that what he terms “reflexive sadomasochism” has become “the linchpin . . . to a new American white masculinity” (190). Produced in response to such factors as feminism, civil rights, gay rights, the loss of the Vietnam War, and, most importantly, “the end of the post–World War II economic boom and a resultant and steady decline in the income of white working- and lower-middle-class men,” Savran’s “reflexive sadomasochism” gave voice to “a new masculinity . . . that was no longer contingent either upon the production of enemies out there or upon nakedly imperialistic forays abroad” (191, 194). The rape narrative is not at all lost in this revised account of white masculinity. In the postmodern text, however, the prerogative for rape is often forcefully dissociated from masculine agency, and it is precisely the trauma of this dissociation that focuses the portrayal of masculinity. No longer promising subjectivity, the raped and disappearing female body shows man his relationship to the techno-economy of late capitalism, and that relationship is revealed to be one that finally nullifies him as subject, spreads that hypothetical subjectivity across the information “space” that constitutes him. In the end the new white man is an exhausted information worker, consigned to a cubicle, detached from any understanding of the larger project of which he is (apparently) a part, producing under compulsion (in the clearly ideological name of pleasure) what does not have the palpable materiality of a “product.” Ultimately, the rape dreams of an older time turn traitorously, masochistically, against the soft, vulnerable body of man himself.

Thus John Barth’s *Giles Goat-Boy* stages in 1966 the kind of masculine anxiety that accompanied the growth of the techno-economy and its colonization of information flow. The masculine protagonist in the novel is secondary, “produced as a residuum alongside the machine,” doomed to a farcical reliving of the quest narrative; like the subject of late capitalism as described by Deleuze and Guattari, the hero “is not at the center, which is occupied by the machine, but on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, defined by the states through which it passes” (20). It is the machine which rapes. Cyberpunk also stages the return of the masculine rapist hero only to consign him to the margins of an informational world. It is *Gravity’s Rainbow*, however, that most relentlessly dwells on the
vulnerability of the new man. In spite of its domination by violent phallic imagery, what it stages is the disappearance of the feminine—the enabling feminine “other” whose rapability used to promise masculine agency—and the spectacular growth of male masochism. The machine, it turns out, has appropriated the traditionally masculine prerogative for sexual violence, and the true sexual event is between the lethal technological phallus and the vulnerable, rapable masculine body. It is a further disempowerment of the masculine body that even the sexual response to the violence of the rocket—a response replicated throughout the text in various scenes of sadomasochism—is a conditioned response; it reflects no desire originating in a subject per se, but is rather a subject-effect constructed through technology and transnational corporate power. The masculine subject is absorbed into the “Their” system—the “They” who manufacture the war as they manufacture gendered and sexual response—for the radical reorganization of spatial bases required for the endless circulation of capital.

Chapter 7, on the other hand, examines the ways the rape narrative is also employed within postmodern fiction to resuscitate the white male subject. There are texts that suggest—precisely through heterosexual violence—a regrouping, or a reemergence of the father amidst post–cold war consumer glut, finance capitalism, and waste management. Ironically, the white masculinity reestablished in this type of postmodern rape narrative is defined in sharp contrast to sexual violence, is actually dependent on the repeated and emphatic casting out of the desire to rape. One is tempted to claim that the essence of the shift is the emergence of compassion, an installation of the kindness so explicitly and self-consciously absent from Pynchon’s texts. There is an overarching grief in the texts of Don DeLillo and John Irving, the two writers I will take up here—grief for a lost masculinity, and grief for the raped girl or woman. That grief, however, as (massively) sympathetically rendered as it is, is predicated on the presence of a victim for whom to feel grief. Like the accumulated and recycled waste of late capitalism, the rapist is thus preserved as he is scapegoated, and he remains to haunt the borders and underground of the text; his violence necessarily continues to operate, denounced and yet crucial for masculine (anti)definition. At the same time, the rape victim herself is heavily fetishized, becomes a holy martyr in what would otherwise be an abject universe.

Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*, itself a reworking of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, achieves narrative epiphany in the saintly, post-death apparition of Esmeralda Lopez, the twelve-year-old raped and murdered in the wastelands of the Bronx. Esmeralda is the ultimate throwaway commodity—she gains value in being thrown, literally, from a building and, figurative-
ly, into the Internet; her rape is the underbelly of consumerist fetishism in an age of waste crisis, and her holy return redeems the postmodern wasteland. Similarly, John Irving’s protagonists achieve mature masculinity when they acknowledge that a rape victim is “holy” (*Hotel New Hampshire* 441). The sexually victimized female body is thus defined both as vulnerable to the touch of displaced masculine violence and yet untouchable to the average man. Rape becomes the occasion to reflect on the “redemptive quality” of the flows and re-circulations of late capitalism, the miraculous fact that the compromised masculine self has been rendered invisible but has not been obliterated (*Underworld* 809). In a significant way, abstract value is thus ideologically produced in a way that nullifies and condemns the laborer (the rapist) while building up the consumer/investor—s/he who watches and witnesses and grieves. This masculine regret and disavowal, in the midst of claiming ownership, is a part of a new vision of subjectivity, a vision explicitly celebrated in the novel as “real” finally, outside the fantastical illusions of late capitalism.

The final chapter examines the struggle over the last thirty years to reclaim the rape narrative for feminist purposes. Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, A. M. Homes, Kathy Acker, Angela Carter, Christa Wolfe, Jeanette Winterson, Julia Alvarez—to name just a few—rework the sadomasochistic narrative in ways that call into question the ways the presumed feminine subject has been traditionally represented. I note above that Sharon Marcus argues that a politically efficacious approach to the study of rape begins with the explicit examination of “rape as a language”: “[A] way to refuse to recognize rape as the real fact of our lives is to treat it as a linguistic fact: to ask how the violence of rape is enabled by narratives, complexes and institutions which derive their strength not from outright, immutable, unbeatable force but rather from their power to structure our lives as imposing cultural scripts. To understand rape in this way is to understand it as subject to change” (387, 389). To understand that the physical event of sexual violence is everywhere framed by the semiotic leads to the ability “to imagine women as neither already raped nor inherently rapable” (387). The writers I take up in the concluding chapter work in tandem with Marcus in struggling to disentangle representations of women from “an identity politics which defines women by our violability” (387). Some do so by staging in self-conscious terms the enduring construction of women as rapable-by-definition. Others interfere with the rape story by focusing on what Janice Haaken describes as the “inevitable disjuncture between rape as a metaphor and rape as a concrete act of violence” (784). Laura Tanner has shown that some contemporary writers reconstruct the rape narrative by “pushing the reader into a position of discomfiting proximity to the victim’s vulnerable body[. . .] collapsing
the distance between a disembodied reader and a victim defined by embodiment” (10), and Higgins and Silver have insisted on the necessity of “taking rape literally,” “restoring rape to the literal, to the body: restoring, that is, the violence—the physical, sexual violation” (4). My concluding chapter examines a range of resistant narrative forms that include the above.

The struggle of contemporary women writers to reclaim the rape narrative calls to mind the advice we routinely give young women and men in the college orientation process. Certainly at my institution, we are careful to organize mandatory workshops during which we exhort students, among other things, not to perpetuate the “rape myths” that support a culture in which one out of four college women has been the victim of rape or attempted rape since age fourteen (Goodman et al.) and in which 91 percent of victims are female (Haws). The obvious rape myths are those which generally condemn the “victim,” to the extent that one believes there to be one, for her attire, behavior, or demeanor. Other legitimate variations include the impossibility of “rape” committed by husband or boyfriend. I would argue that the rape myth is more pervasive yet. It is a form manifestly diverse in its permutations, and like any ideological mold, it changes gracefully in response to the particular features of history and economics that benefit from it.

What the mythic variation relies upon is the extent to which in Western culture the “feminine” is, again to invoke both Alice Jardine and Roland Barthes, “a metaphor without brakes.” Endlessly shape-shifting, the rapable female body persists in highbrow literature as the precondition for the masculine subject of capitalism, the agent to whom all imperial prerogative is granted. In the grotesque repetitions to which capitalism lends itself, the raped woman continues to function as the “earth’ to press down/repress, to work, to represent, but also and always to desire (for one’s own)” (Irigaray 133). Without the presence of this ideological object, “which in theory does not know herself,” then upon what foundation does one think the masculine subject? “If the earth turned and more especially turned upon herself, the erection of the subject might thereby be disconcerted and risk losing its elevation and penetration. For what would there be to rise up from and exercise his power over? And in?” (133). The subject of Western history—of logical and metaphysical thought, of market, industrial, and imperial capitalism—exists in supreme metaphysical thought by virtue of the violable feminized other, rendered visible in every banal figuration and event of our lived experience.
thus, to move? To invoke again the language of rape prevention at my insti-
tution:

[Question]: How do we all contribute to the problem?
[Answer]: Remaining silent. Silence is a form of passive support. Men who harm women sexually will always view our silence as a form of approval. Women who have been assaulted will view our silence as a lack of support. (Chalk and Checkett)