Chapter VI

Ayn Rand and the question of canon

One of the important aspects observed in the relationship between feminist discourse and literature during the second wave feminism of the 1960s was whether feminism can or should be contained within the institution of academic studies. By the 1970s, feminist literary criticism was firmly established in the academic curricula and the major effort of feminist criticism went into exposing what might be called the ‘mechanisms of the patriarchy’ in literary works which Peter Barry in his Beginning Theory has defined as a ‘cultural mind-set in men and women which perpetuate sexual inequality’ (122). The growing eclecticism meant that the feminist discourse drew upon other approaches and sources to mature and validate this point of view.

From attacking male versions of the world to exploring the substance and nature of a female worldview, many feminists undertook the arduous task of unraveling the ‘canon of literature’ and changing it. The Anglo – American feminists have been overwhelmingly concerned with the question of canon: the politics behind its creation, its modification in such a way as to alleviate the grievances of feminists and thereby doing justice to women. Radical feminists argued for a complete abandonment of the standard canon, which they perceived as complicit in ‘patriarchal subordination of women’. and as Elaine Showalter pioneered, the construction of a parallel women’s canon called ‘gynocriticism’.

The Greek word ‘kanon’, means a measuring rod or a rule, which was later extended to denote a list or catalogue of genuine Holy Scriptures designated by the church as ‘major’ or important for praise and study. Church authorities vested with the power to make such a decision, and enforced by authorities with the power to impose religious sanctions
established the Biblical canon; whose hermeneutics were based on creed or sect.

The use of the term ‘canon’ in a literary application arose with the emergence of a bourgeois – patriarchal - capitalist paradigm in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They designated in world literature or in particular European literature - those authors who by a ‘cumulative consensus’ of critics came to be considered ‘major’ and to serve as the chief subjects of literary history, criticism, scholarship, teaching and their works hailed as literary classics. It was very loose-boundaried, and subject to changes in its inclusions. Texts in ‘the literary canon’ are open to, and constantly subjected to, diverse and often conflicting interpretations and evaluations, which feminists view to be unobjective and dismissive of women’s experiences and concerns because of the pervasive patriarchal predication of society.

On closer scrutiny it will become clear that T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis and the American New Critics of the 1930s were largely responsible for assembling a collection of literary works, which came to form what has become known as the ‘canon’, that is, a body of works selected and elevated to canonical status which formed the backbone of literary culture or tradition of England and the rest of the English speaking world in the twentieth century. While forming the canon of English literature F.R.Leavis, Q.D.Roth, I.A.Richards, L.C.Knights, William Empson, T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound no longer saw the pre-war assumptions of the upper class generation with regards to the imparting of ‘English literature’ as valid. They strove to fashion English studies into a serious discipline because according to Leavisian criticism, literature made one into a better person as against the Arnoldian paradigm of constructing English as a subject to heal ‘the failure of religion’ to keep the peace in society, which under the twin impacts of scientific discoveries and industrialization was fracturing into mutually hostile classes.
Matthew Arnold saw the urgent need to ‘Hellenize’ or cultivate the middle classes and transfuse into them something of the traditional aristocratic class thereby lessening the social tensions that had arisen. For Arnold the imparting of literature was essential to reduce political bigotry and ideological extremism, since literature deals in universal human values rather than ‘the demands’ of the working class for equality and with luck may make them see their hostility towards the upper classes as ridiculous in ‘in the high-minded contemplation of eternal truths and beauties’. Thus, literature was invested with an ideological purpose to provide social cement between the classes, which religion had ceased to provide. Not only was ‘it to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the state’ is how Professor George Gordon, early Professor of English literature at Oxford saw (Eagleton 23).

It will be interesting to know that the politics behind the formation of the canon remained undetected for well over a century. The Marxist critic Terry Eagleton writing in Literary Theory, states that from an unclear status in the 1920s, by the 1930s literature was the only subject worth studying. Not only was assimilating English literature worth the effort, but it was the supremely civilizing pursuit, the spiritual essence of the social formation. Far from constituting some amateur or impressionistic enterprise, literary studies inaugurated an arena in which the most fundamental questions of human existence – what it meant to be a person, to engage in significant relationship with others, to live from the vital center of the most essential values – were thrown into vivid relief and made the object of the most intensive scrutiny (31). Feminists in particular, as well as other theoretical movements since the 1960s, see in this ‘preamble of the canon’ a patronizing and conceited tone.

In a short but very influential essay entitled Tradition and the Individual Talent (1919), T. S. Eliot argued that literature embodies timeless qualities and values, which can be seen as a form of cultural
heritage. For Eliot the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer to the present day makes a historical sense, which is timeless and temporal together and thus a writer who adheres to this historical sense is ‘traditional’. This sense of a single, unified ‘tradition’ became central to the way in which literature came to be viewed.

F.R. Leavis saw popular literature as a form of cultural pollution and the only hope of keeping the insidious effects of ‘mass civilization’ at bay was through a cultivated minority. For Leavis ‘literature was in a sense an organic society all its own; it was important because it was, nothing less than a whole social ideology’ (Eagleton 37).

What the critics about the canon framers have noted is the lower middle-class origins of these architects of English literary studies. Non-conformists, from humble and quasi-rural backgrounds, hardworking and morally conscientious, these framers of the canon of literature had no difficulty in identifying the works and texts which would constitute the ‘canon’. Further there was a definite ideological, social, cultural subjectivity in the choosing of authors and leaving out others who just did not manifest the essence of literature in the New Critical sense.

T.S. Eliot best symbolizes the methodology of the framers of the canon by his wholesale salvage and demolition job of Europe’s literary traditions. We see an upgradation in the rights and value of the Metaphysical poets and Jacobean dramatists, and a rude downgrading of Milton and the Romantics coupled with a selected importing of European products- the French Symbolists.

What Eliot is seen to be attacking was the whole ideology of middle-class liberalism, the official ruling ideology of an industrial capitalist society which as seen by him was bereft of an organic whole. He visualized Liberalism, Romanticism, Protestantism to be aberrative
influences and any influence they have on literary works must be expunged.

Another very important feature noted is the social process of ‘canon formation’, by which an author is tacitly and durably recognized as canonical. The factors that go into this formative process are complex and suspect. It does seem, however, that this process involves very ‘subjective’ factors, like the wide consensus of critics, scholars, and authors with different viewpoints and understanding. The persistent influence of, and reference to, of an author in the work of other authors, the frequent reference to an author within the discourse of a cultural community, and the widespread assignment of an author or text in school and college curricula was another device employed by these ‘canon framers’ to raise the social acceptance value of an author.

D. H. Lawrence because of his rightwing views found favour with Eliot and Pound. He was reconstructed as a liberal humanist with his raging contempt for liberal and democratic values more or less edited out. He became the inheritor of the ‘great tradition’ of English fiction from Jane Austen to George Eliot and Henry James to Joseph Conrad.

Another instructive analogy is the attempt by T.S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks and other New Critics in the 1930s to discredit Milton and Shelly, and praise and elevate John Donne and George Herbert whom they admired and helped raise to prominence in the English canon.

However, discussions regarding the process of canon formation, and opposition to established literary canons, are noted to have recently become a leading concern of critics with very diverse sensibilities – deconstructive, feminist, Marxist, or new – historicist. The debate within these discourses often focuses on the practical issue of what books to prescribe in college curriculums especially in “core courses” in the humanities and in western civilization.
A widespread charge is that the standard canon of great books, not only in literature but also in all of humanities, has been constructed keeping in view the ideology and political interests and values of an elite and privileged class.

Marxist feminists alongwith Black, Lesbian and post-colonial feminists have identified this elite and privileged class to be white, male and European, with the result that the canon consists mainly of works that manifest racism, patriarchy and capitalist imperialism. The perfidy according to these discourses doesn’t stop here but goes on to either marginalize or exclude the interests and accomplishments of Blacks, Hispanics and other ethnic minorities. It very conveniently excludes the concerns and interests of women, the working class, homosexuals and of the non-European civilizations. Not only this, popular culture, which represents the interests, tastes and beliefs of the non-elite is very arrogantly put on the periphery.

A frequent demand of these discourses led by feminists is to open the canon so as to make it more objective, multiethnic and de-Europeanized. A key feature of this demand is to have a canon that is representative of the anxieties and literary achievements of women and of other minority groups like non-heterosexuals.

Post-modern critics demand that the standard canon be stripped of its middle-class elitism and its hierarchism so as to include everyday cultural products such as films, television serials, popular songs and fiction written for masses, which high-brow critics have derisively termed ‘pulp’. There is also a radical wing of revisionist theorists who, with a political aim to transforming the prevailing power structures, demand the complete abolition of the standard canon and its replacement with non-canonical, marginalized and excluded groups and texts.
By the revolutionary year of 1968, women began to see themselves as ‘feminist critics’, approaching literature with a political awareness coming from the women’s liberation movement, and enlarging their perspective and knowledge from the contemporary institutions of literary/critical study.

Feminist critics view gender as socially constructed differences which operate in most societies and which lead to forms of inequality, oppression and exploitation between the sexes. Masculinity and feminity are socially constructed and invested with various qualities, values, images and narratives, which constantly circulate in society, shaping and determining people’s attitudes and lives. Just as other communication devices, literature plays a very significant role in the area of upholding gender positions of male power and female subordination. We see how literature and the discourse of literary criticism can work as both agents of reinforcement and of subversion in the ways that they construct or represent gender relations.

The main issue, which has become increasingly significant is, to what extent are the experiences and voices of women represented in literature, which till the first half of the twentieth century was dominated by male writers and their works. Feminists argue that historically, literature has played no mean role in subordinating or marginalizing the position of women. Since the literary works were in a major way penned by male writers, feminists point to the fact that in the cultural institution of literature as studied on academic syllabuses and the selection of works, which form the ‘canon’, male writers and the male points of view have been glorified. One will agree with Roland Barthes when he says that ‘literature is what gets taught’ because this institutionalization of literature has been responsible for defining literature in the twentieth century and feminist critics have argued that the canon is a reflection of the dominant power group in society, which is male as well as middle- or upper class and white (Webster 75).
Thus, we see how literature and the discourse of literary criticism as forms of knowledge have reinforced a patriarchal order in various ways. The construction of a male dominant canon is one aspect of this ‘mechanism of patriarchy’ and various feminist approaches have challenged ‘the canon’ for its manifest and more often latent exclusion of female points of view.

Luce Irigaray, has very aptly presented the feminist case against a male constructed and dominated ‘canon’ in her monumental work Speculum of the Other Woman (1974). Though her work is primarily a critique of the western philosophical canon, Marxist feminists have incorporated her findings to shore up their argument keeping in mind the interdisciplinary and intertextual nature of subjects in poststructuralism. Jennifer Hansen writing the introduction to Luce Irigaray’s essay There are Two Sexes, Not One in French Feminism Reader, ed, Kelly Oliver, writes ‘in speculum, Irigaray challenged the philosophical canon: Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Freud and implicitly Jacques Lacan, as solely privileging and elaborating the masculine subject. She shows that the western canon functions like a mirror (speculum mundi in Latin), which reflects back man as the master of the universe, and the universe and God in the image of man, while distorting the image of woman as imperfect, lacking or a hysterical subject. Irigaray also plays upon another meaning of speculum in her text, namely the instrument used by the gynecologist to reveal the interior sex of a woman. Using such a metaphor, she attempts to use this tool or mirror to open or reflect sexual difference and the feminine so as to interrupt the disfiguring images of women in western culture.

In her close reading of the western canon, Irigaray reveals that at the core of each thinkers/writer’s texts is a fundamental matricide and a continued repression of sexual difference. For example, in the myths of origin, it is not the mother who brings forward life, but rather a self-
originating male principle or life force. Woman, in this scenario, is derived from man and then serves merely to reproduce the species. She is the ‘envelope’, as Irigaray often calls her; she is merely a womb in which male subjects gestate. And finally, woman’s purpose is to nurture men, both nutritionally and spiritually, to enable them to one day leave her behind and participate in the social realm’ (203).

Feminist critics began to note the limited and secondary roles allotted to fictional heroines, women writers and women critics. More serious and explosive questions regarding women’s relation to literary study, their representation in men’s texts and how the ‘canon’ functions to bypass and unrecognized their contributions also now occupy the feminists. In particular the Marxist feminists question the relationship between the textual harassment of women and the oppression of women in society, how and why are women absent from literary history?

Feminist critics began searching for a disciplined way of defining the specificity of woman’s texts and constructing a female literary tradition. Elaine Showalter in 1978 coined the term ‘gynocriticism’ to describe and examine women’s writings in all its possible dimensions ranging from discovering the lost women writers and literary traditions to highlighting the contentious issue of the different nature of the creativity of women in using language. A seminal text of gynocriticism was Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) where employing Harold Bloom’s concept of ‘the anxiety of influence’** they talked of a feminist theory of influence, describing the nineteenth century woman writer’s anxieties within a patriarchal literary culture.

** (It has been observed that critics and historians of literature have mainly been employed in analyzing the influence of one author upon later authors, and examining how much the present author has adopted and incorporated in his work from the predecessor. However, the influential contemporary critic Harold Bloom reverses this process with his radical revision of the standard theory of literary evaluation and uses the phrase ‘anxiety of influence’ to conceptualize it. He insists that while influence is inescapable, however the influence involves a drastic distortion of the original due to an authors ‘defensively’ trying to produce a work which is as different and seminal from the predecessors original. The end product is the author in trying to exceed the greatness and minimize the influence of the predecessor actually distorts the original beyond its own conscious recognition, and embodies the malformed reading into his own work, feeling his work to be absolutely autonomous and original.)
Gynocriticism assumes that all writing is marked by gender as Alicia Ostriker notes in her book *Stealing the Language* (1986), ‘writers necessarily articulate gendered experience, just as they necessarily articulate the spirit of nationality, an age, a language’ (9). As Sandra Gilbert feels women writers cannot renounce or go beyond their gender entirely because of centuries of denigration of women’s art. For gynocritics, every insight and discovery about women’s writings and its relationship to a dominant male tradition is seen to have transformative personal implications to their own discourse and study. Gynocriticism’s rejection of the ‘patriarchal aesthetics’ (Showalter) of universality, linear interest in a narrative and ‘critical blindness’ (Showalter) to the verbal and linguistic interpretations of literature has given birth to a radical history.

A second assumption of gynocriticism is that women’s writing is eclectic and in reading women’s texts, gynocriticism has freely experimented with a wide variety of interpretative tools. Gynocriticism emphasizes the spurious nature of one-sided male claims to universality and emphasizes the impossibility of separating women’s writing from its contexts in a masculine tradition. Despite its many detractors, gynocriticism has spawned a vast literature on individual women writers, constructed a coherent study of the female literary tradition from the middle ages to the present in all national literatures and important books on ‘gender and genre’ (Ostriker 6). In relation to the Leavisite literary mainstream and tradition, women’s writing has moved through several evolutionary phases of subordination, protest and autonomy.

As gynocriticism matured and defined itself, an alternative canon of women’s texts took shape. Canon-formation, best described as the emergence of certain writers and texts as central to the understanding of a particular literary history and tradition, is now accepted as historically constructed, rather than as an assertion of aesthetic value. John Guillory has best described the gynocritical canon-formation as ‘strong revaluations
of devalued figures' (198), in his *The Ideology of Canon-Formation: T.S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks*.

Thirdly, the gynocritics uncovered intertextual affinities between women writers that had previously gone unnoticed. Far from abolishing canons, gynocriticism demystifies their pretenses to be absolute and permanent monuments of excellence. It reveals their corporeality and the relative nature of aesthetic standards. For gynocritics, canon formation is an aspect of the power of critical discourses in the poststructuralist paradigm and to be against them would be akin to leaving the power of canon-formation to someone else.

Finally, gynocriticism has expanded the canon to include neglected genres of women's writings, such as diaries, letters, science fiction and romance, thus, constructing a canon stripped of the elitism and hierarchism found in the standard canon.

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As discussed above in a field as new as Women's Studies, to transform the traditional reading canon is almost impossible. Many feminists have settled for the less polemical task of reevaluation. However, the task of choosing texts for 'women's studies' courses in literature far from being an exciting experience because of the enthusiasm of introducing to students, posits the difficulty of finding women novelists with a balanced representation of the various images of women. Mimi R. Gladstein writing in the periodical *College English* (vol.39, 1978), in her essay entitled *Ayn Rand and Feminism: An Unlikely Alliance*, points the particular difficulty to 'finding sufficient representations for that section of the course that should be entitled 'The Liberated Woman' or 'She Who Succeeds','(680).

In American literature, it is observed that the problem is acute
and the discovery and resurrection by feminist criticism of neglected women writers or of already acclaimed writers, does little to resolve the problem. The neurotic, manipulated, or exploited female continues to be the mainstay of American fiction. For some, the choice of a novelist whose novels produced positive opinions about women — a female protagonist who is active, independent, professionally successful, sexually emancipated and doesn’t pay for it by dying in childbirth or going mad or compromising or giving it all up for the man she loves, turned out to be the philosopher–novelist Ayn Rand. In all her novels, the protagonist is a woman who is active, assertive and successful. She arouses and retains the love and sexual admiration of at least two -three heroic men and emerges triumphant in the end.

Nevertheless, Ayn Rand failed to become the sibyl for the feminists whether of the left, right or liberal hue and apart from a few admirers in the academy who recommended her works to their students for extensive reading, Ayn Rand never made to the Women’s Studies canon. Her exclusion from the traditional literary canon is already a case in point. It will be quite enlightening to analyze the reasons for Ayn Rand’s exclusion from the canon despite her raging admiration amongst college going students.

Barbara Branden, student, friend, advocate and ‘fallen angel’ writing in the Epilogue of her work The Passion of Ayn Rand best sums up the angst by Rand herself and her admirers at the short shrift given to her. She details individuals academics, industrialists, critics, politicians, executives, entrepreneurs and members of interest groups who admire and live by Ayn Rand’s values and philosophy. But nonetheless, Ayn Rand’s major source of conflict with society according to Barbara Branden ‘was her belief that she was being ignored by the academic world, ...’ (428).

William O’Neill in his With Charity toward None states that ‘she
SYED 105

(Ayn) will continue to be read, at least on college campuses, for as far into the future as we can now see... She has all the earmarks of a subdivision of a chapter in every textbook on American literature and philosophy to be written and of a half period in every lecture class on American literature and philosophy to be offered ...'(24).

Ayn Rand was one of only a handful of successful American female novelists of the twentieth century. She was one of an even smaller group of successful female philosophers. The feminists of the second wave/phase should ideally have adopted her but on the contrary they refuse to even acknowledge her in passing, for her views were completely at variance with their objectives. Initially the liberal humanist feminists were drawn towards her because her novels as discussed elsewhere in this study presented a positive perspective to female readers in an otherwise male dominated American fiction where, ‘... American heroines are destined to lives of dependency and servitude, they have dared to disregard authority or tradition in search of wisdom or happiness...’(680), as concluded by Wendy Martin in Seduced and Abandoned in the New World, (quoted by Mimi R. Gladstein for her article, - Ayn Rand and Feminism: An unlikely Alliance, printed in College English [periodical, vol. 39, No 6. – February 1978]).

On a close reading of Ayn Rand’s five fictional works, feminist were appalled at ‘the narcissism, low self-esteem, and the appeal of selfishness and a lifetime of traditionally feminine sacrificial behavior that account for Rand’s appeal to the female psyche’ (34), according to Barbara Grizzuti Harrison in Psyching out Ayn Rand, (Ms. September 1978). Furthermore, Ayn Rand’s frank statements about her contempt for feminism and feminists did not help her. Mimi R. Gladstien writes in her book The Ayn Rand Companion (8), that on numerous occasions Ayn Rand reiterated that ‘the motive and purpose of my writing is the projection of an ideal man.’ Ayn Rand’s attitude towards women is best understood in the utterances she made both in her fictional works and later philosophical
treatises. A particular instance is Ayn Rand’s An Answer to Readers About a Woman President (The Objectivist VII, 12 [December 1968]), where she states the reasons for not voting for a woman as the President of the United States on psychological grounds. As she explains, ‘the essence of femininity is hero worship—the desire to look up to a man... such worship is an abstract emotion for the metaphysical concept of masculinity as such— which [the woman] experiences fully and completely only for the man she loves, — to act as the superior, the leader, virtually the ruler of the all men she deals with, would be an excruciating psychological torture’ (Ibid, 2).

The basic philosophy in her novels as observed is the presentation and projection of ‘the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, his productive achievement as his noblest activity and reason as his only absolute’ (Rand, For the new Intellectual).

For Ayn Rand her novels were viable instruments for the presentation of her ‘sense of life’, which was the presentation of ‘an ideal man’ (Rand). James T. Baker in his book, Ayn Rand quotes her, ‘man is a word that has no plural’ (We The Living, -229) on his title page. Barbara Branden in her book The Passion of Ayn Rand states that Ayn Rand reserved the most intense scorn for women. She was what she later called ‘an anti-feminist. I regard man as a superior value...the purpose of my writing fiction is to create a conflict for a hero, a conflict aimed at the achievement of some serious purpose, ...’(Branden 17).

In her stories it was the man, not the woman who represented the qualities of struggle and purpose though her heroines apparently come out as very liberated and self-assured individuals. The human qualities she cared for were specifically masculine attributes: purposefulness and strength. Later, Ayn Rand would define femininity as ‘hero-worship’. ‘Man’ according to her ‘is defined by his relationship to reality, woman by her relationship to man’ (Branden 20).
It is easy to see, through the works of Ayn Rand what she thought of the feminine character. Implicitly evident in her fiction and explicitly stated in her philosophy is the belief of the superiority of the male and woman’s awe of it. ‘I am a man-worshipper,’ she told Edwin Newman. She said she wanted to look up to men, for to her this was an important part of being feminine. Women who do not accept the natural superiority of men are not really feminine’ (Baker 118).

Mimi Gladstein thinks that Rand’s heroines ‘make interesting case studies of perversion’ (The Ayn Rand Companion, 36). Randian heroines are verisimilitudes of what Ayn Rand actually postulated they were supposed to be. Dagny Taggart, Kira Argounova and Dominique Francon are women whose life is full of action, independence, professional success and sexual emancipation, but all this is only to complement the heroes – man, who is endowed with the purpose of action.

A sensitive reader, especially a woman will feel appalled at Ayn Rand’s ‘romanticizing’ of rapes where in her two major fictional works, The Fountainhead, Atlas Shrugged and in her only play Night of January 16th, the heroines are physically violated at the first encounter by the male protagonists. In The Fountainhead, Dominique is sitting in her bedroom when Roark comes into her room unannounced. The following description follows:

‘He came in. He wore dark clothes... then he walked to her. He held her... her legs jerked tight against his, his mouth on hers... she tried to tear herself away from him... her fists beat against his shoulders... she felt his lips on her breast... she fell back against the dressing table... He had thrown her down on the bed and she felt his hands moving over her body... then the sudden pain shot up, through her body, to her throat, and
she screamed. Then she lay still’ (TF 217-218).

Further, rather than expressing outrage at this forced violation of herself, Dominique gloats, ‘I’ve been raped... I’ve been raped by a red headed hoodlum from a stone quarry... Through the fierce sense of humiliation, the words gave her the same kind of pleasure she had felt in his arms’ (TF 220).

In Atlas Shrugged Dagny’s submission to Francisco D’Anconia on their first sexual experience is similar, ‘she knew that fear was useless, that he would do what he wished, that the decision is his, that he left nothing possible to her except the thing she wanted most – to submit’ (AS 107). Dagny’s asserts that she just wanted to submit to him because ‘...of his power to reduce her to helplessness by the pleasure he had the power to give her,’(AS108). In the same novel John Galt rapes Dagny Taggart on their first encounter, ‘then she was conscious of nothing but the sensations of her body... that she knew nothing but the motion of his body and the driving greed that went reaching on and on, as if she were not a person any longer... and she gasped and lay still...’(AS 888). The rape of Dagny for Ayn Rand is ‘a sensation of physical pleasure’ and it ‘contained her worship of him, of everything that was his person and his life-...’(AS 888).

In Night of January 16th, Karen’s masochistic perverseness is evident when she narrates her ‘rape’ at the hands of B’jorn Faulkner, ‘he seemed to take a delight in giving me orders. He acted as if he were cracking a whip over an animal...I liked it ... then he asked me suddenly if I had ever belonged to a man. I said, no, I hadn’t...’(NJ 16th 82-83). When Karen refused his offer of a thousand kroner’s to have sex with him, he threatens forcing himself on her, ‘ he said if I didn’t, he’d take me...he did’ (NJ 16th 83).

‘Rand tries to portray these ‘glorious rape scenes’ as symbolic head-on clashes between two strong personalities whereas a readership with a raised consciousness about the nature of rape might find this symbolism unpalatable.
While rape is an act of aggression demonstrated through sexual activity, Ruthven defines it as ‘a passion for mastery... for whatever it subordinates, it is a phallic activity... patriarchal system of education’ (2). The violence and accompanying hatred the act involves is the highest degree of subordination, humiliation and dehumanizing a woman is subjected to. For feminists the issue of rape must first be understood in terms of ‘politics’ in the act and then as morally, psychologically, traditionally, spiritually and biologically. According to Catherine A. MacKinnon in *Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory*, rape is ‘the defining theme’ of the whole ideology of androcentrism, in that it signifies ‘the male pursuit of control over women’s sexuality—men not as individuals nor as biological beings, but as a gender group characterized by maleness as socially constructed, of which this pursuit is definitive (18). Feminists thus see sexuality as a form of power, of which rape is its definitive act and consequently the obliteration of distinctions between ‘abuse of women and the social definition of what a woman is’ (18).

Another familiar theme in Rand’s fiction is what James T Baker has called the ‘Tosca theme’ (33), where the heroine prostitutes herself to other men so as to save her ‘ideal man’ from the clutches of an immoral and degenerate society. In all her fictional works the men exchange the heroines amongst themselves and thus far from being sexually emancipated they seem to be sexually emasculated.

In *We The Living* we observe how Kira Argounova goes to Andrei Taganov for the money she will get and invest what she gets in Leo Kovalensky’s medication thus saving him from death by consumption. All the time Leo is in the Crimea recuperating, Kira is a mistress to Andrei and the money he gives her for her expenses she sends to Leo. In *The Fountainhead* we see how Dominique Francon who is passionately in love with Howard Roark, derives sado-masochistic pleasure through the violent
sex she has with him. In order to save the hero-man from the depredations of ‘an immoral and mooching society’ Dominique tries to protect Howard by first marrying Peter Keating and later Gail Wynand, while continuing to be Howard’s mistress. In Atlas Shrugged we have Dagny Taggart, Ayn Rand’s ‘ideal’ female character who is mistress to three of the four male protagonists in the novel—Francisco D’Anconia, Hank Rearden and John Galt.

It is not very difficult for one to surmise as to why Ayn Rand failed to make it to the gynocritical canon of Women’s Studies. Mary Ellman writing in Thinking About Women states that, ‘while men and women employ the same feminine stereotypes, the woman writer seems the more offensive in doing so’ (188). In her novels, far from presenting a balanced or new representation of the images of women, Ayn Rand ended up doing just the opposite it seems: neurotic, manipulated and exploited heroines is what she produced in her fictions.

Ayn Rand loathed feminists and the feminist movements as is abundantly clear through her many statements. Her non-entry in the woman’s canon was a foregone conclusion because she lacked the ideological and political commitment of the feminist movement. With her stated loathing of feminists and the movement at large, and presentation of female characters that demeaned ‘womanhood’, women critics never took her cause. Ideological and political factors restrained the feminists from including her texts for the Women’s Studies courses but what intrigues one is why the traditional reading list or literary canon did not incorporate her name and works into theirs. Richard Ohmann in his essay The Shaping of a Canon: U.S. Fiction, 1960-1975, writes that the process of canon-formation ‘has been a process saturated with class values and interests, a process inseparable from the broader struggle of position and power in our society...’(Critical Inquiry; Canons 378).

It is felt that reading novels is a social act and people are more
responsive to novels where they find values in which they believe and where they can find moral guidance when their own beliefs are shaken or uncertain. Further the values and beliefs of a small group of critics and academics were found to disproportionately influence the outcome of whether a writer will be discussed, referred to and talked within the discourse of a cultural community. Academic journals took their cue from the commercial journals. Whether the writer will be assigned in school and college curricula, giving it de facto recognition as literature was found to be a very subjective exercise.

Ayn Rand was a bourgeois–patriarchal capitalist for many and she proclaimed this for all to see and hear. In all her fictional works this is the implicit idea whereas in her philosophical tomes she explicitly explains it. She should have been included in the American literary canon without much ado, but she wasn’t, despite her belonging to the same ‘Professor-Managerial class of reviewers, critics, scholars, intellectuals who had emerged and grown up with monopoly capitalism’ (Ohmann 387).

Ayn Rand’s anti-feminism and anti–communism was much appreciated by patriarchal capitalists and in fact in 1946 a conservative publishing house Pamphleteers was the first to publish her novelette *Anthem*. The cold war had begun and Ayn Rand’s anti-collectivist/communist rhetoric was welcome. Her novel *We The Living* that is part autobiographical, with Kira Argounova’s and Leo Kovalensky’s attempts to escape from the Soviet Union endeared her to the American public. Another conservative Christian publishing house Caxton (1953) bought the rights to publish her.

However, by 1957 Ayn Rand became a public philosopher. With the publication of *Atlas Shrugged* she gave up fiction writing and involved herself fully in developing, writing and lecturing about her philosophy of ‘Objectivism’, which was the only ‘rational’ way for her to live. Though
her political and economic interests found favour with patriarchal capitalists, it was the ideology of her creed, its values and belief systems, which were not in accordance with those of the elite and privileged class. This class of monopoly capitalists along with the critics, other writers and scholars were factors in the process of canon formation which work in unison and Ayn Rand fell foul of them.

Politically Ayn Rand was a maverick; she alienated both the liberals and the conservatives. With all the rancour against religion, loathing of all forms of altruism, her outspoken atheism, her bitterest critics were the religious writers. These men were in basic agreement with her defense of capitalism and might have become associates of the Objectivist movement, had it not been militantly atheistic. Joel Rosenbloom reviewing Ayn Rand’s *For the New Intellectual*, for the *New Republic* predicted how her atheism would affect her audience. The blatant, offensive anti-religious polemic would alienate right-wingers, her natural following, both in fundamentalist Protestantism and in the Catholic right (29).

For the American bourgeoisie, capitalism and religion went hand in hand and Rand only drove them away. Steven Cory writing for the *Christian Today* saw Rand as an enemy of the faith, in fact a diabolical enemy because ‘she was the oddest of birds, an atheist who believed in free enterprise’ (72).

In addition to her atheism, Rand disturbed religion critics by her rejection of sacrificial love. Moderate Christians reacted heatedly to her denunciations of altruism. The religious critics took note of her espousal of selfishness as a virtue with great disappointment. Her books preached selfishness, which went against the Christian spirit of charity and altruism. The themes and protagonists were full of disdain towards religion, pursuing their selfish interests without any social responsibility. Howard Roark’s willful destruction of the Cortlandt project and the actions
of the protagonists in *Atlas Shrugged* were in complete variance with the Christian ethic of sacrifice, love and charity. Moreover, her romanticizing of anarchy, sado-masochism and infidelity also ran counter to Christian values. For Bruce Cook, writing in *Catholic World*, the most unpalatable aspect of Rand was ‘her complete lack of charity’, her shameless odes to selfishness, which gained media attention and helped spread her anti-Christian message abroad (199-24).

The liberal amongst the laity also found fault with Rand’s defense of raw capitalism and her rejection of the love ethic. For many liberal critics like Charles F. Schroder, her ‘new morality’ of rational self-interest was no more praiseworthy than the nineteenth century rugged individualism. What worried most of them was how the young and impressionable would get affected with her subversive and dangerous ideas.

Outside religious circles, Rand’s atheism and ethic of selfishness brought more amusement than alarm. However, it was the religious press and critics who were alarmed by Ayn Rand and they saw her Objectivism as a rival to their established religions.

Just like the religious press, the political press was as loud in its criticism of her writings and especially took issue with the elitism emerging from Rand’s praise of larger than life heroes and other accumulators of wealth. The political press viewed Rand as ‘impertinent’ for hating the masses for being common and an ignorant majority. For the political left, Rand’s praise for rugged individualism, raw capitalism, advocacy of selfishness were all anathema. Both the conservative right and liberal left recognized that her numbers were small but should they turn political they could have a profound impact on American society.

Given the reaction her work provoked amongst reviewers and critics of the left and right alike, Ayn Rand’s conflict with society was on
all fronts. However, despite the furore her ideas have generated – despite the fact her writings have sold more than 20 million copies as her friend Barbara Branden states and despite the fact that Ayn’s philosophy has had a deep impact on American culture, little is known of her in literary circles.

The academia, scholars, reviewers, critics, other writers and the dominant patriarchal capitalist class, whose values Ayn Rand loathed and attacked in her writings have managed to keep Ayn Rand on the fringes of the philosophical and literary canon, ‘a subdivision of a chapter in every text book on American literature and philosophy...’ (O’Neill 24).

Ayn Rand’s case is singular in the sense that feminists did not see her as one of them for she shared no political commitment, no ideological camaraderie and no sense of an ‘other’ in a patriarchal world with them. However, despite her celebration of patriarchy and capitalism, she never rose to prominence in the traditional canon for she became an anathema to them for her atheism, glorification of selfishness and capitalism. Ayn Rand’s admirers may not agree but Ayn Rand was also like other women, a victim of the ruling class.

A quotation from The German Ideology written by Karl Marx and Frederich Engels will be apt where talking about monopoly capitalism they wrote, ‘the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production’ (Ohmann 380). This probably sums up the situation of Ayn Rand, a victim of the politics of canon and rejected by the traditionalists as well as the feminists. The irony of her situation is all the more poignant, for despite her avowed allegiance to capitalism, the patriarchal-bourgeois class whose interests she advocated disclaim her with equal vengeance as the feminists.

* * * *

Ayn Rand holds a unique place in twentieth century American
literature and culture. It is true that while the academic world refused to acknowledgment her writings between 1940 and 1970, ‘in the post-Vietnam era, with neocapitalist emphases on ego enhancement and hero worship, people even outside her own tight circle of dedicated disciples recognized that she both reflected and helped restore to the American consciousness the recurring Myth of the rugged individualist’ as James T. Baker also notes in the preface of his book Ayn Rand.

Writing about Ayn Rand is a problematic task in itself and making a case for her inclusion into the literary canon may even sound scandalous in some circles. In most intellectual circles she is either outrightly dismissed or unduly eulogized for her philosophy and fictional writings. This academic ambivalence towards her only increased her popularity among the masses to an extraordinary level. Thus on the freeways of Southern California, the hero of her magnum opus, Atlas Shrugged, became the subject of automobile bumper stickers with the insistent question, ‘Who is John Galt?’ (Baker). Her bold, iconoclastic and uncompromising ‘individualism’ is also much admired in colleges and universities today than it was, maybe, from 1950 to 1970s. Whether or not we find her palatable to our intellectual taste, her impact on contemporary American and international culture is without doubt very significant.

Ayn Rand is one of the most widely discussed philosophers of recent times and her philosophy is best expressed in her works of fiction and particularly in her two major novels, The Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged. The impact of her novels is impressive and more than five million copies of The Fountainhead have been sold since its publication in 1943 and her other well-known novel, Atlas Shrugged has sold over two and a half million copies since its publication in 1957. According to conservative estimates of The Ayn Rand Foundation in New York, each continues to sell between a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand copies every year. In addition, Ayn Rand’s novels have been translated
into a dozen foreign languages and her following is no less outside The
United States of America than inside it.

The popularity of Ayn Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism
is by no means reflected solely in book sales. At the zenith of her fame in
the 1960s and 1970s over eighty cities in The United States and Canada
offered lecture courses in Objectivism with operations in such varied
countries as Germany, Pakistan and the Marshall Islands to name a few
(O’Neill 5). In addition, Ayn Rand was a syndicated columnist for the Los
Angeles Times between 1962 and 1965, and according to O’Neill, ‘what
is perhaps the supreme accolade which our society is capable of bestowing
upon a public personality, she was made the subject of an interview in
Playboy for March, 1964’ (5-6).

In 1963, Ayn Rand was awarded an honorary degree, Doctor of
Humane Letters from Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. The
1960s were the high point of Ayn Rand’s career. She lectured at Harvard,
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Johns Hopkins University. She
was always abreast of the current affairs, publishing her responses to
contemporary events, writing her observations in the form of essays and
books. Not the least she was a much sought-after speaker. In 1974 she
was invited to West Point to speak at its graduation ceremony. In 1979, NBC,
one of America’s leading broadcasting networks, announced plans to develop
a mini-series based on Atlas Shrugged. An aspect of Ayn Rand’s personality
that the common readers of her works are not aware of is her stint in Hollywood
between 1926 and 1932. She worked as a screenwriter for Cecil B.De Mille
and also played a bit role in his movie The King of Kings. Her first piece of
fictional writing, Red Pawn, was sold to Universal Pictures to be made
into a movie. Paramount Pictures and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer also
employed Ayn Rand as a screenplay writer. Between 1944 and 1949 Ayn
Rand was back at Hollywood writing the screenplay for The Fountainhead
and she even had the final say in having Gary Cooper to play Howard
Roark opposite Patricia Neal, who was playing Dominique Francon.

Ayn Rand never overtly patronized any political party. Her sympathies for the Republicans were an open secret. Members of the Libertarian movement acknowledge their intellectual debt to her philosophy though she rejected them and the intellectual executor of her philosophy, Leonard Peikoff, continues to do so. The impact of Objectivism and her philosophy has been so profound that one of the most reputed policy think-tank, concerned with political conflicts, their resolutions and disaster management is the acclaimed Rand Institute. The Institute has its headquarters in Washington D.C. and has branches in all the important capitals of the world.

Popularity alone is no standard for inclusion into the literary canon, but the fact remains that, however anyone may feel towards Ayn Rand, her ideas are as popular today as they were when she was alive. Her views may appear outrageous to her detractors but she cannot be ignored because of them. Mimi R.Gladstein in her book The Ayn Rand Companion states, ‘One’s academic peers, whose politics are generally left of center, consider her political theories a little to the right of the John Birch Society and they question the wisdom of your choice of subjects. These same individuals would not question the study of Ezra Pound who was a rabid anti-Semite and made treasonous broadcasts for Fascist governments. So much for academic objectivity’ (4). For that matter the stature of Paul deMan as a very important deconstructionist is not diminished by his association with Fascism in his early period. One can add the names of such eminent writers as Rudyard Kipling, D.H.Lawrence, T.S.Eliot and Norman Mailer, who definitely do not risk academic heresy keeping their political and social views within sights. Thus, Kipling’s imperialist views notwithstanding, he finds a very respectable place in the canon of English poets, and despite receiving a heavy bashing from feminist critics; D.H.Lawrence and Norman Mailer continue to enjoy a good readership.
and critical acclaim. T.S.Eliot was known for his right-wing Catholic views, which many secular humanists find disconcerting.

What probably emerges from these examples is the fact that ultimately it is a writer’s ability to transmute ideas into art forms, which help him/her survive even very biased vitriolic attacks. There will be very few critics who will question Lawrence’s or Eliot’s claim to literary greatness. In this context one can also give credit to Ayn Rand for paying attention to the art of character portrayal in her fictional works. She has surely presented some very powerful characters that continue to haunt the reader for a long time. In certain respects her characters can bear comparison with some of the ‘transcendent characters’ of some of the works of Mark Twain like Hank Morgan and Colonel Sherburn.

From the point of view of plot construction The Fountainhead should pass all tests. It extols individualistic virtues and presents them in a compact manner. We observe a purposeful progression of logically connected events leading to the resolution of the climax. The events are entwined with the fate of Howard Roark – the hero, and all subsequent events and characters in the novel are connected to him.

The novel is sub-divided into four parts and in each part Ayn Rand juxtaposes against Howard Roark a character that represents a variation of spiritual collectivism, as against Howard Roark’s individualism, unswerving integrity and exceptional ability. Thus, Peter Keating, Ellsworth Toohey and Gail Wynand, each bring into focus Howard’s character in contrast with theirs. At the same time the plot follows his (Howard’s) career from the day he is expelled from the Architecture School of Stanton Institute of Technology, through his difficulties in establishing himself as a working architect to his professional and personal victory and vindication.
The novel begins with Howard Roark standing on a cliff by himself. He has been expelled from the Architecture school, ‘Howard Roark laughed. He stood naked at the edge of a cliff ... He laughed at the thing which had happened to him that morning and at the things which now lay ahead ...’ (TF 7). This opening line can be seen in relation to the last line of the novel which also has Howard Roark standing atop the Wynand Building, ‘Then there was only the ocean and the sky and the figure of Howard Roark’ (TF 680). Thus, the novel begins and ends with the colossal figure of Howard Roark, a device which contributes to the unity of this work. We also observe how Ayn Rand has followed the cardinal principle of good fiction writing by integrating the plot with the theme. The theme of the novel that Ayn Rand identified as ‘individualism versus collectivism, not in politics, but in man’s soul’ is artistically interwoven with the plot – the growth of Roark’s career.

One also observes Ayn Rand’s talent for creating dramatic situations. Often short sentences are used to very good effect. Thus, the conversation between Howard Roark and the Dean of the Architecture school is a good example:

“...the sheet bore a drawing – a house of glass and concrete. In the corner there was a sharp, angular signature: Howard Roark. ‘How do you expect us to pass you after this?’ ‘I don’t.’ ‘You left us no choice in the matter. Naturally, you would feel bitterness towards us at this moment, but ...’ ‘I feel nothing of the kind,’ said Roark quietly. ‘I owe you an apology. I don’t usually let things happen to me. I made a mistake this time. I shouldn’t have waited for you to throw me out. I should have left long ago” (TF 13).

In fact Ayn Rand’s short sentences lend great dramatic force to
her memorable characters. Thus, the first real description of Gail Wynand is like John Galt’s in *Atlas Shrugged*. He (Gail) appears a shadowy figure before he is finally introduced in part three and achieves his unique power through Ayn Rand’s language:

‘Gail Wynand raised a gun to his temple ... He felt no relief, no despair, no fear. The moment of his end would not grant him even the dignity of seriousness. It was an anonymous moment; a few minutes ago, he had held a toothbrush in that hand; now he held a gun with the same casual indifference.’ ‘One does not die like this, he thought. One must feel a great joy or a healthy terror. One must salute one’s own end. Let me feel a spasm of dread and I’ll pull the trigger. He felt nothing.’ ‘He shrugged and lowered the gun. He stood tapping it against the palm of his left hand. People always speak of a black death or a red death, he thought; yours, Gail Wynand, will be a grey death ...’ (TF 377).

*   *   *   *

Ironically it is Marxist literary criticism — which would surely have been an anathema to Ayn Rand — that rises in defense of Ayn Rand and unearths the politics behinds her being ignored by the intelligentsia. The value of a text, according to this perspective is determined through ‘ideology’, and in this case the literary establishment representing an ideology has succeeded in marginalizing her to the periphery. This view may also be supported by structuralist criticism, which inspired by descriptive linguistics, rejects the idea of works having intrinsic value. Linguistically no work is inferior or superior. The value is externally determined. Structuralist critics’ efforts in literature may probably help
Ayn Rand's case. The distinction between popular and classic does not hold if one applies the insights of this school of criticism. There is simply no fool proof method, as a structuralist perspective would suggest, by which Ayn Rand's works can be dismissed as 'non-literary'.

The image of Ayn Rand has surpassed her fiction and philosophy and according to Mimi R. Gladstein in The Ayn Rand Companion, ‘Ayn Rand can be compared to Hemingway and Fitzgerald in that her public persona came to be as well known as her most carefully created fictional character. Just as the flaming, hell-bent-for-leather, jazz age Johnny became indistinguishable in the public mind from the hard-drinking, fountain-swimming Scott, and the “macho,” adventuresome Hemingway hero was outswagged by “Papa” himself, so Ayn Rand became the quintessential Rand heroine. She presented herself as representative of the fictional ideal: rational, objective, uncompromising, unswerving. Her followers could find on imperfections’ (5). Thus, Ayn Rand is one of the few writers who successfully managed to embody her work with her own persona, thereby bringing an element of reality to her writings.

To conclude we may add that Ayn Rand's fiction will always have its dedicated readership of the young, and her philosophy with all of its imperfections is probably doomed to academic immortality. William F.O’Neill in With Charity Toward None, delineates very succinctly the reasons he sees for Ayn Rand’s philosophy making to the literary canon as, ‘It meets all of the required standards to be included in the usual college curriculum in philosophy: (1) It is simple and therefore readily comprehensible. (2) It is extreme and therefore memorable. (3) It is dogmatic and can therefore be classified easily in relationship to other points of view. (4) It is a position that has been lacking in formal philosophy (ever since the recognition that science is implicitly founded upon a pragmatic base) to exemplify the formal philosophical category of
what might be termed “non-theistic essentialistic realism.” (5) It is untenable and can therefore be used for purposes of philosophical one-up-manship by professors of philosophy who can easily demonstrate their own intellectual superiority over all comers by disposing of still another patently implausible point of view’ (24).

Whatever Ayn Rand may or may not have achieved, we will not be wrong in saying that even negation is a sort of reverse affirmation. Her writings continue to serve as intellectual catalysts and her philosophy of Objectivism provides a marvelous source of ‘protest commitment’ to the more youthful members of our society. Ayn Rand’s place in American literature and philosophy is yet to be determined.