The Elements of Suspicion and Thrill in Sidney Sheldon’s “The Other Side of Midnight”

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ABSTRACT

Sidney Sheldon was a popular writer of mystery and crime fiction novels. His books have been appreciated for their dense plots and unnerving suspense, especially due to the strong character portrayal. Some of the best works of the author include 'Tell Me Your Dreams', 'Windmills of the Gods', 'Master of the Game' and 'Best Laid Plans'. This paper seeks to highlight the thrilling and suspicion-arousing segments of Sidney Sheldon’s exciting novel - 'The Other Side of Midnight', and thereby understand the impactful sequences that influence the psyche of the expectant reader. It endeavors to bring out the cause of popularity of the novels and the effect of the background of the author on his books, since it can be observed that quite a few of the scenarios have been inspired by his life and the people that he has interacted with. The characters and facts are thus, perfectly labelled. This accuracy of the detailed sequences which are found to be influenced highly by the author’s own life, builds up a bestselling piece and a fascinating read. Power play is the core value and motive in this novel as in most of the author’s novels. An inherent and resilient display of woman-centrality is a characteristic feature developed here. The suspense is kept alive throughout the book, through beaming colors of passion, greed, ambition, politics and total and absolute sense of vengeance and has a shocking end that makes the readers completely frantic.

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1. Introduction

Sidney Sheldon is the seventh bestselling fiction author in the world. He was born in Chicago in 1917. When he was seventeen, he gave Hollywood a shot, and became a small time screenwriter and won an award in 1947, which explains his knack for knitting yarns. During World War II, he served in the Army Air Corps, as a pilot, but later went back to Hollywood. However, his novels mirror perfectly his personal experiences from the war and detailed depictions of real-time situations, through his characters. In the novel of discussion ‘The Other Side of Midnight’, there are instances which indicate a pure amalgamation of suspense and adventure which seems to enhance the ecstasy in a reader which makes them want to never put the book down. The storyline is global, jumping from one part of the world to another, stretches within the timeline of the World War II, before and post-war times and has a delving plot with a promising climax. The leading characters from this novel are expressed as a contrast of ambitious, ruthless, go getters with a strong sense of self-worth and domination along with docile, gullible-in-love individuals.

2. Review of the Literature

The plot revolves around four alluring personalities, each one of which is bound to have some impression.
In a world ruled by men, our protagonist lady, Noelle Page uses the power of seduction to bait each one of them until he gives in to what she wants and then moves on to another just to seek vengeance from the one man she has ever really loved, Larry Douglas. However what happens when she finally gets to him, had the revulsion conquered the overwhelming love & desire she has once had for the man?

The all-influential Greek tycoon Constantin Demiris is also used as a path maker by her but she forgets to realize that the man is not ordinary, but instead a force to reckon with. He retains absolute command and is insanely corrupt, who believes in communicating justice his way. Will he ever forgive her or destroy her completely? Catherine Alexander is the only character with no ulterior motives but still is viciously caught in the middle of the storm and unknowingly becomes a pawn of the tycoon. Her only fault was being a caring wife and working hard to keeps her marriage going [1].

3. Methodology
In order to analyze the success behind the novels and writing style of the author, the following points can provide an insight:

3.1. Autobiographical Elements:
Sidney Sheldon’s novels involve the use of certain personality traits that can be derived from the author himself.

The trial itself shows the theatrical skills Sheldon developed while he was writing and producing screen plays, television series and Broadway shows. Sheldon studied at Northwestern University, just like the character, Catherine. His knowledge on Chicago, his birthplace, London, Athens and Paris is precise too. Constantin Demiris, the billionaire shipping tycoon, is a fictional version of the famous Aristotle Onassis. Sheldon enjoys exhibiting characters like Demiris, whose mere presence seems overpowering. As he was part of the World War II, as an Army Air Corps pilot, this book comprises of several detailed instances of the war, and circumstances at the time.

“Signs in German appeared everywhere. Statues of French heroes had been knocked down and the swastika flew from all state buildings. German efforts to erase everything Gallic had reached ridiculous proportions. The markings on hot and cold water taps were changed from chaud and froid to heiss and kalt. The place de Broglie in Strasbourg became Adolf Hitler Platz” [2]. “The incident with the Gestapo in the apartment had made him very nervous. He could talk of nothing but what the Germans could do to both his and Noelle’s career…the Nazis showed no mercy to their enemies” [3]. “Fifteen minutes after Roosevelt had entered the Capitol, House Joint Resolution 254 was passed, declaring war on Japan—the shortest war message ever delivered to an American Congress” [4]. “On the morning of May 7, 1945, at Rheims, France, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies…missed going the other way” [5]. “The instrument flying was done in a Link Trainer, a small mock-up of an airplane cockpit that rested on a movable base…the little Trainers were much more difficult to operate than they seemed to be” [6].

3.2. Elements of Suspense

“At nine o’clock the following morning Paul Metaxas received a call to report to Dermis’ mining company…No traces of Metaxas’ body or the wreckage were ever found” [7].

“Fifteen minutes after Roosevelt had entered the Capitol, House Joint Resolution 254 was passed, declaring war on Japan—the shortest war message ever delivered to an American Congress” [4]. “On the morning of May 7, 1945, at Rheims, France, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies…missed going the other way” [5]. “The instrument flying was done in a Link Trainer, a small mock-up of an airplane cockpit that rested on a movable base…the little Trainers were much more difficult to operate than they seemed to be” [6].

3.3. Reader-based survey

In order to investigate the popularity and the effect of Sidney Sheldon’s novels on the masses, a survey helped peek into the minds of regular readers. The survey consists of a poll of a mix of the characteristics from the author’s novels, and brief descriptions about the book by the poll-takers.

4. Results and Discussion

The intricate patterns of suspense sequences, psychological impact of the author’s background and authoritative character portrayal along with a hint of charisma was what put together a tasteful Sidney Sheldon novel.

The characters seem to have a certain unique and individualistic qualities that give them a true to life resemblance. They are witty and passionate, but tend to have outbursts, which expresses the desire of a power- hungry mind. The story is believable and has a practical timeline, and readers are made to believe something unreal, so they make the most of it. They like to imagine a world like that in the book and gain
as they please like those in the story. It is an amalgamation of emotions, power, gullibility, love, passion, manipulation and the instinct to rise to superiority. The author’s ability to combine the feminist approach, brash heroines, mystery, and marvel manages to keep the readers gripped onto every page. ‘The Other Side of Midnight’ is a concoction of the following characteristics: Plot, character portrayal, reality quotient, suspense-factor, fast paced, and military references. This section contains the survey conducted among the age group of 20-30 years, on the novels of Sidney Sheldon voted by the ordinary, regular reader. This information targets the audience that relates to the books and the situations that arise as a result of the character’s emotions.

1) Which of the following Sidney Sheldon novels have you read?

![Figure 1: Ratio of Popularity of Sheldon Novels](image)

2) Some of these qualities make Sheldon’s best selling novels. Rate them as per your view:

![Figure 2: Color-Coded Representation of Qualities Rating](image)

3) The novels have certain characteristic elements. How would you rate them?

![Figure 3: Color- Coded Representation of Characteristic Elements of Sheldon’s Novels](image)

5. Conclusion
Sidney Sheldon’s distinctive style has made his novels famous world-over. The writing style and theme of this book tends to nourish a feeling of thrill all through. The style of describing the story of a character and jumping to the other from time to time is amusing, especially using the ‘cliff hanger suspense’. After scrutinizing the main elements of suspense and thrill, it is not wrong to admit that Sidney Sheldon has
lived up to the title, “The master of the unexpected”, through this novel and his peculiar but thoroughly appalling, mysterious style of writing. The author is much more adept in providing genuine settings than he is in making his plots and characters believable. The readers enjoy this style of writing and the rush of adrenaline that comes with the plot. Sidney Sheldon’s method of detailing each scene with depth and enigma has made him one of the top 10 bestseller of mystery and fiction.
References

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