Chapter 4

Sheldon's Craftsmanship

Postmodernism emphasizes plot rather than character. Characters tend to be labyrinthine, flattened, allegorical or fragmented. Protagonists are passive and manipulated by the plot. Sheldon's novels are not puzzling collages of events. Character is most important in his novels: he begins with a character in mind and allows her to lead the story.

The paradigm of form in the modern novel may be said to be the encounter of the rebel-victim with destructive experiences. This is similar to the rebellion and alienation that attend the mythic hero in his quest. Irony is also found in Sheldon's novels. His heroines, like the archaic hero, are both actors and sufferers; victors and scapegoats; public symbols and private will. They are rebel-victims, alienated from society.

Sheldon's novels are effortless as they speak to us in our own idiom. The social settings are highly contemporary and realistic. Authenticity lends strength to his novels, which thereby gain social relevance. His narrative technique is remarkable. Above all, he is a master storyteller. He can weave a spell as intricate as a
spider's web and it captures the reader inescapably. His plots are well-knit and there are no loose ends. Page after page is packed with action, emotion, romance, suspense and masses of information. Glamour, sensationalism and gruesome details are also added to spice the narration for the gratification of the readers' hidden yearnings. All his fast-moving, "unputdownable" novels have memorable characters.

Sheldon's mastery of the English language is astonishing. His narrative style is direct, appropriate and powerful. He paints pen-pictures of places. He portrays large spectacular events as beautifully as small emotion-charged acts. He uses humour, irony and pathos with equal ease. His deep understanding of human psychology helps him create convincing, true-to-life characters. He is a keen observer of man and manners and he analyses problems, at times, almost like a psychoanalyst. His worldview and social awareness are worthy of study. Above all there is variety in his novels. From the known, familiar diving board, his novels make us plunge into the unfamiliar. Sheldon uses apt techniques to make his novels effective. Language is the genie employed by him to do his work effortlessly. He is a skilled writer and his craftsmanship is worth intensive study.
Sheldon's command over the English language is remarkable. The following description of snowfall in The Naked Face illustrates this point: "the sky exploded into a carnival of white confetti that instantly blanketed the city" (9). With heavy snowfall during Christmas time, the city looks like "a gigantic Christmas card" (Rage 69). He describes the heat of the August sun in Athens: "The shimmering heat . . . enveloped the buildings in undulating waves that made them seem to be cascading down to the streets in a graceful waterfall of steel and glass" (Midnight 3). The fast receding buildings in Athens, as seen through the windshield of a speeding car, appear to Sheldon to "collapse in a slov£ dance of disintegration, one after the other like rows of giant pins in some cosmic bowling alley" (Midnight 3). At the age of five, Noelle Page understands that she is the daughter of a fishmonger. She now realises that "the castles she saw from the window of her tiny attic room were the warehouses around the stinking fish market . . . and that her navy was the fleet of old fishing ships" that vomitted "their smelly cargo into the waterfront docks" (Midnight 31).

Kate Blackwell, at the age of ninety, is nostalgic during her birthday party. She sees the ballroom crowded with "familiar ghosts"—her dear departed ones—and she
watches them "mingle with the flesh-and-blood people" and "the visitors from another time and place" glide around the dance floor "with the unsuspecting guests ..." (Master 11).

In Rage of Angels, Ken, the homosexual, is said to carry his own hell with him (70). Michael Moretti is described as "a man of deep silences, a man who distrusted words, as though they were a trap rather than a form of communication" (281). In Memories of Midnight the drive to the beach house "took an hour of actual time and twenty years of memories" (339).

Sheldon compares a city to a jungle. Manhattan looks like "a jungle at night, with only a dying campfire to keep away the encroaching terrors" (Rage 371). Examples of such unusual comparisons can be seen in all his novels. At the trial of Noelle Page, the courtroom is described as a three-ring circus (Midnight 392). In Windmills of Gods Mary's hectic routine as an ambassador is described as a "treadmill" and her long day is said to have a thousand hours (135; 268). There is a lovely scenic description of nature's extremes written in an almost romantic vein: the sweet smell of corn and hay on hot summer days; forests of cottonwood trees, cedars and olive trees; "the odour of burning cedar trees"; a "frosted landscape with power lines
delicately laced with ice, and lonely smoke from far-off chimneys" (Windmills 91).

Sheldon's language is unusual and arresting in several places. The nightcourt is described thus: "The room was old and tired and uncaring, saturated with the stale smell of fear that had accumulated over the years like layers of flaked paint" (The Naked Face 16). In The Other Side of Midnight, Dr. Israel, who had one of his legs amputated six years earlier, begins "to feel the familiar pain in a right leg that was no longer there" (6). Catherine, who is going through adolescence, thinks bitterly: "Kids are too young to have to go through adolescence" (Midnight 20). She is said to have "grown up in Hollywood even though she had never been there" (Midnight 161). When Noelle, smouldering with vengeance, sees Larry's photograph in a newspaper, she realizes that "the photograph of Larry was exactly as she remembered him. If anything the image in her mind was clearer than the image in the newspaper, for Larry was more alive in her mind than he was in reality" (Midnight 189). Fog is personified imaginatively: "It was a ghostly enemy, charging at him from every side, blinding him, seducing hint, trying to lure him into making one fatal mistake" (Midnight 310). With telling effect, Sheldon writes of
Jennifer: "Jennifer Parker was not only on the evening news—she was the evening news" (Rage 32).

Harry Stanford's death in Morning, Noon, and Niche is described 'unusually: "now he was dead, reduced to a black headline"; his daughter's reaction is presented in an equally unusual fashion: "Her father had been dead to her all her life, and now he had died again ... " (113). in The Other Side of Midnight, Catherine's terror, when lost in the caves, is brought out with chilling effect:

Catherine waited, feeling the blackness lapping around her like malicious invisible waves .... Catherine began to feel the first tendrils of terror.... The black minutes dragged by.... A feeling of suffocation began to close in on Catherine, choking her, filling her with a mindless panic... Suddenly it leaped on her in the dark; cold and clammy skin brushed against her cheeks and kissed her lips and she felt something crawling on her head and sharp claws in her hair and her face was smothered by the mad beating of wings of some nameless horror attacking her in the blackness. (377-78)

Sheldon's personification of the wind as "clawing at the house, trying to scream its way in ..." is original
His comparison of a dark room lit up by lightning to "an overexposed photograph" is also original.

Sheldon's use of powerful language is illustrated in the description of a person trapped in a fire:

It was like stepping into a blazing corner of hell. The smoke was getting thicker, filling the room with dancing chimeras that kept vanishing. The fire leaped down at Alec, fondling his hair, and the crackle of the flames became Vivian's voice calling to him in an irresistible siren song. (Bloodline 408)

Sheldon's language is at times highly sensuous, almost Keatsian: "There is a smell to failure. It is a stench that clings like a miasma" (Stranger 263). When Toby is confined to bed following a stroke, Jill finds herself lonely and gets nightmares: "She could not breathe. An icy cloak of air covered her like some obscene blanket, caressing her nude body . . . kissing her lips with a frigid, malodorous breath that reeked of the grave" (Stranger 314). The creaking of Toby's wheelchair haunts and chases her "like the music of death coming to get her" (Stranger 317). In Bloodline a beautiful island is described sensuously, thus:
For Elizabeth the island had its own special odours, the smell of sea breezes and forests, the white and yellow macchia, the fabled flower that Napoleon had loved. There were red fruit that tasted like strawberries.... She loved to listen to the singing rocks, the mysterious giant boulders with holes through them. (95)

The village, with its variegated colours, is said to resemble "a child's crayon drawing" (Bloodline 95).

In Master of the Game, Jamie's near death in the desert is sensuously described:

he heard the rustle of wings above him and the shrill hiss of the vultures.... He could not see them. But he could smell them. ... He could see nothing except vague, shimmering objects that his terrified imagination turned into feral hyenas and jackals. The wind became their hot, fetid breath caressing his face. (55-56)

When Lara, in The Stars Shine Down, sees her recipe for a Black Bun published in a magazine, she goes down memory lane. The article brings back the taste of the bun, the smell of the boarding house kitchen and the noise of the boarders at supper. She can almost see her helpless father in bed (175-76). In another passage, Lara's
lovenaking with Philip is described sensuously, but with no reference to human lovemaking at all:

The silence of the room was broken by a sudden clap of thunder outside. Slowly, gray clouds in the sky spread their skirts open, wider and wider, and soft rain began to fall. It started quietly and gently, caressing the warm air erotically, licking at the sides of buildings, sucking at the soft grass, kissing all the dark corners of the night. It was a hot rain, wanton and sensuous, sliding down slowly slowly, until the tempo began to increase and it changed to a driving, pounding storm, fierce and demanding, an orgiastic beat in a steady, savage rhythm, plunging down harder and harder, moving faster and faster until it finally exploded in a burst of thunder. Suddenly, as quickly as it had started, it was over. (249)

Sheldon's mastery over the language is also illustrated in his vivid pen-pictures of places:

The penitentiary had a music all its own: the clanging bells, shuffle of feet on cement, slamming iron doors, day whispers and night screams ... the hoarse crackle of the guards'
walkie-talkie, the clash of trays at maal time. And always there was the barbed wire and the high walls and the loneliness and isolation and the pervading aura of hate. (Tomorrow 103)

In Rage of Angels, the prison lobby is described as the "waiting room to hell. There was an incredible cacophony" (89).

Nothing Lasts Forever has several descriptions of hospitals and doctors' routine. A day in the hospital is portrayed thus:

Even at that early hour, the bedlam had begun. The patients had been coming in all night, arriving in ambulances, and police cars, and on foot. The staff called them the 'P and J's'--the flotsam and jetsam that streamed into the emergency room, broken and bleeding ... the wounded in flesh and spirit, the homeless and the unwanted, the ebb and flow of humanity that streamed through the dark sewers of every large city. There was a pervasive feeling of organized chaos.... (33)

One sees a frantic and hectic pace of activity in a hospital: "There was no time to know patients. They were simply gallbladders and ruptured livers, fractured femurs
and broken backs. The hospital was a jungle filled with mechanical demons ..." (Nothing 92). Nothing that happens outside has any impact on the hospital, which is a world by itself: "The hospital was untouched by the outside world. The wars and famines and disasters of far-off countries paled by comparison with the life-and-death crises they coped with twenty-four hours a day" (Nothing 97).

The life of actors and stars and their fears and disappointments are presented movingly in A Stranger in the Mirror. The men and women hopelessly waiting for chances in films are like "ancient tribes who sat around long-ago campfires and recounted sagas of brave deeds" (187). They tell and retell heroic tales of show business, and exchange the latest bits of inside gossip. "They knew these things before anyone else did, through their own special kind of jungle drums. For the Business was a jungle" (187).

Running a studio is likened by Sheldon to walking a high wire over the Niagara in a blizzard (Stranger 72). Toby Temple, the comedian, is tense before he gets the approval of the public:

He stood on the stage, on guard and tense, appraising the audience like a wary animal sniffing for danger in a forest. An audience was a beast with a hundred heads, each one different;
and he had to make the beast laugh. (Stranger 98)

Every actor is humble before attaining fame. But the moment he signs a contract, he can make even Hitler look like Albert Schweitser (Stranger 126). Actors fear oblivion and obscurity in later life. So, when Toby hears that "Old soldiers don't die--they just fade away", he prays that he too must "use the same laundry" so that he will only fade and not die (Stranger 150).

A hangover is described unusually in The Other Side of Midnight: "Catherine woke up with a hangover that she was convinced would make medical history. She had at least three heads on her shoulders, all of them pounding to the beat of different drummers" (179). There is another interesting reference to alcohol. Mary calls champagne "France's vengeance against us" (Windmills 37).

Sheldon's descriptions of war are again illustrative of his command over the language. The "German locusts" are said "to swarm in" on Paris (Midnight 84). There is widespread scarcity, and for the average Frenchman, "there was a shortage of everything except cold and misery" (Midnight 132). But war also invigorates men. During wartime,
The air was filled with an electric, contagious excitement. It was as though peace were a lethargy, a miasma that filled mankind with a sense of ennui, and it was only war that could stimulate man to the full exhilaration of life. (Midnight 213-14)

Riots and their aftermath are starkly portrayed in Bloodline:

The entire sky was red from the biasing wooden buildings . . . and clouds of thick smoke hung everywhere. Men and women were frantically searching for their families.... Mutilated bodies of men and women tossed aside like broken dolls; naked, raped women and children, bleeding and moaning for help. (98-99)

The passage of time is described in several novels. In The Other Side of Midnight, Catherine's father reminds her "of a small boy in a middle-aged man's body spinning tales of the glorious future to hide the shabby failures of the past" (21). Catherine seems to have aged all of a sudden and, when she looks into the mirror, "The familiar, ugly face was the same, and yet it seemed twenty years older, as though through some alchemy in time she had become her own

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mother" (Midnight 141). A similar description about aging is to be found in A Stranger in the Mirror:

Seeing her reflection was like looking back into layers of the past. There were still traces of the fresh young girl who had come to Hollywood seven endless years ago. But the fresh young girl had small wrinkles near the edges of her eyes warning signals of time fleeting and success ungrasped, the souvenirs of all the countless dreary little defeats. (220)

When Jennifer loses her son, she feels totally isolated in her grief: "She walked carefully, standing very straight, as though she were going down an eternal corridor wide enough for only one person" (Rage 426). Jill in Stranger in the Mirror and Deroeris and Chotas in Memories of Midnight are said to "pirouette" in space and die at the end of the novels (348; 404). In If Tomorrow Comes, Tracy sees her former fiance with his wife, both of them wearing such bored expression that she does not want to take revenge on him anymore: "They gave the impression of two people trapped together for eternity, frozen in time—Tracy could visualise the endless, tedious years ahead of the two of them" (192).
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A writer's skill is often judged by his ability to handle humour, irony and pathos. Sheldon's humour is gentle and jovial, or dry and bitter as the situation warrants. Sometimes he plays on words; sometimes strange foreign customs provide occasion for gentle laughter; at other-times it is ironic or bitter humour. An actor in Hollywood says that he never fools around with singers as he has no ear (Stranger 130). Similar wordplay is seen when Catherine writes in a school magazine: "Tommy Eelden had a trumpet solo in the second act, but he blew it" (Midnight 17). Catherine has been a virgin for a long time as her unusual sense of humour interferes even during romantic moments and keeps away men who fear her intelligence and wit. When she joins a new post in Washington, an FBI man comes in search of her and she remarks humorously: "My God.... They found I'm a virgin, and there's probably some kind of law against it in Washington" (Midnight 116-17). When her boss shows her round his huge apartment, Catherine says, "It's smaller than the Library of Congress" (Midnight 119). When the doctor asks Catherine whether her husband is alive, she replies with dry humour: "Holidays and weekends" (Midnight 336). After her attempted suicide, when her husband enquires how she is, Catherine retorts bitterly: "Terrific. Suicide always stimulates me" (Midnight 346). With ironic
humour Catherine remarks about the parting of lovers thus: "They lived happily ever after, he in his harem and she in a windswept cave in Tibet" (Midnight 26).

Catherine finds much to smile about in Greece. Once, at a Greek restaurant, when asked by her host to order, she looks at the menu card in Greek and remarks: "Would you mind ordering for me? I'm afraid I might order the proprietor" (Midnight 287). The chaotic traffic in Greece stuns Catherine, but she is told that "the Greeks haven't made the transition to automobiles. In their hearts they're still driving donkeys" (Midnight 302). Catherine is amused by the separate enclosures for men and women in a Greek church, where men are seated at the front and woman, behind, and comments to herself: "I guess the men get to Heaven first..." (Midnight 364).

In Rage of Angels Jennifer's sense of humour saves her sanity when she is disgraced at the court after having lasted as a lawyer for just four hours. She consoles herself thus: "There's one bright side to this. I can get into the Guinness Book of Records for the shortest law career in history" (57). A computer which has lost all records is cursed to "rust in hell" (Rage 76). Jennifer, the lawyer, once tells the priest who brings her a hopeless
case: "Father, it's going to take your Boss to help him" (Rage 77). When the witnesses in a case glorify the deceased Thorps in hyperbolic fashion, Jennifer feels, "By the time they were finished, one would have thought that Raymond Thorpe had been wrongfully deprived of sainthood" (Rage 99). Once, when a case is going very badly, Jennifer's pessimism makes her feel she would lose the case, while her optimism gives her the hope that she could he hit by a truck before the end of the trial (Rage 88). This is like Lara Cameron, at the lowest point of her career, hoping in a plane, "May be we'll get lucky and crash" (Stars 3). Jennifer says she can judge her child objectively and thinks that he may be the "Second Coming" (Rage 279).

In If Tomorrow Comes, Tracy has found out the man responsible for her mother's death. In a spirit of anger she goes to buy a gun. When she gives a fictitious address, the shopkeeper, a resident of that area, helps her with gentle humour: "There is no Thirty-twenty Dowman Road. That would be in the middle of the river. We'll make it Fifty-twenty" (Tomorrow 32).

When Lara Cameron rings up her assistant from Venice, the latter comically wonders, "Are we buying a canal?"
(Stars 255) In *Windmills of the Gods*, Mary is exasperated with her teenage daughter who is a health freak. When the girl says, "I can't eat this. You're trying to kill me," Mary answers, "Don't put any ideas in my head" (37). She is so baffled by her children's ways that she wants to sell them, and wonders who would buy them (*Windmills* 39). In *Windmills of the Gods* as well as in *Rage of Angels* the amusing ideas of children and their funny doings are described with great sense of humour in several places.

In *The Sands of Time* Lucia feels that the nuns "look like a bunch of penguins" and the bad food in the convent makes her feel that the convent is "God's version of a health farm" (31; 35). At a mechanic's shop, Jaime remarks that his car "sputters like an old woman and has no energy" and the mechanic comments: "It sounds like my wife" (*Sands* 296).

In *Morning, Noon, and Might* Steve asks about a sensational millionaire, "What's Stanford done now?" and the reply is, "He's gotten himself dead" (48). Getting from one payday to another is described as a "financial minefield" (*Morning* 238).

*Nothing Lasts Forever* is filled with several hospital jokes. A woman about to deliver says, "Thank God! I'll be
able to see my toes again" (95). Jimmy tells Dr. Paige several jokes: a patient in a body cast had been a window washer at the Empire State Building and had quit halfway down (96); a man in Houston, who enquired about the quickest way to the hospital, was asked to say something bad about Texas (96); there was a patient who was given two weeks to live and, when he felt he could not settle his bills that soon, he was told by the doctor, "'I'll give you another two weeks' " (133); a patient fed intravenously asked for an extra bottle as he was having a guest for lunch (184); and, when a patient was told that the best thing he could do was to give up smoking, drinking and sex, he replied "'I don't deserve the best. What's the second best?' " (194)

Irony is also used to effect by Sheldon in his narrative. In A Stranger in the Mirror Sheldon describes the Christmas parades in Hollywood: The Santa Claus parade is conducted not to bring cheer into people's lives "but because the parade is televised and their faces will be seen coast to coast" (211). Ironically, Toby Temple, the famous comedian who made millions laugh, has a grinning, Jnurtmizied face, smiling idiotically after he suffers a stroke (Stranger 324).
When, on Jennifer's first day at court, someone gives her a parcel, saying that her chief asked that it be given to her specifically, she is thrilled: "He remembered my name, she thought. It's a good omen" (Rage 26). Ironically, what she thinks to be a good omen is the beginning of her crisis. In Nothing Lasts Forever Paige comes to Chicago from Africa and calls Chicago a jungle (60). When she later asks a surgeon what they were operating on, the latter ironically tells the truth: "His wallet" (103). In If Tomorrow Comes there is a fine illustration of irony when Tracy arrives in New Orleans on learning of her mother's death: "It was obscene ... a million Furies celebrating the death of her mother"; in the masquerade, a devil, a deer and a giant Panda manhandle her; and, "She struggled free and tried to run, but it was impossible. She was hemmed in, trapped, a part of the singing, dancing celebration. She moved with the chanting mob, tears streaming down her face. There was no escape" (23-24).

Pathos is skilfully handled by Sheldon without making the narrative maudlin. In A Stranger in the Mirror Toby's mother is described thus: "Somewhere inside Frieda was a beautiful young girl, trapped with a face and body that God had given her as some kind of cosmic joke" (22). Every time
Toby flopped, he would pray to God to take away his desire to be a comedian and say, "let me want to be a shoe salesman or a butcher. Anything but this" (Stranger 48). Sheldon writes about cine world extras: "They had become shopworn without having been used, aged without mellowing, too old for a career with a plastics company, too old to have babies, too old for those younger parts once so coveted" (Stranger 188). An old-age home is described pathetically as a place "filled with used-up mothers and fathers" (Stranger 153).

In the Other Side of Midnight Catherine sees her father's dead body: "A part of her had died and could never be recovered. . . . Time had shrunk him as though the constant abrasion of living had worn him down and made him smaller" (126). Catherine is handed her father's personal belongings, the treasures of a lifetime—fifty dollars, old snapshots, a few bills, a watch, a penknife and a bundle of her letters to him: "It was a pitiful legacy for any man to have left and Catherine's heart broke for her father. His dreams were so big and his successes so small" (Midnight 121).

In Rage of Angels Michael, the rich man, tells Jennifer of his poverty in youth. He relates how, once, in
Mexico, he had swallowed the clay doll in a cake when he learnt that it was the local custom to make the one who got the doll pay the bill for dinner (337-38). When Joshua, Jennifer's young son, dies, she feels that he is cold within too. She covers the body, hoping to make him warm. She talks to him and dresses him in his baseball uniform. The narration is moving and sure to make eyes moist (Rage 421-25). Similar passages filled with pathos are found in Nothing Lasts Forever: Paige looks at the cadaver and thinks:

Here was a man with a home and a family... he laughed and cried^ and he watched his children grow up... he had big, wonderful dreams. I hope they all came true .... A bittersweet sadness engulfed her- because he was dead and she was alive. (37-38).

In another passage, she sees the possessions of a dead man. "There was an inexpensive watch, a set of keys, fifteen dollars in cash, dentures, and a letter to his wife. All that remained of a man's life" (128). In If Tomorrow Comes Tracy cannot bring herself to see her mother's lifeless body:
No! I don't want to see the lifeless body lying in the box. . . . Tracy moved forward slowly, each step a screaming inside her. Then she was staring down at the lifeless remains of the body that had borne her, nourished her, laughed with her, loved her. She bent over and kissed her mother on the cheek. The cheek was cold and rubbery. (25)

Tracy is shocked by the sexual assaults in prison. Having been subjected to lesbian rape, she breaks down every night when she hears screams from other cells. "The screams went on and on, until they finally diminished into helpless, racking sobs" (Tomorrow 100).

In Bloodline Elisabeth is shocked to see the animals kept in a laboratory for test purposes:

Many of the animals had obscene-looking growths protruding from various parts of their bodies. Some had their heads shaven, and were crowned with electrodes that had been implanted in their brains. Some of the animals were screaming and gibbering, racing around in their cages, while others were comatose and lethargic. The noise and the stench were unbearable. It was like some kind
of hell. Elisabeth walked up to a cage that contained a single white kitten. Its brain was enclosed, enclosed in a clear plastic covering through which protruded half a dozen wires.

Authenticity is the hallmark of all great literary works. Realistic and contemporary details lend strength and worth to a novel. Such novels help us to peep into cities and countries, men and manners of a particular age. In this way, Sheldon's novels have great social relevance. In his novels, minute and accurate pen-pictures of particular institutions or cities, along with his general observations and universal truths, become an unusual amalgamation of the time-bound and the timeless. Sheldon's views on men and manners are revealed in his novels. Realism and authenticity can be traced in his accurate and faithful descriptions of cities, institutions, customs and human behaviour and manners. His observations and comments are spiced with humour and tempered by tolerance.

Sheldon gives us several views of American society. In A Stranger in the Mirror he gives several details about the Depression of the thirties and the film world: "movie theatres all over the country were trying every conceivable
stratagem to fill their empty seats. They gave away dishes and radios, and had keno nights and bingo nights and hired organists to accompany the bouncing ball while the audience sang along" (28). Sheldon describes Hollywood, which has made or broken several aspiring actors:

Hollywood, California, in 1946, was the film capital of the world, a magnet for the talented, the greedy, the beautiful, the hopeful and the weird. It was the land of palm trees and Rita Hayworth and the Holy Temple of the Universal Spirit and Santa Anita. It was the agent who was going to make you an overnight star; it was a con game, a whorehouse, an orange grove, a shrine. It was a magical kaleidoscope, and each person who looked into it saw his own vision. (60)

There is an interesting note on Vaudeville, the training ground for all comedians and there are terrible truths about the nightclubs and toilet circuits in A Stranger in the Mirror:

Vaudeville had flourished in America from 1881 until its final demise when the Palace Theatre closed its doors in 1932. Vaudeville had been the training ground for all the aspiring young
comics, the battlefield where they sharpened their wits against hostile, jeering audiences.... For the struggling young comics like Toby, however, it was another story. They played nightclubs, too, but it was a different world. It was called the Toilet Circuit, and the name was a euphemism. It consisted of dirty saloons all over the country where the great unwashed public gathered to guzzle beer and belch at the strippers and destroy the comics for sport. The dressing rooms were stinking toilets, smelling of stale food and spilled drinks and urine and cheap perfume and, overlaying it all, the rancid odour of fear: flop sweat. (45)

The murky, sordid, perverted film world has been etched in a stark manner in this novel. We are filled with horror and intense sadness when we see the exploitation of women in the studios. The despair and the disillusionment of the aspiring stars are painted heartrendingly.

In Master of the Game there are several realistic, colourful descriptions of African towns and people. Cape Town is a mixture of big and small buildings, some posh and glittering, the others run-down and ramshackle. It is
filled with Kaffirs, Chinesemen, Boer farmers, Parsi women and English soldiers (21). A typical market day is described thus:

Saturday was market day in Cape Town and the streets were crowded with shoppers looking for bargains, meeting friends and lovers. Boers and Frenchmen, soldiers in colorful uniforms and English ladies in flounced skirts and ruffled blouses mingled in front of the basaars set up in the town squares at Braameonstein and Park Town and Eurgersdorp. Everything was for sale: furniture, horses and carriages and fresh fruit. One could purchase dresses and chessboards, or meat or books in a dozen different languages.

(Master 57)

The description of the diamond-mining town of Klipdrift and the African veld are noteworthy (Master 26-27; 40).

Sheldon almost provides tourist pamphlets on most places on the continent. The following is the description of London in Memories of Midnight:
London ... a cornucopia of wonderful theater, ballet and music concerts. There were interesting old bookstores like Eatchard's and Foyle's--and dozens of museums, little antique shops, and restaurants. Catherine visited the lithograph shops in Cecil Court and shopped at Harrods, and Fortnum and Mason, and Marks and Spencer, and had Sunday tea at the Savoy. (78)

Conditions of life in a Muslim country are presented realistically in this novel: the biasing heat, the mosquitoes, flies, dust, fever and dysentery, the oil rigs, the ban on alcohol and the gruesome punishment of chopping off human organs for theft (14).

France has been pictured authentically in *The Other Side of Midnight*. The particular and the universal blend in a description of Marseille:

On the surface Marseille is a city of violence, the kind of primitive violence spawned in any waterfront town crowded with hungering sailors with money to spend and clever predators to relieve them of it. But unlike the rest of the French, the people of Marseille have a sense of solidarity that comas from a common struggle for
survival, for the lifeblood of the town comes from the sea, and the fishermen of Marseille belong to the family of fisherman all over the world. They share alike in the storms and the calm days, the sudden disasters and the bountiful harvests. (31)

The important landmarks of Paris such as Mai Mai son, place des Vosges, Notre Dame, the colourful market at Maubert. the Marche de Buci, Du Pont on Montpaxnasse etc. are described. Dinner on the Bateau Mouche and onion soup at four in the morning at les Halles, along with butchers and truck drivers, bring France alive in all its local colour (52-53). The description of France and its people during the war in the 1940s is very realistic (83-85).

The novel gives us a peep into Greece also:

Athens is an anvil that has withstood the hammer of centuries.... Underneath the shiny patina of the city one still found a village filled with ancient ghosts and steeped in rich tradition of timeless glories, where its citizens lived as much in their past as in the present, a city of
constant surprise, full of discovery, and in the end unknowable. (Midnight 275)

According to Sheldon, Greece is "a marvel of organised inefficiency" (Midnight 293). No one appears to be in a hurry and the traffic is eccentric, as the Greeks have not yet made the transition from carts to cars. They still belong to the past in spirit (Midnight 302).

Holland has been beautifully pictured in If Tomorrow Comes and The Stars Shine Down. The former describes Amsterdam thus:

- Amsterdam is a tourist's paradise, a city of windmills and dairns and row upon row of gabled houses leaning crazily against one another along a network of tree-lined canals filled with houseboats decorated by boxes of geraniums and plants, and laundry flying in the breeze. (459)

The Stars Shine Down talks about places of interest such as the Rijkmuseum, the Botanical Gardens of the Free University, Concertgebouw, P.C. Hoofstraat, Leidestraat and so on (244). A cruise along the Amstel River is described realistically:
They boarded a canal bus that cruised the Amstel .......... The canal trip was an enchantment. A loudspeaker poured out information in four languages: "We are now passing centuries-old merchants' houses with their richly decorated gables. Ahead are ancient church towers. There are 1,200 bridges on the canals, all in the shade of magnificent avenues of elm trees ...'

They passed the Smalste Huis . . . and the 'Westerkerk' . . . and they went under the wooden lift bridge over the Amstel, and the Magere Brug—the skinny bridge—and passed scores of houseboats that served as home for hundreds of families. (Stars 248)

Similar is the description of Venice in The Star's Shine Down:

Venice was the kind of magical city that Prospero might have created.... She [Lara] roamed through San Marco Square, and visited the Doge's Palace and the Bell Tower, and wandered along the crowded Riva degli Schiavoni.... She walked through the winding little side streets, crammed
with jewellery shops and leather goods and restaurants. (255)

Sheldon leads us through Vienna by his faithful descriptions of the city: the Kartner Strasse, a busy shopping area; horse-drawn Fiaker; Schonbrunn Palace; the Lipizaner stallions; and, a cruise on the Danube and so on (Stars 259-60).

Sheldon provides keyhole glimpses into the Iron curtain countries of Russia and Romania. His observations are typically American:

Moscow in June is one of the loveliest cities in the world. Graceful white bereska and Lipa trees with yellow flowerbeds line the wide boulevards crowded with natives and visitors strolling in the sunshine. It is the season for tourists. (Stranger 301)

An interesting insight into the "People's State" is provided by Sheldon when he mentions a store in Moscow "crammed with imported luxury foodstuffs from all over the world. This was where the ^NachalstoV, the Russian elite, were privileged to shop" (Stranger 302) .
Several such observations are made in Windmills of the £25M about Romania. Cigarette packs make the economy go around: "If you want to see a doctor, you give the nurse cigarettes. If you want meat from the butcher, a mechanic to fix your automobile, or an electrician to fix a lamp—you bribe them with cigarettes" (214). The story of Bula, a mythical character in Romania, is told with characteristic humour: Bula, who gets mad after having waited for over five hours in a queue to get meat, vows to kill Ionescu and rushes to the palace, but he comes back to the queue two hours later to inform his friends that there is a long line at the palace too (Windmills 214-15).

The Romanians are more interested in the commercials than in the films, for they are able to look at things they can never have (Windmills 215).

Sheldon's novels abound in descriptions of several cities—Istanbul, Madrid, Majorca, Singapore etc. The crowded, colourful Bugis Street in Singapore is so painted in The Rage of Angels with its trishaws, the fruit and vegetable stalls and the outdoor restaurants that the reader is able to imaginatively drink in the sights, the sounds, the smells and a riot of colours (451). The midnight parade of transsexuals, known as "Billy Boys", is
also presented (Midnight 452). The description of the Street with No Name, with its houses of death, is eerie and realistic (Rage 4 64).

Sheldon excels in describing institutions such as hospitals, courts, convents and prisons. There is an interesting account of hospital life in Nothing Lasts Forever. Life in a Cistercian convent is presented to us in The Sands of Time—the spartan life; the austere, ominous silence; the sign language; the eight hours of prayer; the tolling of bells; the self-flagellation; the rites of death etc. (29-30; 153-54).

• While courtrooms are portrayed in Rage of Angels, The Other Side of Midnight, Memories of Midnight and The Naked Face, the NASA is depicted in The Doomsday Conspiracy. Prisons have been captured in their sordid, murky atmosphere in Rags of Angels and in If Tomorrow Comes. The morbid aura of funeral parlours is evoked in several novels. The film industry has been minutely chiselled in A Stranger in the Mirror and there are telling words-pictures about real estate business in The Stars Shine Down.

Several interesting local customs and lore lend colour to Sheldon's narrative. A Jewish funeral is described in gpthing Lasts Forever: the burial takes place as soon as
possible following the death and many Jewish beliefs are explained (123-29). Another reference to a Jewish burial is found in Bloodline: "the burial party carefully dug up the ground under his mother's body: for it was soaked in her blood, and according to the Scriptures, it had to be buried with her so that she could be returned to God whole" (99).

It is interesting that, in a Chinese funeral, the parade moves around the city as it is their custom to take the departed past some of the places that he frequented (Nothing 135).

In Greece, when you ask a local how far a place is, he will say "one cigarette away" (Midnight 294).

An African native does not know his age, for natives have no birth certificates: "Their ages were measured by tribal lore: wars and battles, and births and deaths of great chiefs, comets and blizzards and earthquakes, Adam Kok's trek, the death of Cliaka and the cattle-killing revolution" (Master 57).

African native medicos are called wogesha and their primitive remedies are passed on from father to son, and often have deadly effects: "The Kikuyu remedy for smallpox
was to have children drive out the sickness with sticks" (Nothing 56).

In Morning, Noon, and Night, the Harvard Bridge connecting Boston and Cambridge is said to be "exactly three hundred sixty-four point four Smoots and one ear long" and an amusing local story is given to explain 'Smoot':

A Smoot is a measurement using the body of Oliver Reed Smoot, who was five feet seven inches. It started as a joke, but when the city rebuilt the bridge, they kept the marks. The Smoot became a standard of length in 1958. (306)

Realism is seen in the description of fussy, overprotective mothers and childish pranks in Rage of Angels (275-76; 290-91). Mary's exasperation with her adolescent children's behaviour has been vividly depicted in Windmills of the Gods (37-39; 76-80).

The mad rush and frenetic atmosphere preceding a fashion show is pictured in Morning, Noon, and Night, with panic prevailing inside the auditorium:

A dozen half-naked models were running around in a kind of mass hysteria, while ushers finished
setting up chairs and carpenters pounded away at last-minute bits of carpentry. El very one was screaming and gesticulating wildly, and the noise level was painful.

In the eye of the hurricane, trying to bring order out of chaos, was the mattresse herself, Kendall Stanford Renaud. Four hours before the fashion show was scheduled to begin, everything was falling apart. Catastrophe: John Fairchild of W was unexpectedly going to be in Paris, and there was no seat for him. Tragedy: The speaker system was not working. Disaster: Lili, one of the top models, was ill. Emergency: Two of the makeup artists were fighting backstage and were far behind schedule. Calamity: All the seams on the cigarette skirts were tearing.

In other words, Kendall thought wryly, everything is normal. (77-78)

The following description of Chicago in The Other Side of Midnight deserves special attention:
Every large city has a distinctive image, a personality that gives it its own special cachet. Chicago in the 1920's was a restless, dynamic giant, crude and without manners, one booted foot still in the ruthless era of the tycoons who helped give birth to it. (15)

So does the following description of Paris in the same novel:

The soldiers neither knew nor cared that Paris was the city of Baudelaire, Dumas and Moliere. To them Paris was a garish, eager, overpainted whore and they raped her, each in his own way. (84)

Sheldon's views, beliefs and observations are thought-provoking. His worldview or philosophy often surfaces in his novels. At the end of *The Naked Face*, the psychiatrist finally gets rid of the mentally sick killer DeMaxco and ponders over whether it is indeed a victory:

*We've won*, he thought. *We've won .... What kind of victory was it? He had thought of himself as a decent, civilised human being—a doctor, a healer—and he had turned into a savage animal
filled with the lust to kill. He had sent a sick man over the brink of insanity and then murdered him. It was a terrible burden he would have to live with always. Because even though he could tell himself it was in self-defense, he knew—God help him—that he had enjoyed doing it.... Civilisation was a thin, dangerously fragile veneer, and when that veneer cracked, man became one with the beasts again, falling back into the slime of the primeval abyss he prided himself on having climbed up from. (315)

In *The Other Side of Midnight*, Catherine is happy with her father, though he is good-for-nothing, for she loves his enthusiasm and smiling face in a sullen world. He has taught her to dream and laugh, two precious gifts in this world (21; S3).

A similar philosophy is expressed through Catherine in *Memories of Midnight*: "I'm alive, she thought. No one is born happy. Everyone has to make his own happiness. I'm a survivor. I'm young and I'm healthy and wonderful things are going to happen"1 (80).

The impartiality of nature is brought out in the description of "sleety rain that fell impartially on sleek
limousines driven down Market Street by uniformed chauffeurs, and on the abandoned and boarded-up houses huddled together in the slums of North Philadelphia” (Tomorrow 6).

The bartering going on in prisons, the atrocities committed by women on women, according to Sheldon, are all means of survival (Tomorrow 98-100). Convicts have a label stuck on them and are never accepted by society. It is the society that is responsible for making them continue to be criminals. They are denied opportunities to reform (Tomorrow 208).

Through one of his characters, Sheldon tells us how we can be somebody important: It is "By knowing that you're important. First, you get an image in your mind of who you want to be . . . and what you want to be. And then you go to work, becoming that person" (Nothing 52). Sheldon emphasises the importance of reading and education for women, particularly black women, in this novel:

^ead, and you'll learn where you came from and where you're going. I've got a feeling that you're going to be famous one day, baby. But you have to get an education first. This is America. You can become anybody you want to be. You may be
black and poor, but so were some of our congresswomen, and movie stars, and scientists, and sports legends. One day we're going to have a black president. You can be anything you want to. It's up to you.' (53)

Sheldon's philosophy seems to be that nothing in life can be got free (Nothing 110),

The novelist's feeling for the poor is reflected in Rage of Angels: "Being poor is only romantic in books. In real life, it's smelly rooms with rats and cockroaches and bad food that you can never get enough of" (337). The novel portrays people in trouble, with no one to help them, with no money or power to fight the Establishment and finally crushed by it. It shows justice honoured mostly in its breach.

Sheldon's cynical worldview is evident in Windmills of the Gods:

We're brought up to expect a happy ending.... But there are no happy endings. There's only death waiting for us. We find love and happiness, and it's snatched away from us without rhyme! or reason. We're on a deserted space ship careening
mindlessly among the stars. The_world_is_Dachau, and we're all Jews. (101)

Sheldon describes the world as God's slaughterhouse and men as his cattle (Windmills 102).

In Doomsday Conspiracy, the aliens express their sympathy for human beings:

Nothing has changed with the Earthlings. It is a pity. They have learned nothing. We will teach them. (71)

They have come to the earth to prevent earthlings from destroying the earth, since all creatures are part of one universe.

Sheldon seems to be an atheist or an agnostic and belief in hunanness seems to be his religion. In A Stranger in the Mirror there are several sceptical references to religious revival meetings. These meetings proclaim that all men are sinners and they will be punished in terrible ways by a merciless God. Belief in God's wrath and sure damnation for the wicked and the unrepentant is highlighted to bring out the fanatical nature of such meetings. These meetings inculcate a terrible sense of guilt and fear in the minds of those who attend them (50-56). Sheldon seems
to be against any coercion in matters of religion. Ke believes that "in this life you made your own miracles because God was busy elsewhere" (Stranger 233). In Nothing Lasts Forever there is a mild criticism of the Jehovah's witnesses who do not permit blood transfusion even to save a child's life (116).

Jennifer, in Rage of Angels, questions the very existence of God when her son Joshua dies (420). In The Sands of Time, during a bomb attack, the wounded, frightened people are not let into a locked church. They themselves do not dare break into the house of God and are soon torn to pieces by a hail of bullets (211-12). Sheldon's description of nuns and convent life in this novel is not only sceptical but also tinged with satire.

Sheldon's views on old age and death are found in several novels. In A Stranger in the Mirror Toby's father is in a nursing home for the aged, which had the smell of death.... It was filled with used-up mothers and fathers who were in the way.... they were becoming an embarrassment whenever there were guests, and had been sent to this nursing home by their children, nieces and nephews....
The Eskimos were more honest about it. They sent their old people out onto the ice and abandoned them there. (153)

Toby's father is happy when one of the patients staying in a single room dies because he can now move into this vacant room (Stranger 153). Sheldon's views on death appear in many novels: Bloodline (290), Rage of Angels (421-25), The Other Side of Midnight (126), to mention but a few.

In The Other Side of Midnight Noelle realises the value of life when faced with death:

In the past Noelle had been careless of life, recklessly squandering time as though it were eternal: but now something in her had changed. The imminent prospect of death had made Noelle realise for the first time how much she wanted to live. (397)

In Nothing Lasts Forever, the medical students, who are respectful to the dead persons in the anatomy laboratory in the initial stages, become callous in course of time, "eating sandwiches during the dissections, and making rude jokes. It was a form of self-defense, a denial of their own mortality. They gave the corpses names, and
treated them like old friends" (37). Kat Hunter reminds us that "We're all dying.... Forget what Dylan Thomas said". The real trick is to go gentle into that good night (79). In this novel, Sheldon seems to advocate euthanasia.

Sheldon often becomes a crusader for women's equality. In Bloodline, Elisabeth's birth is described as a double tragedy—the minor tragedy being her mother's death on the delivery table and the major one being that Elisabeth is a girl (88). When Elisabeth grows up into a beautiful woman it is concluded that she should be stupid (Bloodline 160-61). She soon understands her special problem—she is a woman in a man's world.

Lara's problem in The Stars Shine Down is similar. Her father is disgusted and angry with fate for having killed the boy and not the girl along with his wife. He keeps telling everyone that the wrong child died (23-26). Lara grows up into a real estate promoter in the midst of gender bias. Jennifer in Rage of Angels too suffers due to this gender discrimination: "Because she had entered a man's world she had to work twice as hard and be twice as good as the competition" (164).
Mary Ashley in *Windmills of the Gods* meets with several obstacles because she is a woman ambassador and, to make matters worse for her, she is in a male chauvinist country (198; 240). The exploitation of woman in the film world is pathetic and shocking. While an actor can grow old unconcernedly, it is not so in the case of an actress. The moment a woman gets a wrinkle, her career takes a nosedive (Stranger 229). In *Nothing Lasts Forever* too, gender bias is brought out powerfully. The women doctors are not accepted as "real" doctors. At the most, they are considered as nurses. Men doctors seem to think that they are "perks that go with the territory" (47). Ironically, even the chief nurse, herself a woman has "an antipathy to woman doctors" (Nothing 75).

Sheldon feels strongly against cruelty to animals, even when they are used as guinea pigs in science laboratories (Bloodline 201).

Sheldon is also a crusader for the minorities, be they Jews or Blacks. In *The Other Side of Midnight* Noelle ruminates over the word "Juden" which meant nothing to her, but wonders "what must it be like to live that word, to be a Jew in a country sworn to wipe you out, exterminate you, particularly when it was your own motherland" (142). In
Bloodline there is a detailed and moving account of the inhuman treatment meted out to Jews (127-28; 135-40).

In Master of the Game we hear of the African natives being whipped: "'you can't hurt a native.... Their hides are so thick they don't even feel the goddamned whip. It just scares them' " (144).

Sheldon has sympathy for call-girls too. In Master of the Game: "Of all the female species, they were the most honest. All they wanted was money.... You paid for what you got, and you got what you paid for. No complications, no tears, no deceit" (289).

Sheldon feels that the homeless are a disgrace to a country as wealthy as America (Stars 165). His pride in America is evident in Nothing Lasts Forever; "'This is America. You can become anybody you want to be. You may be black and poor.... You can be anything you want to be. It's up to you' " (53). Sheldon's view that "we do not inherit the world from our parents; we borrow it from our children" is unusual, but true and beautiful (Rage 291).

Sheldon's understanding of human psychology is remarkable. He is able to trace the influence of childhood on the lives of characters very convincingly. The role of
parents may be either positive or negative. Toby Temple, Paige Taylor, Tracy Whitney, Jennifer Parker, Catherine Alexander and Kate Blackwell have all enjoyed parental love. But Josephine Czinski and Lara Cameron have had a lonely childhood. Noelle's father betrays her. Elisabeth Roffe, in *Bloodline*, craves for her father's love in the beginning and wins it finally. Tony Blackwell suffers due to the excessive love of his manipulating mother. Graciela and Kat Hunter have been scarred by a terrible childhood. Megan, an orphan, has never belonged to any one. Parental influence is a major factor in determining the psychological attitudes of the characters. The rejections, betrayals and disappointments faced by them in later life aggravate these attitudes.

In *A Stranger in the Mirror*, Toby's mother helps him to escape from being trapped into marriage. She sends him to New York and wants him to become a famous star. Her death shocks Toby and he speaks of his mother in all his interviews as that is the only way by which he can share his success with her. Josephine, in the same novel, has never felt loved and wanted by her mother. She is lonely with her fears. David Kenyon's mother makes her children feel guilty that she has risked death for their sake. This
qivcs her a powerful hold on them. Josephine's insecure childhood, poverty, her mother's fanaticism and her shattered dreams make her psychologically abnormal. She takes revenge on her enemies and finally kills her paralysed husband Toby. Sheldon deals psychologically with Toby's mind being alive in a frozen spastic body and of Jill's guilt haunting her. This guilt chases her and she too dies by drowning.

In *The Other Side of Midnight* Noelle dies a princess and is reborn a slut because of her father's betrayal. Her will to survive is fired by her hate and strengthened further by the betrayal of her lover Larry. She achieves everything in life because of her hatred. Larry's wife Catherine has a loveable father who is a failure but has taught her to laugh and dream. Paradoxically, parental love makes her passive when faced with trials, whereas Noelle appears to have become a sadist. Sadism develops inexorably in her when she carries Larry's child and waits for it to grow so that it will feel the pain when she aborts it. She is also sadistic when she plans the murder of Catherine. Sheldon shows Noelle employing keen psychological insight in playing on the ego of the German officer when she helps Dr. Israel to escape. Demeris, for his part, uses his
knowledge of Noelle's fear of death, tricks her and savours her terror in the end. In Bloodline, Elizabeth suffers psychological trauma thinking that it is her husband who is trying to kill her. The Naked Face, the central character of which is a psychoanalyst, is filled with several aspects of human psychology.

Tracy Whitney, in If Tomorrow Comes, is unable to accept her mother's suicide. It becomes a turning point in her life. She thirsts for revenge and lands herself in prison. The novel reveals the writer's deep understanding of prisoner psychology. Later Tracy uses psychology to triumph in her several adventures.

In Rage of Angels Jennifer adores her father who is also her friend, teacher and mentor. Her mother's elopement has had such a lasting and painful impact on Jennifer that she never accepts divorce cases.

In Master of the Game Kate is proud to be like her father. She goes to any extent to achieve her ends. Her dominating nature makes her son Tony stammer in her presence. He is psychologically hurt that she sees him only as a crown prince and never as a son. She thwarts his artistic ambitions. She also succeeds in her marriage plans for him by deliberately pushing him in the opposite
direction, knowing his tendency to defy her. Ironically, her excessive love breeds such hatred in him that he finally attempts to kill her.

In *Nothing Lasts Forever*, Paige has inherited the selfless dedication of her doctor-father. Her mother's desertion of the family does not affect her very much. However, she is psychologically upset when her fiance betrays her. In this novel, Kat Hunter's youth has left a psychological scar, for she has turned against all men because of her lustful stepfather. Her mother has neither cared for her nor believed her. Kat's only weakness is her good-for-nothing younger brother. Honey Tart's family has implanted in her a deep feeling of inferiority. She uses sex to please men and get things done. She has been made thru.; by her family's high expectations of her.

In *The Stars Shine Down* Lara, who has never got affection from her father, resorts to make-believe in later life and tells everyone that she has achieved such fame only because of her father. His hatred for her has shaped Lara positively. In order to prove him wrong, she becomes a great achiever.

In *Sands of Time* Graciela's youthful lust does not accompany her into adulthood. She even gives up marriage,
for, at the altar, she remembers that she is already married to God. She returns to the convent, which alone can give her happiness. A negative atmosphere at home has not weakened her but has only strengthened her.

In *Windmills of the Gods* Mary is a very successful ambassador because of her understanding of human psychology. Catherine's psychological trauma, not knowing who she is in the beginning of *Memories of Midnight*, has been very subtly handled. Her fear of the unknown killer also adds psychological depth to the novel. Judge Tyler in *Morning, Noon, and Night* hires men to kill his father because of the latter's hatred and contempt for his children. Tyler's father has used every opportunity to humiliate him, especially after knowing that his son is a homosexual. Tyler has always seen his father as Saturn devouring his son.

Sheldon also seems to have a very good understanding of child psychology. *Rage of Angels* shows Joshua passing through the various stages of growing up, now destructive, now stubborn, now angelic and now responsible. His love of fixing things, biting a pup, and asking visitors terribly awkward questions are amusingly portrayed. Modern children's preoccupation with health foods and school
problems, the bickerings between siblings, their infatuations and crushes, and their crazy use of language have been pictured with a sound understanding of children's psychology.

Several kinds of perversions are also portrayed in Sheldon's novels. They are all psychologically dealt with and explained. Interestingly, the perverts are not ever the central characters but are only peripheral and secondary ones. Sexual perversions (Stranger), lesbianism (Tomorrow), terrible rapes (Sands; Doomsday) are all realistically presented. Psychological perversions of patients are discussed in The Naked Face. In Bloodline, there are many characters with perversions: Ivo's wild mistress Donatella, Helene with her excessive libido, a mentally unbalanced Anna who is hallucinating and violent, and Alec, the mysterious sadist who loves to see women killed in moments of ecstasy during lovemaking.

Inspector Cooper, in If Tomorrow Comes, kills his mother, who is immoral, and, from then suffers a psychosomatic vision problem and has an obsession to wash himself clean very often. To him, all women are whores (482-85). In Rage of Angels Ken is a homosexual. There is a psychopathic liar and pervert in the novel, Jack Scalon,
who rapes and sodomises children. To him, all women are unclean like his whore of a sister and only little children are pure.

Catherine in *Memories of Midnight* is nearly killed by Atanas, the sadist who rapes his victims before killing them. *Windmills of the Gods* portrays Marin Groza as a sadomasochist. He punishes himself by asking call girls to whip him and this ritual is almost a penance: he was unable to save his wife and his young daughter from being gang raped, sodomized and finally killed and he was himself castrated then. George Melis, in *Master of the Game*, is a terrible sadist, who bashes up his women for his pleasure. In the same novel Eve has a destructive streak of violence in her from childhood and she is cunning and promiscuous.

Sheldon's psychological insight is evident in the characterization of Ashley in *Tell Me Your Dreams*. Multiple personality disorder, also called dissociative identity disorder, is said to begin because of a childhood trauma. The victim shuts out the trauma by creating another identity. A person can have dozens of alters in him. The host may not know them. The alters sometimes know one another. Alters are born when the host cannot stand the pain of a trauma. It is a form of escape from reality.
Alters can be totally different from the host. The host suffers a loss of time and memory when the alter is in control. It is said that alters use the same initials as the host: Ashley Patterson, Antoinette Prescott (Toni) and Alette Peters. It is interesting to note in this context that in A Stranger in the Mirror, Josephine Csinski becomes Jill Castle, retaining the same initials.

Ashley's terrible childhood is pathetic. She has not had love from either mother or father. Her mother has always criticised her and discouraged her talents. When Ashley's mother dies in a car crash, the child, thrown out of the same car, watches silently without helping her mother. When Walter Manning rejects Alette's painting in order to favour his artist daughter, he is killed by Alette in a hit-and-run accident.

The psychological influence of parents is seen in Ashley's behaviour. She has suffered her mother's neglect and criticism. She has been sexually abused by her father. As a result, lasting damage has been done to her. She suffers multiple personality disorder and becomes a maniacal killer.

Sheldon uses his knowledge and understanding of human psychology not merely for his characterization but in his
A close study of his novels reveals a pattern. His heroines and a few other characters withdraw into a world of make-believe in a moment of crisis. This withdrawal from reality cushions them from the shocks of the present reality. They withdraw for a while, but soon return. This creates a criss-cross pattern in the novels: lines of reality and unreality, or the present and the past, criss-cross.

In A Stranger in the Mirror, Josephine often dwells in a world of fantasy and make-believe (156). When she is drugged into doing a pornographic film, she imagines the actor to be her lover David (217-18). At the end of the novel, Josephine, now Jill, sees her dead husband's face beckoning to her. Hallucination and reality mingle and she finds herself in the deep sea along with Toby.

Carol's past and present criss-cross in The Naked Face. Such a pattern is evident in The Other Side of Midnight too. Catherine, fleeing from her killers, slips back to her childhood and is no longer afraid. She feels safe and secure praying (387). Her withdrawal cushions her during the trauma. Noelle, before being shot, is mentally with her father. She has withdrawn into her happy childhood, when she was her father's "Princess". She feels
sad only because she is not able to recollect his face clearly (434-35). Present and past, real and make-believe criss-cross very dramatically in the novel.

If Tomorrow Comes has several criss-crosses. During the ride to the prison, Tracy withdraws into her past. She is not aware of the present as "she had withdrawn into herself, no longer conscious of the other passengers. . . . She was in another time, in another place" (54). She is now a little girl with her loving parents on the beach; she is a bright student in school. Reality suddenly crosses when the guard shouts at her. She is instantaneously back in the present, in the prison. Soon she withdraws again from the prison to her tenth birthday. She can hear the clang of a streetcar bell. The bell in the prison clangs and brings her back to reality (68). Her tall call-mate transports her back in time. Tracy is now going to the E:00 when she sees a giraffe for the first time (72). Mien she is brutally abused and bashed up by her cell-mates, she withdraws into her childhood and feels secure that "Mama will take care" (76).

In Bloodline the neglected child Elisabeth plays this game of make-believe and imagines that her father loves her. Once, she keeps dancing on the stage even after the music stops in order to please her father, unaware of the
reality (114). Alec imagines that he sees and hears his wife Vivian in the fire. He tries to embrace her and, in the process, he is burnt to death (Bloodline 408-09).

In Memories of Midnight the criss-cross confuses Catherine till she suddenly emerges from it and realises her identity (5-7). Lara, in The Stars Shine Down, makes believe that her father is a rich man who loves her very much. She spends hours in the land of make-believe, imagining her grandfather or the Highlands Scots coming to her rescue and helping her flee from her mirthless life (32-33).

Kate, at the age of ninety, in Master of the Game, is transported to the past by a storm, which she used to call donderstorm in South Africa. That word links the present and the past—for, that is how years ago her father Jamie too exclaimed at Klipdrift (14-15). When David Blackwell warns Kate, now a young lady, to control her "temper", she moves backward in time to a day when she was four years old and in a terrible temper (Master 176).

The sound of a crashing car and the shouts of the people transport Paige from America to Africa, with the natives yelling and fighting in a deadly tribal war (Nothing-31). When a nurse assures a child about an injection, "This won't hurt, baby," the words echo
darJcly in Kat Hunter's mind: it is the voice of her stepfather who made advances to her and it brings back her terrible teenage days. (Nothing 51). The criss-cross pattern is clear in Morning, Noon, and Night too. Tyler often moves from the present to the past and remembers the taunts and humiliations experienced by him because of his father.

Many novels of Sheldon have a dramatic opening and ending, some of them coming a full circle. While Rage of Angels begins dramatically in the courtroom, Nothing Lasts Forever begins and ends so in the courtroom, the action thus coming a full circle. The Stars Shine Down begins and ends in Lara's birthday party. A Stranger in the Mirror begins with an ominous feeling aboard the ship where Jill is to wed David and it ends with the wedding being cancelled, David leaving the ship and Jill dying.

The Other Side of Midnight begins and ends with the trial and the death of Noelle. There is a dramatic anti-climax in Memories of Midnight, which opens with Constantine Demeris planning Catherine's death. At the end of the novel, he is himself killed by the lawyer Chotas. Bloodline begins with Sam Roffee's death and ends with the death of his killer, Alec. The Naked Face begins as well as ends with Christmas and murder. These novels thus offer a very interesting pattern.
A formulaic writer has to invent within conventional boundaries. He should use the brand of style expected of a formulaic writer and, at the same time, introduce an element of "newness" amidst the familiarity. If he moves away from his formula or convention, his readers are disappointed, as it is not like his other novels. Yet, if he repeats the conventions alone, the readers may feel that the novel is just like his previous novels, with nothing new in it. Therefore, a formulaic writer should know the art of mingling convention and invention in the right proportion.

The world of formula can be better understood as an archetypal story expressed in the images and themes of a particular culture. The writer requires the ability to plunge the readers into excitement and, at the same time, he should also reassure them that all will be well. Three devices are used by formula writers, namely, suspense, identification, and, creating exotic worlds: a temporary fear is created; the cliffhanger suspense poses a threat to the protagonist as rescue is suspended for a while; justice is delayed; but the excitement is within the framework of certainty and security (Cawelti, Adventure 16-17).

We approach formulaic literature with certain expectations due to our experience with the writer's
previous works and our exposure to formulaic writing in general. We are encouraged to identify ourselves with the protagonist. This is done in other types of novels as well. But, in formula novels, there is more of an escapist thrust and the protagonists are either superior to us or luckier than people in real life. Formulaic novels are "individual versions of a general pattern defined by a set of rules," producing "a patterned experience of excitement" which can be perennially engrossing (Cawelti, *Adventure* 18-19).

Formula literature maintains "conventional patterns of imaginative expressions" and enables the reader to explore the area between permitted and forbidden realms in a controlled fantasy (Cawelti, *Adventure* 35). It helps in relaxation and escapism. Artistic tension is created by the balancing between conventions and inventions, that is, the individual contribution, or uniqueness of the writer. Such a writer vitalises stereotype characters, invents new problems or creates a unique setting. Stereotype characters in successful formula literature become archetypes in due course. The creative writer endows them with certain qualities contrary to stereotype traits and adds human complexity to the characters. The formula succeeds if the pleasure of the conventional structure is combined with some new elements or the writer's individual vision.
Kiir.etic and fonrailaic literature are not in watertight compartments of the realistic and the idealistic. Formulaic literature stresses more the intensity and gratification of excitement (Cawelti, Adventure 8-14).

Another technique used in formula literature is simplification and intensification. By way of simplification, our attention is focussed on moments of crisis. This is the principle of episodic simplicity. By way of intensification, there is melodramatic use of spectacle. Trials, murder, revolution and war are described as spectacular public events. Such large, sensational events intensify our anguish about the individual episode or crisis. This helps us to hope and have faith in a moral order amidst chaos (Cawelti, Adventure 264-265).

Sheldon's novels satisfy these demands of formulaic literature. Suspense is maintained, the cliffhanger technique is used, exotic lands serve as setting, our attention is focussed on crisis after crisis, and public spectacle intensifies our excitement and anguish. The characters are not mere stereotypes, but individuals with contrariness and complexity. Realismo and idealism are mingled in the right proportion and we are filled with hope of poetic justice and moral order.
Sheldon uses the innovative technique of convergence and divergence. Convergence is the technique of treating similar situations similarly in different novels. Divergence is the technique of treating similar situations differently in different novels. The former technique is part of convention while the latter could be credited to the invention of the writer.

Sheldon's novels have several convergent strands. Heroines like Jennifer (Rage) and Paige (Nothing) have both had loving fathers and their mothers have deserted their family. The theme of betrayal by women converges in several novels. Demsx-is (Midnight), Toby (Stranger), Jeff (Tomorrow) and Paul Martin (Stars) have all been let down by the women they love and cherish.

Tracy (Tomorrow) and Noelle (Midnight) are both tricked into a plea of guilt. Kate (Master) and Lara (Stars) are obsessed with their career. Kate and Noelle take a good deal of risk in saving their friends, the native Banda and the Jew Dr.Israel, respectively, Elisabeth (Bloodline) and Kate are both inspired by their forefathers. Both these heroines marry their childhood heroes, who are indispensable in running the family business. Noelle (Midnight), Jill Castle (Stranger), Honey
Taft (Nothing?) and Lara (Stars) sell themselves to further their ambitions. Jennifer (Rage) becomes Moretti's mistress to repay a debt of gratitude. Noelle (Midnight?) and Lara (Stars) achieve everything because of hate in-planted in them by an insensitive, uncaring father.

The technique of divergence ushers in the creativity of Sheldon. Parental neglect and betrayal mould different types of characters. Judge Tyler (Morning) becomes a murderer and Ncelle becomes a cold sadist thirsting for revenge. Honey in Nothing Lasts Forever becomes immoral because of her family. Cooper in If Tomorrow Comes becomes a psychopath due to his mother's infidelity. But Lara in Stars Shine Down and Graciela in The Sands of Time blossom positively in spite of negative parental influence: Lara achieves unimaginable fame but Graciela is contented and happy as a nun in a convent. In the case of Kat Hunter in Nothing Lasts Forever she turns against all men. Elisabeth turns her father's indifference to love (Bloodline). Tony fears his mother's dominating love which becomes worse than hate and makes him attempt to kill her (Master).

Betrayal by men or lovers has divergent effect on the women: Noelle thirsts for revenge, Kat succumbs to her lover and dies, Tracy and Paige forgive their unworthy lovers, Jennifer gives up her lover for the sake of his
career, and Catherine flees from her husband who plans to kill her.

While Jennifer cannot bear to think of aborting her baby, Noelle waits for it to grow and feel the pain when she aborts it. Noelle's behaviour is definitely divergent.

Much thought seems to have gone into the titles and epigraphs of Sheldon's novels. The titles are symbolic and philosophic. The Naked Face is the story of a psychoanalyst who has to strip away the mask of innocence that the criminal wears. A Stranger in the Mirror is a philosophic title: we are not what we are; what we are within is totally different from what we are outwardly; and therefore, we see only a stranger when we peep into a mirror. The Other Side of Midnight refers to the brighter side of the earth when it is midnight in this half. Noelle reaches the brighter side by her courage and determination. Bloodline denotes the evil machinations of blood relatives. The epigraph in this novel is from a Papyrus listing 811 prescriptions used by the Egyptians in 1550 BC. It talks of a strange concoction. It may be a satire on the strange cousins who combine to form the Roffe clan. In Rage of Angels, the epigraph, from Dialogues of Chios, speaks of the rage of angels that drove out the hosts of evil when the latter attacked the heavens. Jennifer fights against
injustice with an angel's rage. Kate, in Master of the Game, is determined to be master in her field. There are two epigraphs for this novel, one from Pope's "Essay or. Man," talking about a master-passion swallowing the rest in a person's heart, and the other one from Pliny, describing the hardness of diamonds. It could symbolically refer to Kate's unshakable strength.

If Tomorrow Comes symbolises waiting for a better morrow. The epigraph, which provides the title for Windmills of the Gods seems fatalistic. Longfellow's lines are used as epigraph in The Sands of Time. It appears to be a tribute to the Spanish heroes. The Doomsday Conspiracy has a simple ancient Chinese curse as epigraph, "May you live in interesting times" which is not only amusing but also ironic. Memories of Midnight, a sequel to The Other Side of Midnight, has an epigraph from Sappho which gives the novel its title. In the epigraph to The Stars Shine Down, Monet Nodlehs says that the stars shine down and watch and weep for us. This too seems to be a fatalistic epigraph. Nothing Lasts Forever has two epigraphs: the one by Hippocrates asks us to accept the incurable; the ether by Sir William Osier refers to women physicians as a separate class of human beings. The title itself could be interpreted either negatively or positively. Morning, Moon,
and Might has an epigraph quoting Rimbaud about the warm morning sun of passion being cooled by the soft noon winds and of death lurking in the night. This could symbolise youth, middle age and eld age. The title of The Best Laid Plans warns that even such plans can go awry.

The reviews of Sheldon's novels are not very flat taring. He is often criticized for his predictable plot, stereotype characters and hackneyed language. But then, as Fiedler says, popular fiction is not read for the virtue of the writer, elegant structure, precision of language or subtle thoughts; such books are important because of "their mythic resonance and archetypal appeal" (Literature 77). Reviewers, after all, are not the entire reading public. Their reviews cannot be accepted as infallible barometers of public taste. Reviews of formulaic works become conventionalised and the individual aspects are blurred. Ironically, the novels of Sheldon have become bestsellers in spite of bad reviews.

The reading public has accepted Sheldon. Bestsellers settle into the "sediment of the readers' past experience" (Long 59). As such the general reading public approaches such books as mere means of escape and relaxation. But a researcher reads the novels with a different intention. Attentive and repeated reading helps in unearthing patterns
and literary values that are not generally perceived by the casual reader. A scholarly shift in focus leads to useful discoveries. A stepping back from the general crowd of readers gives a clearer view. At the same time, such an analysis may also lead to idiosyncratic interpretations. A critical assessment may turn the book into "another book", not experienced by everyone, by going off base. While literary critics challenge the value of popular literature, critics championing popular literature may reconstitute non-canonical work by reading literary value into it, rewriting the work in the process (Long 60-61). However, the critical acumen of the serious researcher should be acknowledged. The formulaic bestseller has been analysed in this thesis in a critical, interpretive manner. Bestsellers can be justified if they are read as evidence literature: evidence of the shifting literary standards, evidence of contemporary society, and, evidence of a brand of literature which is popular, mythic, archetypal, ever-growing and ever-changing.