Chapter 2

Prey Turns Predator

Feminist critics feel that postmodernism is a purely male genre, essentially masculinist or misogynist. Most of the famous works are by men and they are preoccupied with aggressive, often violent, male sexual behaviour and the denigration of female character. A close study of the novels of Sheldon reveals an astounding pattern. Most of the novels are dominated by strong, indomitable women who fight and struggle against social injustice, fate, social moeurs and ruthless men. They emerge as survivors after the struggle due to their intelligence and ingenuity. No small feat or coincidence that, for more than a quarter century, a male writer has been focussing on women and letting them occupy centre stage.

Feminists have naturally made women the protagonists of their works. Sometimes the sufferings of women and the injustice meted out to them have been portrayed. Feminists highlight the trials and tribulations and the trauma of being a woman. A rapid glance at the portrayal of women in American fiction in the twentieth century shows that many women have been portrayed in tailor-made roles. If they are good, they suffer silently and sacrifice for the happiness
of the family; if they are bad, they seduce man and lead them on to destruction. Writers generally see women in such traditional roles. For some reason, in most novels, women represent emotion while men symbolise intelligence. But Sheldon has not portrayed women in the traditional role. They are epitomes of struggle and survival, and they represent intelligence and ingenuity rather than emotion.

Sheldon has portrayed the exploitation of women at all levels in society. Although this has been done by other writers also, Sheldon goes a step further. He does not stop with the mere portrayal of the sufferings of women. He highlights their indomitable courage, their determination to overcome hurdles and their latent potential. Their every move is intelligent and well thought out. They keep their emotions under control. They are ruled by their head rather than by their heart. All the heroines are intelligent, hardworking and ambitious. They are all survivors. They excel in male-dominated fields too. They are all determined, like Alfred Tennyson's Ulysses, "To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield" ("Ulysses" 70). Sheldon's women are no angels. He has successfully destroyed the traditional role of women being good, forgiving martyrs.

Sheldon has also successfully broken the myth of male supremacy. His novels are filled with superwomen. Sheldon
is a writer with a positive attitude who highlights the innate potential and the intelligence of women, their power, will power, determination and will to survive. Sheldon thus becomes a crusader for women's rights and a panegyrist of their abilities. His novels show the different faces of women, their exploitation and their emergence as powerful, complete beings whom nothing can destroy.

Even a casual reader of Sheldon will be impressed by the memorable, strong, powerful heroines in his novels. The novels span a wide spectrum of American society. His heroines range from starlets, heads of business empires, doctors and nuns to a lawyer, a real estate promoter, an ambassador, a con woman and even an extra terrestrial female creature. His characters include the mentally aberrated, the mild, the fair, the grotesque and the insane, as well as the innocent and the betrayed. Sheldon's women are railtidimensional: well as weakness, their brilliant ingenuity and 3œen intelligence as well as their fears, traumas and loneliness.

His galaxy of women is spell-binding, as is the range of his psychological insight: silent love, love fulfilled and love unrequited, destroying love; love turned into hate
and hate mellowing into love; killing hate, passionate jealousy; the feeling of being trapped, outwitted, betrayed, deceived, crushed; fear of being killed; having everything and still feeling hollow—the entire gamut of human emotions has been portrayed. There is dazzling variety in his novels.

Traditional values and beliefs inculcate certain typical qualities in a woman. She is a patient, silent sufferer, a martyr—an angel in the house. But the intense rumination triggered off by the catastrophe or crisis kills the angel and, from the ashes is born, Phoenix-like, the avenging angel. It is difficult to assess if the angel is killed by the monstrous actions of man or by the crisis which becomes the last straw on the camel's back. The hidden potentialities can be kept under leash no longer. The protagonist can no longer hide the lamp of her worth under a bushel. She has become weary and is tired up with being a submissive daughter, wife or mother. The sleeping dragon has been awakened by feeble foolish man. She has suffered wrongs at the hands of men; she has indulged their whims and flattered their ego long enough. Now her ingenuity and innate intelligence spur her on to achieve what mediocre man was pompously attempting to do.
A careful study of Sheldon's heroines shows a clear pattern of evolution in their portrayal. The heroines of Sheldon's novels written in the seventies appear to be more physical, sensuous and glamorous than the heroines of the novels published in the eighties and the nineties. As the novels enter the present decade, the woman are better educated and more professional and career-oriented than their counterparts of the previous decades. This aspect, if studied deeply, will no doubt point to radical changes in societal attitudes.

Sheldon's heroines, chosen for the present study, seem to have certain shared traits. They are all women with latent or dormant qualities. They emerge as complete beings after breaking out of the hard shell of the chrysalis. This chrysalis may be defined as (a) hardships reaching a climax or crisis, (b) the protective core around women, i.e., restrictions imposed by either parents or society, and, (c) a shell of unconscious inhibitions, fears and diffidence inherent in women, due to traditional gender bias. This chrysalis is neither a must nor an option. It is naturally there. Women do not choose to be within the shell of protection, nor do they prefer seclusion. They do not avoid society or social interaction. Patriarchal society either directly or indirectly imposes restrictions, social or
psychological, on women. From the time a girl baby is conceived the gender bias begins. This is responsible for the women being cocooned in a shell of so-called protection, which actually keeps them in a torpid state till their inertia is rudely disturbed by some crisis or intolerable injustice.

Most of Sheldon's women pass through five stages in their emergence as heroines: (1) a stage of familiar, ordinary, uneventful living, from which they depart; (2) a period of struggle in an unfamiliar area due to a terrible challenge or crisis; (3) a short period of stillness or continued inertia, which is only apparent, since, deep inside, the mind of the protagonist has started utilising the pause to reinforce her mental capacities to prepare herself for the plunge she is to take soon, resembling the tiger that seems to withdraw before it pounces on its prey--the stage during which the prey turns predator; (4) a period of action and achievement; and, (5) the point of transformation. These five stages may not be obvious and distinct in some novels. Either the stages overlap or the pattern changes. Nevertheless, the stages are traceable.

Sheldon's heroines are strong, dominant and intelligent women whom nothing can destroy. They bridle
their emotions and keep their passion under check. Personal happiness is often sacrificed for public achievement and recognition. They have their sweet revenge, become champions of justice and, in the process, carve a niche for themselves in some male-dominated field. They reach the top and remain there, most often, alone. They begin fighting for a private cause, but they are socially aware and they become crusaders of justice which is what makes them heroines.

The heroines of Sheldon react diversely to challenges. Some react positively, while others do so negatively: while some become achievers others resort to revenge.

Sheldon portrays the liberation and retaliation of women instead of merely showing their suppression and sufferings. In his novels the exploited empire strikes back—the empire of strong, wronged women striking back at society. Interestingly enough, Sheldon's women are one up on men in all ways. Sheldon does not stop with showing them as social achievers. There is no concessional treatment for women in Sheldon's novels. According to him men and women are equal in all ways: both are capable of greatness, intelligence, sacrifice as well as cunningness, criminal tendencies, sexual perversions, thirst for revenge, etc.
This balanced and impartial view of man and woman is interesting.

Sheldon's heroines emerge from the chrysalis as "iron butterflies", beautiful, vulnerable yet ironically strong, complete beings. None of them loses her femininity in the course of the struggle. There is no unsexing of the heroines. At the same time they do not use femininity alone as a weapon to achieve their ends.

The women become epitomes of the struggle for survival. They resemble the heroes of lore in their encounter with destructive forces. They remind us, for instance, of Ernest Hemingway's old man Santiago, since what is important is the struggle and the capacity to survive, which is what human life is all about.

The pattern spelt out above will now be shown to operate in the selected novels.

Noelle Page, the heroine of *The Other Side of Midnight*, is born the daughter of a Marseille fishmonger. He cannot get over his luck in having such an incredibly beautiful daughter. To him she is a royal princess and the warehouses round the stinking fish market her kingdom. He tells Noelle that she will one day own it all. He wonders how to capitalize on the good fortune that nature has bestowed upon him. He gets her a job in a dress shop.
Noelle is suddenly transported to a genteel world. Her father drives away the poor neighbourhood boys who try to date Noelle. They are not good enough for his princess. Noelle marvels at her father's love for her. So, it is a shock to her when the shop owner Lanchon invites her to spend a weekend with him in Vienna. She rings up her father and, when he arrives, her face lights up with relief. But he slaps her hard, and calls her a selfish bitch and asks her to think of others besides herself. Her mind refuses to accept the fact that her father, who so cherished his princess, has sold her to the fat, ugly animal, Lanchon, as Sheldon records in *The Other Side of Midnight*:

> It seemed to Noelle that in the next few hours she died and was born again. She had died a Princess, and she was reborn a slut.... She would never forgive her father for his betrayal. (40)

She perceives the weakness of men and decides to use it to her advantage. She will be a princess after all; she will indeed rule the world; for, in a moment of crisis, she has understood life, as Sheldon goes on to unravel her mind: "Men ruled the world because they had the strength, the money and the power; therefore it was necessary to rule men, or at least one man" (*Midnight* 40). She will rule men
in bed. The bed will be her school, her education—the beginning of power.

Noelle runs away to Paxis and is rescued from a tricky situation by an itaerican pilot named Larry Douglas. She falls in love with him and, when he proposes to her, it is the happiest moment of her life. Larry "had taught her to laugh and she had not known that laughter was within her. It was like a gift from a god" (Midnight 53). He goes away to report to his squadron, promising to be back for their wedding. On the appointed day, dressed in her best, Noelle waits for Larry, but he does not come. She desperately tries to contact him but only learns that he left her with no true intention of marrying her. Let down by her father first and her fiance now, Noelle falls ill and wakes up in a hospital. Dr. Israel Katz befriends her there. Her hate for Larry keeps her alive and gives her a raison d'etre, for, as Sheldon narrates,

[Noelle] knew that she had to survive, for she had a reason to live now. She was filled with a deep and burning hatred that was so all-consuming that it left no room for anything else.... She would not rest until she had destroyed him [Larry]. (Midnight 60)
Noelle decides to take revenge first on Larry's son, who is growing in her womb, and then on Larry himself. Wanting the baby to feel the pain, she crudely aborts herself in the sixth month of her pregnancy: "She was not interested in a formless embryo that knew nothing. She wanted Larry's spawn to feel what was going to happen to him, to suffer, as she had suffered" (Midnight 65).

Noelle becomes a model and lives with a famous French actor and then with a director, hoping to become a stage actress. Men perceive in her a core of steel and no one ever really possesses her. They understand that there is some force in her that is irresistible, that will obtain anything she wants. She knows what she wants and nothing can stop her. She is a challenge, a puzzle to every man she comes into contact with. Nothing thrills her and, in some way, she is sick within: something in her has died. Noelle becomes the greatest star in France. She firmly believes that human beings can change and become what they want to be. She becomes a princess and her kingdom of fans keeps growing. She gives interviews to the press. Everything she does is for the sweet moment of her revenge on Larry. Her every move is a reminder to him, a message and a signal to bring him back to her so that she can destroy him.
Noelle opens a salon to which axe attracted powerful men from all walks of life. Working intelligently and diligently, she masters politics, finance and axt, and learns everything from wine to architecture. She fascinating student with a quick probing mind and is an intelligent listener.

Sheldon's portrayal of Noelle is impressive:

She was an insatiable sponge, learning everything he [Gailtier, a film director] had to teach her and demanding more. It had been fantastic to watch the metamorphosis in her as she went from the halting, external beginnings of grasping a part to the self-assured inner mastery of the character. Gautier had known from the very beginning that Noelle was going to be a star—there was never any question about it—-but what astonished him as he learned to know her better was that stardom was not her goal. The truth was that Noelle was not even interested in acting.

(Midnight 133)

Constantin Demeris, a Greek tycoon, is attracted towards Noelle and she becomes his mistress. To him she is a delightful enigma. For the first time in his life, here is a woman who is more than a match for him. Anything he
can do, she can do better. She is a phenomenon constantly revealing new facets for him to enjoy. Demsris marvels at her honesty, knowledge and ability to take right decision. She is treated like royalty wherever she goes. Noelle is impressed by Deroeris's intelligence and strength. She senses the implacable cruelty in him, but somehow this makes him even more exciting, for the same streak is in her also. Noelle now owns the world. She creates a situation for her ex-lover Larry to become Demeris's pilot. Her years of waiting, careful and patient planning, the slow closing in of the web is now come to an end and the prey Larry is now in the net.

Noelle makes Larry's life hell and taunts and humiliates him. She makes him risk his and her life by asking him to fly her plane to Amsterdam under impassible conditions. In anger Larry assaults her, and then she realizes that deep down she has never stopped loving him. But she is no longer the innocent, helpless girl deserted by him. She is powerful and ruthless now. Everything she has achieved has been through hatred. She has become a princess. The world is at her feet. She has survived and achieved. The prey at the hands of men has become the predator and hunts down men and rules them. She has become
he epxtoms of power. In the process she has become ruthless.

Noelle and Larry are arrested and charged with the murder of Larry's wife, Catherine. Demeris is shattered. Foelle, who faces trial, is described by a news weekly as 'a superwoman, a goddess on a golden pedestal" and a "Marie Antoinette riding to her doom in the tumbrel" (Midnight 93). She realizes how much she wants to live, but she knows neither fear nor nervousness. She still looks like "a princess from a fairy tale" (Midnight 400). She is tricked by the cruel and vengeful Demeris and is sentenced to death. But she is too proud to beg. Dressed like a princess, she faces the firing squad. She withdraws into her past, her happy childhood. Her father hugs her and she feels safe. She dies trying to recapture her father's face. Her death is as royal and dignified as her life has been. She makes a graceful exit from this world, where man ecraved her. She struggles, survives and achieves.

The cruel way in which Noelle aborts Larry's child early in the novel may appear to be unwomanly. But she is ayond man-made codes. Her role is different from the traditional tailor-made ones of women in fiction. She has been born anew, out of the fire of betrayal. Hate is her inspiring force. There is a cold, ruthless streak in her
...ow that frightens men. She is an avenging angel. Larry ade her a prey. She finally succeeds in hunting him down, id becomes a predator. She has not been merely selfish. he has been human and her selfless heroism is evident when he risks her life and saves Dr.Israel from the Nazis in axis. She uses her intelligence and, uncaring of the epercussions, saves the only man who helped and saved her ithout expecting anything from her. Her death is not to be quated with defeat, for, death is inevitable. And, Noelle ies only after achieving whatever she wished to. It is nly when she listens to her heart, rather than to her ead, and resumes her affair with Larry, that she becomes usceptible and weak.

The very birth of Josephine Csinski, the heroine of A. tranger in the Mirror, is traumatic. She is dying in her other's womb and the doctors fear severe brain damage for he child. Just when they are thinking of mercy killing his blue baby, she perks up and survives. The doctors are orried that the baby may not be normal. But she does seem ormal. Her mother is a poor Polish seamstress in Odessa,exas. The child is restless and has convulsions and her creams are feral and eerie. Right from childhood, osephine suffers terrible headaches. Her mother turns to anatical religion and finds solace in punishments. She
alieves that they are all sinners and that the flames of 3d's wrath will consume them unless they repent. Josephine :ows up in fear of God's wrath, divine punishments and midst utter want. She thinks that her headaches are mishments for her wickedness.

Young Josephine is one of the "Others". She secretly ivies the luxurious life of the Oil people. She begins to ream that one day she too will live like them. She is mely and afraid but keeps her fears and terrors to srself. She wants to win the Most Beautiful Child contest. it her dreams are shattered when a less pretty rich child ns the gold cup because her father is a powerful man. >sephine steals the cup and brings it home. She is .scovered and punished. But, to her, all the pain is worth to few minutes that she has held the trophy in her hands. >r mother does not want her to mingle with the rich and .eked. She takes Josephine to revival meetings and the .nister tries to purify the devil-ridden child. The girl ;terrified.

Josephine finds a door through which she can escape .to a beautiful dream world. Here she can hide from her ther's punishments and from hellfire and damnation. She ts in the movie house and watches the glamorous people on
screen living the life she envies. Josephine decides to go to Hollywood and become rich and famous.

On her thirteenth birthday, Josephine is invited to the birthday party of her friend Mary Kenyon. It is a great party and, while playing in the swimming pool, Josephine menstruates for the first time. All the children humiliate her, mock her and call her a dirty Polack. Only David Kenyon, her friend's handsome older brother, is kind and understanding.

At seventeen, Josephine is arrestingly beautiful and she no longer mixes with the rich people. She works for her living. But she is "filled with a restlessness, a yearning for something she had never known. It was nameless, but it was there" (Stranger 155). Her mother tries to bring her down to the earth by warning her that poor Polack girls will not find knights in shining armour. In the dim recesses of her mind, Josephine feels that Hollywood is her answer. She is secretly in love with the millionaire David Kenyon. David loves her, but he is tricked by his mother to get engaged to a wealthy girl. Josephine leaves Odessa and arrives in Hollywood as Jill Castle. Sheldon describes the transformation dramatically:

somewhere during the fifteen-hundred-mile, two-
day journey, Josephine Czinski had become Jill Castle. Outwardly, she looked like the same person. It was inside that she had changed. Something in her was gone. The laughter had died.... Josephine Czinski was dead.

Long live Jill Castle. (168)

Hollywood both fascinates and bewilders Jill. She discovers that getting into movies is very difficult. She has neither an agent nor any previous film experience nor even a portfolio. She is just another pretty face among the milling crowds of ambitious would-be-stars in Hollywood. She meets a lesbian agent and many perverted assistant directors. The whole Film City seems to be peopled with sex-maniacs.

Sheldon describes Jill's predicament in Hollywood thus:

Jill Castle became a fully fledged member of the Survivors, the tribe of people on the fringes of show business who spent years and sometimes a whole lifetime trying to break into the Business, working at other jobs temporarily. The fact that the temporary jobs sometimes lasted ten or fifteen years did not discourage them. (Stranger 187)
While other girls are making what is called mattress money by using their physical attractions, Jill wants to become someone. She is not going to allow herself to be a loser. She does small parts. In her letters to her mother she sounds as though she is just one step short of stardom. She is used by men in pornographic films. Though at first she rebels against it, she changes, as each year leaves its mark on her, a patina of hardness, like the annual rings on a tree. She becomes cynical. Her mirror asks her to hurry. She begins to work in all studios, except at Disney where sex does not exist. Jill loses her self-respect, and love dries up in her. She becomes hard and bitter. She becomes a nameless face in the crowd. She knows not how, but one day she will make them all pay for what they do to her.

Jill meets David at her mother's funeral. Though he still loves only her, he cannot leave his wife who has attempted suicide and is bedridden. Life changes for Jill when she has an interview for the Toby Temple Show.

Toby Temple is a phenomenally successful comedian of Hollywood. He is the monarch there. He takes a fancy to Jill. He is used, to eager, young aspiring stars queueing towards his bed. But Jill plays hard to get and puts him off. Toby becomes obsessed with her and her every rejection spurs his ego further. She remains cool and pretends to be
uninterested in the mega star. Toby thrives on pursuits and challenges. Jill handles him very cleverly. She systematically makes him go out of his mind. She does not care for his expensive gifts. But she makes his loneliness vanish. Soon, her wish becomes his command. She has him eating out of her hand. When she is rejected in a screen test, her dreams turn to cinders and in that moment, Toby reaches out to her. When he proposes marriage, Jill accepts it, for Toby spells power. She has resolved to pay back all the people who used her, hurt her and degraded her. She has wanted vengeance. Now she is going to have it. Even as David Kenyon becomes free to marry her, he sees Jill's wedding to Toby flashed in all newspapers.

Jill feels like a newly crowned queen. She wants to settle scores with Hollywood. The persons in her hate list are all in real trouble. Sheldon points out Jill's newfound power:

Jill Castle Temple was the most exciting thing to hit Hollywood since Cinemascope. In a company town where everyone played the game of admiring the emperor's clothes, Jill used her tongue like a scythe. In a city where flattery was the daily currency of conversation, Jill fearlessly spoke her mind. She had Toby beside her and she
brandished his power like a club, attacking all the important studio executives. They had never experienced anything like it before. They did not dare offend Jill, because they did not want to offend Toby. He was Hollywood's most bankable star, and they wanted him, needed him. (Stranger 268)

The most important people want to please Toby and they learn that the way to please Toby is to please Jill. Soon, as Sheldon describes,

the little Polish girl from Odessa, Texas, entertained and was entertained by governors, ambassadors, world-renowned artists and the President of the United States. This town had done terrible things to her. But it would never do them again. Not as long as she had Toby Temple. (Stranger 269)

Toby does not know Jill's dark past. To him she is gentle, kind and good. She makes him believe that she thinks with her heart. Slowly, one by one, many casting directors are fired. This is certain: "Everyone who had ever used her was going to pay. It was, she thought, like the rite of mating with the queen bee. They had all had their pleasure, and now they had to be destroyed"
With great subtlety, Jill gets her retribution.

At the Cannes Film Festival Toby falls unconscious. He has suffered a massive stroke. He loses the use of his arms and legs and his speech as well. Even the best medical aid does not help. It is then that Jill's ordeal begins. She decides to attempt to do what doctors said could not be done. She is stern and relentless with Toby. She is tireless. Days blend into one long, endless round of irudgery. She punishes Toby and herself mercilessly. She imagines that she and Toby are "the lone survivors of some Long-forgotten holocaust" (Stranger 285). It looks as though Jill is possessed. Just when she is about to give up, Toby revives. His progress is spectacular and Jill becomes his goddess. By now, as Sheldon describes,

Toby had become part of her. They were one body and one mind and one soul, obsessed with the same purpose. They had gone through a purging crucible. His life had been in her hands, and she had nurtured it and strengthened it, and saved it, and out of that had grown a kind of love. Toby belonged to her, just as she belonged to him. (Stranger 287)
She arranges a one-man show and Hollywood makes Toby a living legend. But now they are applauding Jill as well as Toby.

But Toby has a second stroke and the doctor says that even if he survives, he will never walk or speak again and that, though his mind is clear, he is completely paralysed. Jill meets David and suddenly wants to marry him, her only love, and settle down. She is afraid of Toby who looks grotesque. She knows that this time there is no hope for him. Wishing to be free, she pushes his wheel chair into the swimming pool. The inquest concludes that it is death by accident. The world does not suspect the real-life heroine, Jill Temple. But her final attempts at happiness are frustrated when David Kenyon jilts her on the day of the wedding. By projecting one of her pornographic films to David, Clifton Lawrence, one-time agent of Toby, has his own revenge on Jill.

Sheldon describes Jill's predicament: ""Jill sat there, unseeing, numbed by a defeat that was beyond comprehension. Only a few hours ago she had owned the world ... and now she had nothing" (Stranger 346). Out on the decks she sees Toby's face floating on the waves. The icy wind pushes against her and she is pirouetting in space. Toby and she are together.
Jill was born out of Josephine. Josephine suffered poverty, shame and humiliation. She was haunted by fear of punishment and sin. Belonging to the "Others", she silently envied the oil-rich families. She knew that David would never marry her, the poor Polish daughter of a seamstress. But if she became a star, she would have her dreams come true. She faced initial crises in Odessa, Texas. The metamorphosis starts then and Josephine becomes Jill. The crisis deepens in sordid Hollywood. Laughter, happiness, innocence—all these die one after the other in Jill. But she survives with determination. For a time, she goes along with the filthy tide but never drowns in it. All the time she is full of courage and hope that one day she will wield power. She battles against despair, age and time. Hope and ambition lie in embers in her mind. She has her life under control. She is not defeated by odds. She survives the crisis—Her determination, courage and intelligence make her win power through Toby Temple. She gains all that she desires. Reality becomes fairer than dreams. She avenges those who exploited her. She is intelligent and balanced. She knows what she wants and gets it. She is defeated only because she allows her emotions to come to the forefront after Toby suffers a second stroke. She opts for normal marriage with David. This is her weakness—her emotion.
Once she thinks with the heart rather than with the head, she becomes vulnerable and she breaks. Ironically, when she thought with her head, she pretended to do so with her heart. At such times Toby used to gently scold her: "You think with your heart Instead of your head. You've got to learn to be tougher" (Stranger 270). But when she really thinks with her heart, she is in trouble. At heart, she has been true only to David. But the world is for the tough ones. The poor Polish girl rules Hollywood and has her revenge on those who exploited her. She has tasted riches, success, fame and power. She is a heroine who has survived and achieved her goals.

Jill too, like Noelle, is at first a prey, powerless and helpless, till she turns a predator, after marrying Toby Temple. It is interesting to note that The Other Side of Midnight and A Stranger in the Mirror, both written in the seventies, have heroines who use their physical charm to win their ends. The heroines in the later novels do not use their physical allure so explicitly or freely to get what they want. This may be an unconscious reflection of the changes in American societal attitudes. Women, earlier considered to be glamour symbols, seem to have won respect in the eighties and the nineties. Their career is not a means to an end, but an important end in itself. It gets
top priority, whereas to Noelle and Jill, belonging to an earlier decade, career is but a means to an end. Several parallels can be drawn between Noelle and Jill. They are the only two heroines of Sheldon who die at the end. Both of them emerge from trials scarred and scathed, but as stronger, more complete beings, with full control over their lives. But once they allow their emotions to rule them, they become weak and are destroyed. Noelle's unconscious love for Larry and Jill's conscious love for David, make them careless of all that they have gained, paving the way for their final doom.

Sheldon's novel *Rage of Angels* opens ominously: "The hunters were closing in for the kill" (15). The quarry is Moretti and the lion Di Silva. Jennifer Parker, caught in the crossfire becomes the prey for both the lion and the quarry. She reaches the nadir of her career and, by sheer dint of will, reaches the zenith too. The prey becomes predator. She becomes a super achiever in a male-dominated field, for criminal law is a macho area. But Jennifer does not stop with personal achievement. She goes on to fight for the poor dregs of the society. Law made her a puppet in the hands of fate, but she soon makes law a puppet in her hands.
Jennifer's father is a small-town attorney. He is her inspiration and she dreams of becoming a successful lawyer. After his death, she goes to Manhattan. Having been the brightest law graduate of her batch, she has been recommended to be an assistant to District Attorney Di Silva. The young aspiring Jennifer makes an incredible blunder on her first day, after the swearing in ceremony. Di Silva is trying to pin down the Mafia leader Michael Moretti and one of Moretti's men has turned approver. Jennifer's naive innocence makes her an easy pawn in the hands of the Mafia. Without her realising it, she is used by them to hand over a symbolic threat—a dead canary—to the chief witness against Moretti. The witness is terrified as he understands the threat and refuses to testify against Moretti. Di Silva loses the case. Jennifer is accused of being hand in glove with Moretti. She is fired and her dreams crumble after the shortest law career in history: "She had lasted exactly four hours" (Rage 33). Jennifer has had great faith in the court of justice believing It to be the heart of freedom. Ironically, injustice has been done to her in the court itself.

The media splashes her role in paving the way for Moretti's escape. She finds herself jobless and friendless in New York. In fact, she has been guilty of stupidity and
nothing else. Her innocence has been exploited by the Mafia. There are moves to debar her. Jennifer realises that she has become the pariah of the legal profession. But she survives. She struggles to survive. She is determined to be the best lawyer in town. She is beaten and cornered and she struggles even for food and shelter. She is reduced to serving summons to make a living. She is lonely, impoverished and ostracized. But she is bold and strong. She takes even this job of serving summons very seriously. She uses her ingenuity even in serving them. She runs around "in rain and sleet and snow, delivering subpoenas and summons to people who hated her for it" (Rage 68). Her dreams become nightmares. She is surrounded by loneliness and failure. She has no one with whom she can share her feelings. She aches with a feeling of emptiness, watching families hurrying to the warmth of their homes.

Most of Jennifer's clients are unimportant, uncompromising and good-for-nothing. A missionary priest brings her hopeless cases. Her clients have no one to turn to and have neither money nor power to fight against the establishment. In the end, they are crushed by the system. Jennifer fights for them all and the education gained by her is priceless. Night court depresses her. All the accused have one thing in common: they are poor, defeated
and lost. They are the misfits whom the affluent society has passed by. Her clients are those who have been ground down by poverty. Their fears feed her self-confidence. She is neither a shining example of success nor is she superior to them. But she knows that there is one big difference between her and them: she will never give up like them. Ironically, the stalwarts of the legal profession do not realise her talent. It is the Mafia who understands her brilliance as a lawyer. She is a challenge to men. She seems as elusive as the justice for which she fights. Men hate being outwitted by a woman and this makes her achievements more difficult.

Jennifer is a diligent worker with hardly any personal life. Once the jail supervisor asks her: "For God's sake, don't you ever sleep?" She replies simply: "It keeps me off the streets" (Rage 74). But Jennifer does not see her cases merely as means of keeping off the streets. She feels responsible for the lives of her clients. She feels that it is like playing God to hold someone's life in her hands. She feels that, when the jury convicts her clients, it convicts her too.

Her trials spur her on and, pushed against the wall, she fights back ferociously like a wounded tiger. Case after case, she claws her way to the diszy pinnacle of
success. Case after case she proves that sheer hard work and intelligence can finally win. By inspired strategies of courtroom drama, she wins a few spectacular cases. Soon she becomes a force to reckon with and is pitted against the greatest lawyers of the world. Several well-known lawyers invite her now to join them. But independent as she is, Jennifer decides to stay on by herself. She spurns the attractive offers made by the Mafia as well. Jennifer's best comes out only when she is cornered and crushed. Like many other heroines of Sheldon, she emerges triumphant and as a more complete being after her trials. Like the Phoenix, she springs forth from the ashes of her ruined career with new life and vitality. It is this determination and will to survive and her brilliant ingenuity that make her a survivor and a heroine. After she wins a sensational case, the newspapers hail her as a "heroine" and as "the legal David who had slain Goliath" (Rage 114). Jennifer finds true love in Adam Warner, a senior attorney, a would-be senator and a big name in society with powerful connections. She has a child through him but she decides to give up Adam, already a married man, as she does not want their love affair to jeopardize his political career. Work is her only anodyne for the pain of personal loss. The courtroom is where she escapes from pain. A trial
is a game where the better player wins and Jennifer is determined to be always the better player. In fact, she wants to be the best player. Her cross-examinations become theatrical events. She discovers that being a woman criminal lawyer is a disadvantage in a macho territory. She is either expected to dress like Jane Eyre or have an affair with every client. Since she has entered a man's world she has to work twice as hard and be twice as good as the competition. She prepares thoroughly not only her own cases but the cases of her opposition as well. It is a battle to survive in a male-dominated arena. And Jennifer survives.

Michael Moretti despises women since they have no spirit—till he sees and falls in love with Jennifer. Losing Adam creates a vacuum in her. Her life is now divided between her two loves—her legal profession and her child Joshua through Adam. When Joshua is kidnapped by a cold-blooded sadist killer, she turns to Moretti for help. She becomes indebted to him as he kills the kidnapper and saves the child. Jennifer repays Moretti's debt by sharing her lonely life with him. He fills the vacuum in her life. She loses Joshua to a fatal illness. She tries to save Adam from Moretti and, in the bargain, gets shot by the latter. But she does not die.
At the end of the novel, Jennifer leaves an impression of courage, idealism and vulnerability. Love, hate, defeat, success, joy, pain, loss, loneliness—nothing has been able to destroy her. She is a survivor. Finally, bent but not broken, she goes on searching for the elusive thing called justice. A burst of merriment is an alien sound to her and she tries to think when it was that all laughter died.

Critics have said that bestsellers do not have heroines but only brave women who fight for their own survival. But Jennifer is a heroine with a conscience, seeking and fighting for justice. Like a missionary, she tries to help the poor people in trouble, who have no one to help them: people with neither the money nor the power to fight the establishment and, in the end, crushed by it. Even after the sunset of her happiness, she lives only to win justice for others. She loses all that she gained and is back to square one. But she continues to fight, and like a rubber ball, she has resilience. Loss is a part of life. So, her loss does not make Jennifer less heroic.

Jennifer's sacrifice of Adam's love, her turning to Moretti when her son's life is in danger, her repayment of Moretti's debt—all these only make her human. She is torn between two types of love and loyalties. After all, heroes and heroines are also human beings.
Jennifer is a selfless heroine who departs from familiar circumstances and faces crisis after crisis boldly. She does not allow defeat to defeat her. She survives and excels. She is transformed into a totally independent crusader for justice. Life's bitter struggles have strengthened her and made her a more complete being. In the beginning, she is angelic in her innocence and goodness. But, when defeated, she retaliates with the rage of angels. Society has made her a prey. But, using her intelligence and inner strength, Jennifer reverses the roles, becomes a predator hunting down others and achieves her end.

Jennifer is a memorable character, a heroine who is remembered for her struggle against odds, her will power, intelligence and determination. She is a survivor, who has emerged from the hard chrysalis into a butterfly—an iron butterfly—a complete, whole being, beautiful yet vulnerable and ironically strong. She is an epitome of the struggle for survival. She is like the archaic hero in her rebellious encounter with destructive forces.

Kate, the heroine of Sheldon's novel Master of the Game, is named Katharine, a name given to queens. She and her mother become prisoners of war and are kept in camps, where the conditions are deplorable.
Each day becomes a calendar of horrors. It is a constant nightmare that goes on for almost three harrowing years. The worst of it is the feeling of utter helplessness. She is powerless to protect her mother or herself, and she learns a lesson she is never to forget: if you have power, you have food, medicine and freedom. She equates power with life. She decides that, one day, she will have power so that no one will be able to do this to her again (Master 164). Having been born in a wealthy family, Kate does not have to struggle for survival against external forces. Her fight is within: she has a sense of restlessness and a craving for power. Her experience as a prisoner of war is the crisis which makes her hunger for power. Her struggles later in life are against fate and misfortunes.

All that is now in the past. The future lies with the family's company, Kruger-Brent Ltd. Kate is wild, stubborn, opinionated and intractable. She is often involved in brawls and fistfights. She is wilful and impossible; she is passionate and intense. She loves to hear of how her father found his diamonds with his native friend, Banda. Threats and treats cannot make her do things she does not want to do. She is a terror in school. Her headmistress says that Kate is extremely bright, but rebels against simply
everything. Only David Blackwell, her father's trusted
general manager, can handle her and she wants to please
him. She hates all other women friends of David. She is
determined to marry him. Kate is high spirited and she
meets Banda and his family often. She goes into the diamond
mines. She goes fishing and hunting. She is a bad influence
on other children. Her vocabulary is shocking. She is too
bright. She does not want to learn good manners and be a
young accomplished lady. She declares that she does not
need manners because she has got brains. She wants to be
like her father. Her boarding school is a prison to her and
she runs away thrice. She is unrepentant and
uncontrollable. The school feels that, if Kate can be
disciplined, then anyone can be. She is a challenge. Only
her interest in her company and her love for David keep her
going. She cannot get along with girls who have led
sheltered lives, who have seen animals only in a zoo and
who have not seen a diamond or gold mine. She does not want
to be like them. Her mother's death shakes her. She decides
to keep her company and expand it. She also decides to
enroll in business school. When asked what she wants to do
with her money, she answers simply that she wants to earn
it.
Kate risks her life and saves Banda. She smuggles him in her car and crosses roadblocks. She pretends to be nervously leaving for Cape Town. Kate hides Banda in her private railway car and travels with him for a few hours till he is out of danger. She does this in order to help her friend, Banda. She feels very deeply for the Blades.

Business school fascinates Kate. She learns how to manage her company. She postpones romance. When she takes over the affairs of the company, she tastes power. She enjoys power and decision-making, which involve gambling with millions of pounds. She learns that big business is a matching of wits, the courage to gamble and the instinct to know when to quit and when to press ahead. It is a game with fantastic stakes. One has to be master of the game in order to win. Kate is determined to learn and win. She travels widely and gains experience.

When David is about to get engaged to an American businessman's daughter, Kate is shaken. David decides to go to America, contribute a share and expand his future father-in-law's new Frozen Food Company. But Kate silently manipulates and buys the company. David breaks his engagement. His ego is hurt and he never again thinks of leaving Kruger-Brent. Soon David and Kate are married.
But Kate cannot settle down to mundane married life. She wants to achieve things. She wants Kruger-Brent to produce guns and ammunition. But David opposes it vehemently. He is idealistic. Kate thinks that he is an idealistic ninny and David thinks that she is cold-blooded and that business has changed her. She is proud and will not bend. When David enlists in the army, she plunges more into work to drive away the loneliness.

War is a blessing in disguise for Kruger-Brent and Kate's companies supply trains, tanks, uniforms and guns. When David questions her on his return, she defends herself saying that when times change, one has to change with them. She wonders if she has changed or David has. Eas she become stronger or has David become weaker? She feels that she has become more capable. She is afraid to answer the question whether the company means more to her than marriage.

In the middle of a night, Kate excitedly wants the company headquarters shifted to New York. To her, New York is a city with a unique vitality. She knows that it is growing and that, with it, the company will grow. David asks her how much more she wants and she replies that she wants all that there is. To Kate, as Sheldon describes,
The name of the game was to win, and you won by beating everyone else. It seemed so obvious to her. Why couldn't David see it? David was a good businessman, but there was something missing in him, a hunter, a compulsion to conquer, to be the biggest and the best. Her father had had that spirit, and she had it. Kate was not sure exactly when it had happened, but at some point in her life, the company had become the master, and she the slave. It owned her more than she owned it.

(Master 225)

David complains that she is working too hard. But to her,

There was no greater joy in life. It was when she felt most alive. Each day brought a new set of problems, and each problem was a challenge, a puzzle to be solved, a new game to be won. And she was wonderful at it. She was caught up in something beyond imagination. It had nothing to do with money or achievement; it had to do with power. A power that controlled the lives of thousands of people in every corner of the earth. Just as her life had once been controlled. As long as she had power, she would never truly need
anyone. It was a weapon that was awesome beyond belief.

"Power. The company was alive, a growing giant, that had to be fed, and some times sacrifices were necessary, for the giant could not be shackled. Kate understood that now. It had a rhythm, a pulse, and it had become her own.

(Master 225-26)

She does not have time to be unwell. When she is pregnant, she wants a boy to take over Kruger-Brent. As Sheldon describes,

[Kate was] head of a great conglomerate, she was married to the man she loved and she was going to have his baby. If there was irony in the order of her priorities, Kate was not aware of it.

(Master 227)

David dies in a mine accident and she is left alone. But her priorities are unique. To her, as Sheldon, describes, there was something mystic about the company.... It was alive, consuming. It was her lover, and it would never die on a winter day and leave her alone. It would live forever. She would see to it. (Master 228)
Kate cares for Africa deeply. She is also concerned about Banda, who has become a rebel leader. She cannot sit by, doing nothing. She arranges for huge sums of money to help his cause. Kate's compassion makes her help Jews during World War II. They are employed in Kruger-Brent companies in Allied Countries.

Tony, her son, is nervous of her and stammers in her presence. She overpowers him and manipulates and controls his life. He is the future king of Kruger-Brent. She is worried that Brad Rogers, who is working with her, is getting diverted because of his affairs with other women. So, she seduces him just once and he never strays after that. Her sexual energy has long been harnessed into other channels. To Kate, winning alone is important. She is shocked when her son wants to be a painter. She sabotages his artistic ambitions. She buys an art critic to scorn Tony's works. She risks Tony's anger in manipulating his future. He finds out about his mother's role in ending his artistic pursuits and is horrified. Kate pushes him towards the wrong girl and he falls into the trap. He marries the heiress Kate wishes him to marry. Marianne, Tony's wife, has been warned by doctors against pregnancy. But Kate asks her not to heed the foolish doctors. She needs Tony's heirs. Tony attempts to kill his mother when his wife dies.
after giving birth to twin girls. He is shut up in an asylum. Kate is deeply hurt that Tony has not understood her. She is filled with such a deep agony that she wants to die. But she will not let herself die. She has done what is right. They are wrong. Tony is a weakling. They have all been weaklings. Her father was too weak to face his young son's death. Her mother was too weak to face life alone. But Kate is not weak. She thinks that she can face anything. She is determined to live, to survive. The company also will survive.

Tony is a wound that never heals in Kate. The twins, Eve and Alexandra are the heirs now. But the former is wicked from childhood. Kate is shattered when she realises this and she cuts Eve off. Kate is troubled by several 'Ifs':

If. A two-letter word for futility. The future was clay, to be molded day by day, but the past was bedrock, immutable. Everyone I've loved has betrayed me, Kate thought. Tony. Marianne. Eve. Sartre said it well: 'Hell is other people'. She wondered when the pain would go away.

(Master 343)

Eve schemes to win back the company. She gets involved with a sadist and sees to it that he marries her sister,
Alexandra. She plans to have Alexandra murdered. She cheats the psychiatrist disguising herself as Alexandra, complaining of suicidal depression. Later she murders the sadist opportunist George Mellis and is finally discovered in her evil machinations by her plastic surgeon Keith, who loves her. She has to marry him or the murder will out. He disfigures her face so irrevocably that her ugliness will bind her to him forever. Alexandra marries her psychiatrist and refuses to take over Kruger-Brent, much to Kate's disappointment. Kate still clings to her passionate conviction that one in her family will take over the company. Now she shifts her hopes to Alexandra's son Robert. The boy is interested in music and Kate, now ninety years old, begins to manipulate his life too. An insane son who is a vegetable, a grotesque grand daughter who is a murderer, a meek grand daughter who will not take over Kruger-Brent—Kate survives it all. She will not give up. She is determined, as Sheldon reveals her mind:

I won't let it end like this. It's not all been wasted. I've built a proud dynasty. A hospital in Cape Town is named after me. I've built schools and libraries and helped Banda's people. (Master 488)
Kate is a proud, independent lady. She is strong and determined. She wants to be a winner. She is a predator who goes after success. She is sly and scheming like a hunter in trying to catch her prey. She has a compulsion to conquer, to be the biggest and the best. She can be neither predicted nor tamed. She wants power. At the same time, she is human. She supports the Blacks in Africa and tries to protect them. She firmly believes that every race has something to contribute. She strongly condemns slavery. Her company and her aspirations have mingled in her blood and become constant with her heartbeat. She is ready to make any sacrifice for the company. But she will not even dream of sacrificing the company for anything. She is able to survive the loss of her mother, husband and son and the tragedy of Eve being evil, only because of her strong bond with the company. She is ageless, as her mind is alert and young. She never allows emotions to dominate her. The Governor eulogizes her, as Sheldon narrates, saying,

"[Kate is] one of the most remarkable women in the history of this nation. Kate Blackwell's endowments to hundreds of charitable causes around the world are legendary. The Blackwell Foundation has contributed to the health and well-being of people in more than fifty
countries. To paraphrase the late Sir Winston Churchill, "Never have so many owed so much to one person." I have had the privilege of knowing Kate Blackwell...'. (Master 13)

It looks as though Kate can keep even death at bay because of her strong will power. She will allow death to snatch her only when she is ready, that is, after finding a successor for Kruger-Brent. She has inherited her father's piratical qualities—his perseverance, endeavour and high spirits. He was a survivor till he succumbed to the death of his son. Kate surpasses him. Even her son's insanity and his attempt to kill her cannot break her. She is invincible. She is a dreamer who is also practical and down to earth.

Kate is made a prey by misfortune several times. But, with her inner strength, she becomes a predator and captures success. She succeeds in becoming the master of the game. Although she does love her husband very much, she never allows emotion to rule her, and, her company is always her first love. She survives several tragedies and achieves what she wants to, being ruled by her head always.

Tracy Whitney, the heroine of Sheldon's novel If Tomorrow Comes, is deliriously happy. She has a good job in a bank, she is going to marry the man she loves—a prize
catch--and she is going to have his baby. Her mother has rung up and told her how much she loves her. Tracy is a little worried that her lover Charles Stanhope's parents are almost like royalty. She wonders if oil and water can mix. Her wonderfully secure, happy world is shattered by a telephone call informing her that her mother is dead. She rushes over to New Orleans police headquarters. It is Mardi Gras and the city is wildly merry. She is shocked, to learn that her mother has committed suicide leaving a note that she has failed. The house is on sale and there is nothing inside. It has been stripped of all the antique furniture. Her father's automotive parts company was being run by her mother. Joe Romano wanted to buy the company but her mother refused to sell. When his offer was difficult to resist her mother took the advance. Joe moved in after giving the small advance, looted the company and made it totally worthless. He did not pay for the supplies and the company soon had a half million dollars of debt. Now Joe refused to buy the company and Tracy's mother was forced into bankruptcy. She also faced a fraud charge and was sentenced to prison. Joe Romano was the agent of Anthony Orsatti of the Mafia. Being proud, Tracy's mother could not bear her failure and so killed herself.
Tracy is filled with a new emotion—hatred. She swears to herself that Joe Romano is going to pay for killing her mother. She has to do it single-handedly. She has decided to somehow avenge her mother. She buys a gun and confronts Romano. When he assaults her, she shoots, and believing him to be dead, she flees. She is arrested at the airport. She is accused of stealing a painting worth half a million dollars and attempting to kill Romano—attempted murder and armed robbery. The court appoints Perry Pope as her lawyer. He pretends to be very sympathetic towards her and suggests that she plead guilty, as that will reduce her punishment. She does so and is sentenced to fifteen years in jail. She has been tricked and destroyed by the same gang which destroyed her mother. The media make her humiliation public.

Charles betrays her and breaks their engagement. He does not take on responsibility for their child. Tracy is figuratively buried with her mother. Till now she has only seen and heard of such things happening to others. She is transported to prison and she withdraws to a beautiful past that cushions her against the cruel blows of the present.

Prison is hell. Tracy undergoes all types of humiliation, both physical and emotional. She has to face lesbian assaults and perverted sex. The prisoners are
stripped of privacy and self-respect. Tracy becomes a mere faceless, nameless number. She is physically assaulted by her cell-mates and kept in solitary confinement but she refuses to tell the warden the real reason for the bruises on her person. She loses her child.

Solitary confinement, to her, as Sheldon describes, was a form of oblivion, a return to the womb. She was alone in the dark.... Tracy lay there in the blackness, humming folk songs to herself that her father had taught her long ago. She had no idea how close she was to the edge of insanity.

(Tomorrow 76)

Tracy weeps for her lost baby, for herself and for the whole sick world. But soon her thoughts "burned and biased until her mind was empty of every emotion but one: Vengeance" (Tomorrow 77). It is a vengeance directed against the men who destroyed her life. She will take revenge on them tomorrow—if tomorrow comes.

With this new determination, Tracy forces herself to eat every morsel in prison. She knows she will need every bit of her strength to carry out her plans. Sheldon portrays her mind clearly:

She was in a situation that anyone else would have considered hopeless: she was locked away for
fifteen years, with no money, no friends, no resources of any kind. But there was a wellspring of strength deep within her. I will survive, Tracy thought.... She would survive as her ancestors had survived. In her was the mixed blood of the English and the Irish and the Scots, and she had inherited the best of their qualities, the intelligence and the courage and the will. My ancestors survived famine and plagues and floods, and I'm going to survive this. (Tomorrow 79)

In order to regain her physical strength, Tracy starts doing the centuries-old martial art, t'ai chi ch'uan. She keeps herself physically and mentally alert. She uses the solitary confinement as a 'pause period' during which she prepares herself for the great task ahead. She walks out of the solitary cell to her prison room with calm composure and dignity. She has lost her naive innocence. She is now realistic and hardened. She is optimistic and confident. She returns to her original cell-mates. Brave and patient, she befriends the powerful prisoners and starts planning her escape. She learns to survive by attacking her attackers. People slowly respect her courage, strength and dignity.
Tracy soon becomes the nanny for the warden's young daughter, Any. The child loves her. Tracy carefully plans to escape in a laundry van one day. She knows what terrible repercussions will follow if she is caught. She is asked to mind the child that afternoon also. She plays ball with the child. It is the time for her to make good her escape. Just as she is preparing to escape, the child accidentally tumbles into a lake. Tracy has to make a choice—the child's life or her own freedom. She makes her choice, as Sheldon describes:

Tracy turned and began running as fast as she had ever run in her life. The others were calling after her, but she did not hear them. She flew through the air, unaware that her shoes had fallen off, not caring that the sharp ground was cutting into her feet. Her heart was pounding, and her lungs were bursting, and she pushed herself to run faster, faster. She reached the wall around the lake and vaulted on top of it. Far below, she could see Amy in the deep, terrifying water, struggling to stay afloat. Without a second's hesitation, Tracy jumped in after her. And as she hit the water, Tracy
thought, Oh, my God? I can't swim.... (Tomorrow 136-37)

Moments later both Tracy and Amy axe hauled to safety. Tracy does not regret losing a chance to escape, as Sheldon narrates:

I couldn't have borne it if anything had hardened to her, she thought.... The incident had cost her her chance to escape, but she knew that if she had to do it over again, she wouild do the same thing. (Tomorrow 145-46)

Overnight newspapers and television commentators turn Tracy into a heroine. The Governor himself visits Tracy at the prison hospital. The public wants her released from jail. Her selfless heroism and courage get her a pardon and a

Now Tracy goes about using her ingenuity and intelligence to destroy her enemies. She disguises herself and transfers her money from her bank. Her experience at the cable transfer section at the bank helps her juggle with computers and she puts Romano into trouble. She makes Orsatti suspect him of double dealing. She finishes off Judge Lawrence with a coded telegram. He is condemned as a spy while on a trip to Russia. Perry Pope is killed by Orsatti as Tracy makes the latter believe that the former
is cheating at cards. Orsatti himself is dethroned, as he has no control over his men and region. Tracy is not happy but she feels an empty satisfaction in having avenged her mother's destroyers.

Tracy is not allowed to lead a normal life after her jail sojourn. Her bank refuses to take her bade. This is the turning point when Tracy is forced to become a con-woman, an adventuress and a thief.

Tracy is terrified and nervous. But she likes the thrill and the challenge to her intelligence, the demands made of her ingenuity. She laughs with sheer delight, recollecting how she cheated the police. She enjoys the high wire of tension and excitement in this business. It sharpens her intelligence. She loves outwitting con-man Jeff. She thrives on matching wit for wit and outmatching someone. She enjoys being an adventuress and an avenger. Every robbery is planned with knowledge of human psychology.

An ordinary middle class woman who is about to settle down to a normal, happy married life, Tracy is jolted out of her "ordinariness" by her mother's death. Instead of being simply broken by the incident, Tracy is enraged and vows revenge. She learns that the underworld monarchs are behind her mother's disgrace and death. She does not stop
to consider if she can take revenge against such powerful men. Her first encounter with Romano is totally stupid and amateurish. But once she is nearly destroyed, she gains inner strength. While any other woman in her place would have gone to pieces in the prison, Tracy emerges from the chrysalis as a complete and strong being after the crisis in her life. She has come a long way from familiar landscape, battling physically and emotionally against heavy odds out to destroy her. She battles against unfamiliar adversities and is not cowed down or defeated. She wins. She becomes a heroine as she risks her life in saving Amy. In doing so, she loses her opportunity to escape. But she cannot do otherwise. This heroism wins her the required release from the prison.

She burns with zeal for revenge. She knows not how to accomplish it. She plans carefully and her intelligence and ingenuity win finally. She finds chinks in the armour of the so-called invincible powers. Using her brains and knowledge of human psychology, she settles scores, one by one. She is a far cry from the Tracy who was told that her mother was dead. Experience has toughened her. Prison has been her university and it has taught her to survive in any circumstance. Terrors, sexual assaults, unbearable living conditions, lack of space and good food, perverted cruel
enemies—none of these can destroy Tracy or, much less, dim her spirits. She becomes a survivor and goes on to become an achiever excelling in whatever she undertakes. Even in burglary she is always one up on her male counterpart Jeff. She has been activated and motivated by the crisis in her life. She has been made aware of her own latent, innate potentialities. She has touched a depth in her that she never knew existed. She might have settled down to an insipid life with Charles Stanhope. The crisis saves her from this and releases the wellspring of strength and power deep down.

A prisoner is always a criminal in the eyes of the society. Tracy is looked upon as an outcast or leper. But she retains her dignity. She declares: "My pride is all I have left, and no one is going to take that away from me" (Tomorrow 191). She is determined that no one is ever going to cheat her again. Her bank balance is denied to her and reverted to the general fund. Even though it is possible for her to transfer more than her actual balance to her account through the computer, she resists the temptation. She can take millions, but all that she wants is what is rightfully hers. She is a challenge to the police. Her style of robbery is daring and imaginative. Having tasted failure earlier in life, she is sorry for Inspector Daniel
Cooper who has been defeated by her. She lives on challenges and there is no stopping her. She declares: "I'm a survivor. Somehow I'm going to make it" (Tomorrow 201).

In this novel, the pattern of the prey turning predator is very clear. Tracy is made a prey by society in the beginning and is very nearly crushed. But using her intelligence, she becomes a predator and destroys her enemies.

The heroine of Sheldon's novel Windmills of the Gods Mary Ashley, teaches political science in Kansas University. She is dedicated to her family. Her articles on political science have impressed the new President of the United States, Paul Ellison. Her special subject is Eastern Europe. The President wants to make her the U.S. ambassador to Romania because of her expertise in Eastern European politics and her Romanian heritage. He believes that she can help in easing East-West tensions. Although the President's offer is totally unexpected and Mary is initially thrilled, she declines the offer as she cannot leave her family and go to an Iron Curtain state. Her husband is a well-known surgeon practising in Kansas City and she has two small children. But things change overnight when her husband is killed in an accident. It is a difficult decision for a middle-class woman but she is
encouraged by friends and, especially, by President Ellison's friend and Foreign Affairs Adviser Stanton Rogers. Rogers himself was a strong candidate for the presidency but a messy divorce ruined his chances. Now he wants Ellison's foreign policy to fail. He schemes and sets up Mary as a very effective ambassador. He is in fact the chief of the Patriots for Freedom, an Organization which wants the cold war to continue as it feels that Capitalists and Communists cannot meet. The organization engages a mysterious killer named Angel for their terrorist killings. Rogers's villainy is revealed only at the end of the novel and the suspense is maintained till then.

Mary takes up the challenge and is determined to succeed. She and her children reach Washington and are given terrific media publicity. She is naive and she blunders in the beginning. She commits several social gaffes, like leaving an official party before the guest of honor leaves and calling at the Romanian Embassy unannounced. She takes an instant dislike to her deputy, Mike Slade. But, at the end, it is Mike who rescues her and the two fall in love.

The Patriots for Freedom see to it that Mary's blunders do not get publicity. A suspicious reporter Kohn is murdered. The killer Angel engaged by the organization
can be contacted only through a semi literate peasant woman named Neusa Munoz. At the end of the novel, we are told that Munoz is Angel and that he has murdered a Romanian revolutionary leader Groza.

In Romania Mary becomes a very capable ambassador. She takes credit for several feats of diplomacy that even veteran professionals might envy. She is more than a match for the dictator of the country. She manages the release of an American student arrested on drug charges. She persuades President Ionescu to allow the Jews to leave the country after she saves the life of the President's son by procuring a medicine from the United States in time. She cleverly makes Ionescu buy corn and soy beans from America. She makes the U.S. sanction a large loan to Romania after making the latter grant visas to a church group. She saves the lives of the American embassy staff and all the people gathered for a party by remembering at the crucial moment that the roof of the ballroom could be slid back. Angel has tied balloons filled with poisonous gas as part of the decoration. For once Angel fails, for Mary is too intelligent for the international killer.

Considering Mary's background as a happy housewife, her success as an ambassador is meteoric. A woman involved in normal chores, who has never visited any other country,
who has never flown—such a woman is to shoulder such new responsibilities. She is frightened of the task ahead. She thinks: "I'm a Kansas housewife pretending to be some kind of statesman. Everyone's going to know I'm a fraud. I was insane ever to agree to this" (Windmills 115).

But this very same Mary is bold and confident when questioned about her qualification to handle the assignment:

*If you mean have I had any diplomatic experience in dealing with foreign countries, then I'm not qualified. However, I've been told that one-third of the country's ambassadors are also people without previous experience. What I would bring to my job is a knowledge of Romania. I'm familiar with its economic and sociological problems and with its political background. I believe I could project a positive image of our country to the Romanians.' (Windmills 128)

This is quite a transformation in a woman who was a homecoming queen and who won the ice-skating contest three years in a row at Junction City. She has no idea as to how she is to manage. But she is determined to find a way. Mary has another disadvantage besides being inexperienced. She is a woman and alone. Romania is a male chauvinist country.
Mary is not to be bullied or snubbed. When the sister of a senator comments that Mary must have been thrilled to escape from Kansas, Mary proudly puts the patronising woman in place:

"If you've never been to middle America, you really don't know what you're talking about, do you? Because that's what this country is all about. America isn't Washington or Los Angeles or New York. It's thousands of small towns that you'll never even see or hear of that make this country great. It's the miners and the farmers and the blue collar workers. And yes, in Kansas we have ballets and symphonies and theatre. And, for your information, we raise a lot more than corn and wheat--we raise honest-to-God human beings.' (Windmills 171)

Mary is confident about her own capacity: "I'm going to be the best damned ambassador they've ever seen ... Before I'm finished, the United States and Romania are going to be close allies" (Windmills 181). Many people think that she is just a pretty face. President Ionescu also regards her as a beautiful, weak woman. She is determined to fight against gender bias as well. Mike Slade asks her to try her charm on the Security Chief to get the
arrested American student released. Mary manages every crisis and challenge with charm and stern authority as the situation warrants. She first ushers in discipline at the American embassy. She learns that unofficial meetings are held without her permission and that cables are being dispatched without her knowledge. She firmly puts people in their place with a warning that in future such wrong-doers will be dismissed. She asserts her right to fire any member of the staff and she fires the Agricultural Consul Ted Thompson for sending an unauthorized cable to the State Department. There is steel in her voice. She intends to succeed and she promises herself that she will do something worthwhile. Ironically even her disguised enemy Dr. Louis tells her that everyone who knows her is very impressed with her: "It seems that you have brought here an image of America that is beautiful and intelligent and warm. If you believe in what you are doing, then you must fight for it. You must stay. Do not let anyone frighten you away" (Windmills 242).

Mary struggles and wins. She uses human psychology to win. She bargains with the Romanian Government without appearing to do so. She boosts up the ego of Ionescu and wants him to have a sister-city for Romania in the U.S. She tells him that this will make him unique and he falls into
the trap. She blackmails the Security Chief about a family secret and gets the American student released. She delays the news of the loan sanction and invents a story to get visas for the church group. She comments about Romanians being good people but without knowing how to fix things up. She says this loudly knowing that the premises are bugged and it has the desired effect. All the repair work in her house are undertaken by the Romanian officials at once. She gets a serum flown immediately to save Ionescu's son without waiting for official permission. She is bold, undaunted, revolutionary and innovative. President Ellison calls her a miracle worker. At the end of her tenure, the President tells her: "'You've done a truly remarkable job ... we're all terribly proud of you.... You're the person we need over there. You'll be doing our country a great service ...'" (Windmills 317). Mary knows she has succeeded and the President asks her to continue in her place.

The contented Junction City housewife has left her familiar area, has departed into unknown regions and has battled with unfamiliar problems. She has been initiated into the art of managing a crisis. She has not only survived with her intelligence and ingenuity, but has also excelled and achieved unbelievable success. At the end, she is transformed: she is no longer the naive, simple
woman we saw at the beginning of the novel. There is steel not only in her voice but in her nerves also and her head has conquered the heart. Yet, she retains her femininity and day-to-day values. She is heroic as she has done everything for her country selflessly, risking her very life.

Mary gains strength as the novel proceeds. She is no victim whose destiny is decided by the winds of fortune blowing from the windmills of the gods. She cannot be blown hither and thither by even gods' windmills. She can no longer be made a prey, for, she has hunted out success, which was playing bo-peep with her.

In Sheldon's novel The Sands of Time, four nuns escape from a Cistercian Convent in Spain, when Basque separatists, continuing the Civil War, raid the convent. The nuns are entrusted with the sacred task of taking the golden cross to safety. Each of the nuns has had different reasons for entering the convent. Lucia Carmine, the daughter of a Sicilian Mafioso leader, has avenged her father's death by killing the murderers. She is wanted as an international fugitive and has taken refuge in the convent. She is happy at having escaped now and is on her way to Switzerland where she will inherit some of her father's money. She falls in love with one of the Basque
rebels, Rttbio. She finally settles down as a farmer's wife—quite a transformation for a sophisticated, unscrupulous, revengeful, high-spirited woman.

Graciela has been scarred in childhood by an immoral mother and her line of lovers. She now accepts an offer of marriage by one of the rebels, Ricardo. However, at the altar, she realises that she is already married to God and she returns to the convent.

Megan has been brought up in an orphanage before she comes to the convent. She is a high-spirited girl who dreams of riches and power. She wants to belong to someone. She lives in a world of fantasy and make-believe. She enters the convent, as she does not have any other option. After her escape from the convent, she falls in love with the Basque leader Jaime Miro. She turns out to be not an orphan but the heir to an international conglomerate. She assumes control of her family's Scott enterprises. Her aunt confesses to abandoning her after a plane crash, in which Megan's wealthy parents were killed, hoping to take over the business empire herself.

All the three women reveal remarkable courage, confidence and strength of character during their escapade. It is a totally unfamiliar area after their sheltered cloistered life. But, after departing from familiar
experiences, they meet with several problems and come out of them successfully. They survive and, with their strength, come out victorious. They are transformed finally into new, more complete beings. Megan in particular is resourceful, intelligent and ingenious. She learns everything required to head the business empire. She saves her lover Jaime Miro from death thrice by using her intelligence. She is the heroine of the novel who loves adventure and puts up with all rigours and refuses to crack.

The fourth nun, Teresa cannot be considered a heroine. She has been a nun for thirty years and is haunted by her guilt of abandoning her lover and her sister's baby through him before joining the nunnery. She joins the three sisters in taking the golden cross to safety. She becomes a traitor because of her guilt. She dies after being gang-raped by the army.

In this novel, the heroines have inner strength and courage. But Sheldon seems to have diffused their importance by sharing the focus amidst four women. Megan's aunt is another powerful woman in the novel. So, the heroines do not stand out as powerfully as the women in the single-heroine novels. Attention has been distributed and, therefore, the intensity seems reduced. The heroines in
this novel do not exactly face a crisis. It is more of an adventure. Hence, the spur to their heroism is mild. The crisis is not heightened enough to make the woman powerful. The escape of the nuns from the convent turns out into a romantic interlude. Footprints on the sands of time can be erased soon. So too the impact of these heroines, who do have the required potential, but unfortunately not the scope to emerge stronger. In this novel, the plot dominates the characterization.

Lara Cameron, the heroine of The Stars Shine Down, is the unwanted child of a drunkard, profligate father. He is the manager in charge of collecting rents from the boarding houses owned by Sean MacAllister at Glace Bay. He is a bitter man, a failure. He has become stoical and he blames fate for everything. He begins to enjoy failure and shirks hard work. His wife has died after giving birth to twins. The boy has died and Lara is alive. He wonders what to do with a daughter. He hopes she will also die. He thinks that if his son had been alive, he would have cared for his father. But Lara survives—she survives his hatred and indifference and neglect. The child is named Lara by the wet nurse, as the father does not care to think of a name for the girl. Sheldon describes Lara's predicament as a child:
Lara was hungry for affection, without knowing what the hunger was. She had no toys or dolls to cherish nor any playmates. She had no one except her father. She made childish little gifts for him, desperate to please him, but he either ignored or ridiculed them. (Stars 26)

Lara often hears her father complaining that the wrong child has died. He feels that his son should have lived. Lara weeps alone, for she loves her father but he hates her. Some sympathetic boarder makes her go to school. James Cameron thinks that she need not go to school, being a girl. He considers it a waste. But he finally agrees in order to keep Lara out of sight. The girl pretends at school that her father misses her even during school hours. The teacher finds a disquieting maturity about her. Lara has no decent clothes to wear. She does not have anything for lunch. When she asks her father for a dress, he tells her to get herself something from the Salvation Army. The children at school have dolls and toys. Nothing belongs to Lara, though some children share their toys with her. In a few years, Lara gets a glimpse of a different world, "a world where children had mothers and fathers who gave them presents and birthday parties and loved them and held them and kissed them" (Stars 29).
The boarders of the boarding house are tradesmen, lumbermen, carpenters, electricians, plumbers and miners and the boarding house is in reality Lara's school. Even as a child, Lara decides not to get married. Her father thinks that she is ugly and tells her, "*Ye hae best marry the first mon fool enough to ask ye'" (Stars 31). Lara weeps alone, unable to bear his hatred.

Lara envies tourists and longs to escape with them, but knows not how. She dreams that her maternal grandfather would one day take her away to glamorous cities. She does not have the time or the money to enjoy life. She works hard at school and at the boarding house. She dreams that, some day, Scott's Lochinvar would come and rescue her from her dreary conditions. As a child, Lara is moved by the sufferings of the Scottish tenants who were forced out of their land, burnt in their huts and robbed of everything during the notorious Highland Clearances and how some reached Canada and then had something they had never had before—their own land. She tells herself: "Some day... I will have my own land, and no one—no one—will ever take it away from me" (Stars 38).

Lara's father has a heart attack and is hospitalised. Lara takes on his work of rent collection and surprises Sean MacAllister by handing over all the rents in time. The
owner feels that she has done a better job than her useless father. But her father mode at her attempts and is worried only about his future. He does not care about what will happen to Lara. She is on trial for a month in the new job and she enjoys the thrill of having earned twenty-five dollars for the first time in her life. It is like a taste of freedom. When the boarders start giving various excuses for not paying the rent, she stands her ground. They do not realize that the young girl is fighting for her life. They grumble and say that it was easier dealing with her father. But every one admires Lara's spunk.

When the owner tells her that she has done better than her father, Lara is thrilled. Her father is again proved wrong when several young men come after her. But Lara is not interested in donning pretty clothes. She wants to own land. Bill Rogers, a boarder who has been in real estate, teaches her all about mortgages, bank loans and refinancing. "Lara listened and learned and remembered. She was like a sponge, eagerly soaking up every bit of information" (Stars 45) . Lara learns that in real estate one deals with other people's money and that location alone is important. Bill Rogers tells her that Glace Bay has a big housing shortage. Lara starts dreaming and visualizing
buildings. It is exciting and frustrating as she has only dreams and no money at all.

Charles Cohn, a Jewish boarder, wants a new location for a well-known national chain store. Lara impresses him with her quick intelligence and independent spirit. She decides to own a suitable location and put up a building if Charles Cohn agrees to take it on lease for five years. She chooses an ideal site. Cohn compliments her on the location. Lara borrows money from Sean to buy his own land. He will hold the mortgage on the building and the land till she repays his money with interest. She already has a tenant and cannot afford to lose him. She works hard and has all the necessary details at fingertips. She has to sell herself to Sean MacAllister once. She has nothing else to sell. She has to make this sacrifice in order to make her dreams come true. After this, Lara avoids him. He tries to double deal and Lara manages every crisis boldly. Finally, she becomes the proud owner of the huge building. To the onlooker the building is a maze of wood and steel, but to Lara it is something else: "It was her dream come to life" (Stars 61).

Her first building is only the beginning. There is no stopping her after that. She borrows on her buildings and goes on to new projects. Two years later, at the age of
twenty-one, she leaves Glace Bay for Chicago with three million dollars, after selling her real estate holdings.

In Chicago, banks advise Lara that real estate business is a man's game, that there is no place for women in it and that she would be dealing with a bunch of macho roughnecks who would eat her alive.

Howard Keller, her assistant, is captivated by Lara's enthusiasm and determination and he looks upon her as "a beautiful woman-child" (Stars 83).

Her building Cameron Palace wins rave reviews. She is called a phenomenon. Her innovations change the concept of hotels. She is said to have invaded the traditionally male turf of real estate developers and proved that a woman can outshine all of them (Stars 94). The boom in world population inspires Lara to go on to housing projects. She has learnt that real estate business is "an inverted pyramid—a real estate pyramid—that you can build on a very small initial cash investment" (Stars 95). She believes that there are too many ugly buildings marred the beauty of the horizon. According to her, every building should be a tribute to Chicago. Lara rarely socialises and she has no time to feel lonely. She never allows emotions to dominate her. The buildings she is putting
obsession with her. Her stage is Chicago and she is the star thereon (Stars 99).

Lara’s empire keeps expanding and still she is not satisfied. She does not allow anything to stand in her way. There is no stopping her. She is a perfectionist. She knows what she wants and she insists on getting it.

Lara does not allow any of her woricmen to take advantage of her. She deals with sexual harassment firmly and fires the wrongdoers. Their amusement eventually begins to change to respect. ‘When an old coffee shop owner refuses to sell his shop to her, as it is his sole means of living, she accommodates him, quite unpredictably. She buys a castle in Scotland and has her father buried there to be avenged on him.

Cameron Enterprises moves on to New York. She wants her name on the New York skyline. One day she wants to build the tallest skyscraper in the world. She takes great risks. According to Lara, that is what makes it exciting, the gamble and, the winning (Stars 115).

Lara is restless watching a new building go up, for, at that stage, the building belongs to the workmen. Once, her New York attorney, who is handling her contracts her, tells her that he has been betting against her: « 'Real estate development on the level where you're operating is a
man's game. The only women who should be in real estate are
the little old blue-haired ladies who sell co-ops' " (Stars
118). The next moment he is fired. According to Paul
Martin, her attorney, Lara is ambitious and independent,
and yet very feminine (Stars 141). She is the best in her
field and is excited to see her ideas grow in steel and
concrete. In a way, her buildings become monuments. She
does not tell any one her real story. There is a
vulnerability about her, an innocence and, at the same
time, something wildly sensual.

Some of the architects are patronizing. They have
never worked for a female developer before. She never
copies—she wants to be copied. She wants New York to be
her city.

Lara uses her intelligence, ingenuity and natural
flair for business and survives in Chicago and New York.
She does not merely survive but excels in and reaches the
top rung of the ladder in real estate business. Soon she
becomes a power to reckon with. A taskmaster, she gets
things done. She learns more and more as she goes along and
uses her experiences to become cleverer. Using psychology
and people's naive gullibility, she wins in a predominantly
male-oriented, field. She is tough with others and tougher
with herself. She becomes a legend, now vulnerable and
compassionate and totally human, and now hard and unyielding. It is said of her, " ^The Iron Butterfly is a bitch on wheels.... She'll eat you alive' " (Stars 13). Her secretary says of Lara: " 'She's larger than life___ She is a perfectionist, so she makes everyone around her miserable. In her own way, she is a genius. She can be petty and vengeful and incredibly generous' " (Stars 14). She is totally unpredictable in everything except in success.

Lara wins the friendship and love of Paul Martin, the attorney who is an expert in settling labour union problems. He has descended from a Mafia family. He warns Lara that real estate is no place for a woman. Lara reacts violently and asks him: " ^And what is the place for a woman? Barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen?' " (Stars 122) Paul Martin has been a dangerous friend. When Lara marries the internationally acclaimed pianist Philip Adler, Paul very nearly destroys her in the Casino Gambling license inquest. Lara almost loses Philip because of her possessiveness. Her devoted assistant Howard Keller does what he considers to be for her happiness and very nearly breaks Lara's marriage. But Lara survives every type of crisis: labour problems, threat by a powerful Mafia attorney, emotional crisis, the fear of losing her beloved
husband's love and trust, fear of bankruptcy, imprisonment and total financial chaos. But she does not stop dreaming and fighting with determination. In spite of all these, she holds her head high.

Lara knows when to be proud and when to be humble. She begs Paul Martin to give back her life. She almost gives first preference to love and married life. That is her weakness because she has always craved for affection. But even Philip cannot make her a normal housewife. No one can stop her from dreaming and achieving.

Lara's work touches the lives of so many people. She thinks: "I've made this city better.... I've done everything I wanted to do. Then why am I restless?" (Stars 241) One headline reads: "Lara Cameron stands for 'CAN DO'" (Stars 183). She lives in a fantasy world of riches, very different from that of the girl who was asked by her own father to get a dress from the Salvation Army.

To Lara her employees are family. She builds a protective wall around herself and vows that no one is ever going to hurt her again. She is now more than a glamorous figure. Sheldon describes her greatness:

She was a symbol to the women of the world, an icon.... A perfume was named after her. She was invited to all the important social events, and
hostesses were eager to have her at their dinner parties. Her name on a building seemed to ensure success. (Stars 178)

Lara is "America's Princess" and she is the main attraction wherever she goes. Hundreds of people gather to see her and cheer her. The Mayor says at a function: "Wherever you look ... you can see Lara Cameron's contribution written in concrete" (Stars 180).

Lara has scaled the unimaginable pinnacle in a purely male domain—real estate. From being a prey to parental neglect and poverty she has become a predator seeking international success. There seems to be a period of passiveness in this otherwise active heroine when she depends on Paul Martin to save her. But then, she knows when to be proud and when to be humble. That is her charisma and strength. Even the unforgiving Sicilian, Paul, is so much fascinated by Lara, that he forgives her for having cast him aside for Philip. She intelligently strums the strings of human psychology and calls her own tune. She uses humility as a weapon at the right moment to win sympathy, and thereby, her goal. She does not stand by, letting things take their course. She plans and works for her happiness and success. She finally becomes a star in her own right.
In Sheldon's novel *Nothing Lasts Forever*, Paige Taylor, Kate Hunter and Honey Taft join the Bembaradero County hospital in San Francisco as doctors. It is one of the oldest hospitals in the country. Right from day one, they have to fight against gender bias and discrimination. The janitor wonders if they are nurses. When told that they are doctors, he asks sceptically: "^Doctors? You mean, like real doctors?' " (*Nothing* 30) The three women share an apartment and plunge into the hectic activity at the hospital.

The doctors do thirty-six hours of unrelenting work. Paige has to put up with sexual jokes but she deals firmly with any advances made by the doctors or the patients. According to her, some of the doctors feel that the women doctors are "perks that go with the territory" (*Nothing* 47). The worst is that men think that they are doing the women doctors a favour. Paige complains: "^Women are judged inferior until we prove ourselves, and men are judged superior until they prove what ... they are' " (*Nothing* 47). Some of the men doctors like Dr. Kane are licensed to kill by their negligence and indifference. Dr. Kane refers to nurses and female residents derisively as fresh meat (*Nothing* 48).
Paige has been inspired to become a dedicated doctor by her father who died while serving in Africa. She was nearly engaged to Dr. Alfred, but he let her down and married someone else. Paige throws herself into the medical profession to forget her pain.

Kat, a Black, was sexually abused at the age of thirteen by her stepfather. She fled to an old aunt, aborted the child and went on to study medicine. She lives for her younger brother, who has now got into bad company. His life is in constant threat because of his underworld connections. Kat's aunt is responsible for changing the girl's attitude to life. She told Kat, as Sheldon narrates:

'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 be. It's up to you.'

(Nothing 53)

Kat has been influenced by Sinclair lewis's Arrowsmith, Agnes Cooper's Promises to Keep and Dr.Else Ree's Woman Surgeon. She discovers that there are people who devote
themselves to helping others and to saving lives. She decides to become a doctor, and a famous one. She wants to serve suffering humanity and she lives up to her lofty ideals.

Honey has not been able to live up to the expectations of her wealthy, famous family. She wanted to be a nurse but her family snobbishly wanted her to become a doctor. Not having the brains to do the difficult course, Honey used her physical allure to win the degree. She circumvents every problem using her sexual prowess.

Paige and Kat are thrilled by the miracles performed in their profession. They are proud to be doctors. While Kat builds an armour round herself, Paige is human and friendly to her patients besides being brilliant and dedicated.

Kat is harassed by the chief nurse Margaret Spencer. She constantly makes Kat examine male patients suffering from venereal disease. No one seems to recognize Kat's ability or dedication. However, she is a survivor and will not quit even amidst adversities. Soon, she wins the respect of everyone. She is firm and she takes bold decisions concerning her patients, undaunted by anything.

Paige and Kat are righteously indignant at the negligence that prevails in the hospital. They are both idealistic. Once, Dr. ECane removes a healthy kidney from a
patient by mistake and Paige voices her condemnation, not
caring if she gets the reputation of being a maverick, blowing the whistle on fellow doctors. Paige takes quick
decisions when she has to save a life. She is an excellent
surgeon. She refuses to be tied down by bureaucracy. She
detects that one of the doctors is selling narcotics from
the dispensary and making money. Another doctor has
carelessly sent a HIV positive blood sample for a
transfusion for a patient named Sean.

Paige has long admired cardiovascular surgeon Dr.
Barker. She wants to impress him. But he is rude. From the
beginning, he seems to be prejudiced against Paige and he
openly criticizes her. He is miserly with praise and caustic
and sarcastic. Once, when Paige is operating and the patient
dies due to the fault of the anesthetist, Dr. Barker accuses
her of having killed the patient. When Paige thinks of
leaving the hospital because of Barker, he suffers a stroke
and is confined to bed.

Meanwhile, Ken Mallory, for a wager, makes Kat fall in
love with him. She gets pregnant and he decides to do away
with her as he is to marry a very wealthy girl. Kat is found
dead and it is dismissed as suicide. Paige single-handedly
proves it to be murder. She helps John Cronin, a terminally
ill patient, to die, at his request for mercy killing. He
leaves her his inheritance, much to her surprise and shock and she is charged with murder for gain.

At the trial, Dr. Barker appears in a wheelchair and, to everyone's amazement, turns the case in Paige's favour. He says that he was harsh with her as he recognised a born, gifted doctor in her. He wanted her to be perfect.

Paige uses her inheritance to set up a medical foundation in her father's name in Africa and marries Jason, an architect, and goes into private practice with Dr. Barker. Honey moves to Ireland with Sean who shows no symptoms of AIDS as yet, and works as a nurse.

The novel highlights the gender discrimination even against highly qualified doctors. Patients and doctors instinctively feel that women can only be nurses. A lady-doctor meets with a lot of opposition in her work. Negligence by a male doctor is dismissed as a mistake but a woman is blamed even for the mistakes of others. There are different yardsticks for male and female doctors.

Paige is human, dedicated and brilliant. She survives several crises in her life and achieves success. She survives when let down by her fiancé. She survives the animosity of fellow doctors, the taxing demands of the hospital, sexual harassment and a murder charge. She excels in her field and fights against insincere doctors boldly.
She brings to light the murder of Kat and single-handedly trades the murderer Ken Mallory. She exposes the drug-narcotic theft going on in the hospital. She is a woman with a social responsibility and awareness. She is strong and determined amidst discouragement. She is an ideal doctor with lofty, noble dreams.

Kat is also a serious, sincere doctor. Her career is all the more spectacular, for she is a Black woman and has to face double discrimination. Her family background is traumatic—a rapist stepfather, poverty and a younger brother who belongs to the underworld. She survives amidst these conditions. More important, her values and noble ideals survive. She fails to get admission to prestigious medical schools, being a Black. At the hospital she meets with sexual harassment and is ill-treated for being a Black and a woman. She is firm and straightforward. Her survival, achievement and excellence are phenomenal till an emotional entanglement leads to her murder.

Honey is a victim of social snobbery. Her family is the culprit for her being a whore-doctor.

Paige and Kat are intelligent, independent women. They make their own decisions boldly, undaunted by the system or social pressure. They believe that they are responsible for the lives of the patients who come to them and will not give
in to any pressure, if it conies in the way of their saving their patients.

This novel, like The Sands of Time, has three important women characters and the focus seems distributed among them. Unlike the single-heroine novels, this novel portrays characters who are slightly less powerful. There is no transformation in Paige's character: there is only a further strengthening and development of her inborn qualities. Hence, her emergence from the crisis is not dramatic. She is not isolated or let down by the social system in her moment of need. Dr. Barker, her worst critic, does come to her rescue. It may be a lucky coincidence, but her sense of dedication and courage has fascinated him. The element of struggle is toned down by the structure of the novel. There is no total swing in the action or crisis to be faced single-handedly.) The external impetus is tepid. But Paige refuses to be made a prey. She hunts down wrong-doers and carves a niche for herself by conquering all kinds of bias. Nothing lasts forever at the emotional level. But the success and achievements, the courage and dignity of a strong survivor do last forever.

The Best Laid Plans has two strong female protagonists, Leslie Stewart and Dana Evans. Leslie is intelligent and beautiful and is on top of the world as she is engaged to
Oliver Russell, an upcoming attorney and a sure candidate for Governor. She handles his campaign. As a child, she was wounded by her father's desertion of the family. Now, she is betrayed and let down just before the wedding by Oliver, who chooses to marry Jan, the only daughter of Senator Todd Davis. Oliver had been dating Jan even before he proposed to Leslie. Leslie puts up a cool, composed facade and everyone is surprised when she graciously forgives Oliver. Leslie.

Leslie leaves for Phoenix, where she meets Chambers, a newspaper owner, with the help of Davis. Peter Tager takes over Oliver's campaign and the latter becomes Governor. Leslie marries Chambers and is soon widowed. She becomes the owner of the paper. She is self-willed and adamant. But she gradually wins the respect of her staff. She moves from success to success and acquires more newspapers. Oliver soon becomes the President of the United States. Leslie monitors scandals involving Oliver.

Miriam, Oliver's secretary when he was Governor, is found in coma under mysterious circumstances. Leslie uses her paper as a weapon to taint Oliver's public image. Oliver, in order to placate her, invites her over and, after spending the night with the President, Leslie writes about his secret love nests in the morning's newspaper. Oliver's nana gets linked with the mysterious murder of a teenage
girl and Leslie is determined to pin him down. But, she allows her emotions to dominate and ends up by publishing a false report accusing the President as being responsible for the murder. When it is proved otherwise, Leslie's revenge backfires and she makes herself a laughing stock.

Dana Evans is a spirited, courageous reporter working for Leslie's paper. She is sincere, dedicated, intelligent and ingenious. She takes up several dangerous and risky assignments and very nearly loses her life. But, she always succeeds in exposing the truth. She finds out that Peter Tager is behind the murder of the teenage girl and that he has been using the President as his cover up. Dana, known for her sensational interviews, corners the killer sent by Tager in a live telecast.

In this novel, Leslie's thirst for revenge makes her a typical heroine of Sheldon. But her failure at the end is uncharacteristic. It may be because she allows emotion to cloud her intellect. Dana comes out as a high-spirited successful heroine. The heroine stuff seems to have been divided into two in this novel. The cinematic climax and the plot seem to dominate characterization. Neither of the heroines is passive. Leslie, made a prey at one stage, does turn into a predator. The crisis of being let down makes her follow the quest pattern and she does journey from
contentment and humility to angry pride. She becomes an avenging angel, hunting down the President himself. The element of struggle is mild as she conveniently inherits a newspaper as a weapon, fortune and power. But she does not have control over her emotions and, therefore, she fails to act in a controlled manner. The final defeat may be attributed to this. Dana cannot be viewed as a heroine, as her courage and intelligence are but a part of a journalist's profession. She is made a prey by terrible circumstances as part of her assignments but she emerges a predator in hunting out truth at all costs.

The novel is socially relevant with the President's name being linked in several scandals. His public confession of a private weakness, his testifying in the Oval office before the FBI--these may sound familiar to the reader. These details make the novel contemporary but the similarities need not be overemphasised.

Ashley Patterson, the heroine of Tell Me Your Dreams, works in a computer company in Cupertino, south of San Francisco. Her mother having died when Ashley was a child, her father, a famous heart specialist, is all she has. She is attractive but keeps men at a distance. She was in love with her schoolmate Jim Cleary, but her father disapproved of the match. Ashley planned to elope with Jim and waited
for him at the railway station, but he did not turn up. She quietly returned home and was sent to London for further studies the very next day.

Ashley is now disturbed in Cupertino by terrible nightmares. She feels that she is being stalked. She meets her company's psychologist, who asks her to take a holiday. In the office, Dennis Tibbie, the computer genius is obsessed with Ashley. But she firmly discourages him. Two other young women, Toni Prescott and Alette Peters, are also said to be working in the same office. They seem to feel that Ashley is goody-goody and stupid at times.

Ashley attends an old students meet in her hometown. She is shocked to learn that Jim was murdered and castrated on the night before she left for London. Ashley has a suspicion that her father must have been responsible for the murder. Back in Cupertino, Ashley visits Dennis, as he wants her advice regarding some girl he has fallen in love with. The next day, she finds herself in a cheap Chicago hotel. She has no recollection as to how she landed there and she has exceeded the limit on her credit card. Desperately she calls her father who helps her return to Cupertino. She then tells him of her visit to Dennis's apartment. Her father reacts violently, as he always does when she has any problem with a man. She hears later that day, that Dennis was
murdered and castrated. Ashley feels that her angry father is behind it all. When the police question the staff in her office about Dennis, Ashley volunteers the information that, though they were never close, she visited him once to deliver some papers. She feels that now, even if her fingerprints are found in Dennis's apartments, she will be safe.

Ashley becomes paranoid. She is puzzled that someone is using her apartment, going through her wardrobe, ordering dresses in her name and so on. These mysteries confuse her and make her panic-stricken.

Toni Prescott loves to sing and has a typical British accent. She finds a boyfriend through the Internet. The computer company sends a group of the staff to attend a conference in Quebec City. Ashley too attends the conference. So does Toni, who is excited because her boyfriend Jean Claude lives in Quebec City. Jean gives Toni a beautiful emerald ring. The next day he is found murdered and castrated. The police cannot trace Toni Prescott.

Alette loves a young, upcoming artist called Richard Melton, she herself loves to paint. He seems to have a positive influence on her. Soon, he too is found murdered and castrated. The series of maniacal murders shock the
public. Common links are traced and it is suspected that the
murderer works in Ashley's computer company. It is revealed
that all the murdered man have had sex before dying. DNA
tests and fingerprint tests are being done.

Ashley is questioned about Jean Claude, as she was in
Quebec City at the time of the murder. She says that she
does not know Jean Claude or Richard Melton. She takes a
polygraph test which proves that she is not lying. Ashley
finds a murder threat written on her mirror at home. She
calls Deputy Sam Blake, the detective, and begs him to stay
overnight as she is frightened. The next day his naked dead
body, stabbed and castrated, is found in an alley near
Ashley's house. She is arrested. The butcher's knife used
for the murder and the emerald ring given by Jean Claude to
Toni, are found in Ashley's apartment. She knows nothing
about them. Meanwhile, the fingerprint tests and the DNA
tests prove that she is the murderer behind all the gruesome
killings. Ashley is sincerely puzzled.

David Singer, a young lawyer, indebted to Ashley's
father, takes up the case, at the insistence of the latter.
All evidence points to Ashley being the maniacal killer. But
her ignorance appears genuine and David gets the help of a
psychiatrist. During hypnotherapy, it is found that Ashley
has multiple personality disorder, and, Toni and Alette are
her alters who have committed all the murders. David is
stunned to see that Ashley's face and voice change
differently when she becomes Toni and Alette. The trial
nearly goes against Ashley as no one seems to believe in
MPD. The alters refuse to emerge during the trial. Then, in
a private viewing of a videotape, the Judge herself sees
the stunning personality changes in Ashley. Ashley is
acquitted and sent to a psychiatric hospital.

At the hospital, after several months, many truths
emerge. It is found that Ashley's father, who is actually
her stepfather had sexually abused her at the age of six,
in London. Toni was born then. Ashley was raped by him when
she was eight, in Italy. Alette came into existence then.
During hypnosis, the modus operandi of the murders is
revealed by the alters. Ashley is initially frightened of
the alters within her. However, she gradually accepts them
and, with the help of the doctors, becomes whole once
again. Her repressed talents emerge and Ashley sings and
paints happily. She gains confidence and loses her fears
and inhibitions. Her trauma ends and she is at peace with
herself and with the world.

Ashley is made a prey to her stepfather's incestuous
appetite at a tender age. She is forced out of innocence
and she struggles against unfamiliar psychological
problems. The alters emerge from the chrysalis after every trauma, and take over. The pause periods are not very obvious. Action is sudden and violent and not carefully planned. The alters take revenge against men who approach Ashley for sex. The prey Ashley turns a terrible predator in the guise of Toni and Alette. The transformation is not only within but external changes can also be discerned during hypnosis. At the end, Ashley emerges from her double crises as a more complete, whole being. The first crisis is her sexual abuse by her father and the second one is the alters taking over and killing men without her being aware of it. She gains inner strength and total control over herself at the end. She accepts her hidden cravings and loses her inhibitions and fears.

The five-stage pattern can be traced in her evolution as a more complete being. The pattern of prey turning predator is also clear. Ashley emerges from the chrysalis of secret fears and becomes a complete being. The alters are not driven out but amalgamated into her personality. A disintegrated personality is unified.

Sheldon's heroines are women who emerge from the chrysalis as stronger, more complete beings. They break out of the hard protective covering and emerge from a torpid.
inert state to an active, independent state of mind. The crisis becomes the catalyst to bring them out.

No longer a weak prey, the Sheldonian heroine has now become powerful and has turned into a predator. While some women hunt down enemies, others go hunting after success and impossible achievements. They have gained a hunter's compulsion to persevere and go after their goal undeterred and undaunted. The torpid worm has now gained full maturity and can fight for and by itself. The women have total control over their lives. They do not merely survive but excel.

Sheldon's women are first shown living ordinary, uneventful lives, with the normal desires of women in general. They crave for a happy family, loving husband, good job, money, children etc. But they are suddenly forced to depart from this familiar landscape, the departure being necessitated by a terrible crisis or challenge. Now begins for them a period of struggle in an unfamiliar area with hitherto unknown adverse forces. The women very nearly give up. Then comes a period of introversion or outward stillness.

It is at this point that the Sheldonian heroine draws strength from within and listens to her head. It is a time of planning: every move is well thought out. After this
period of pause begins the phase of action and achievement. If the pause period is the theoretical rehearsal, the next stage is the practical test, the stage of implementation. At the end, the heroine is transformed by her struggles. She emerges stronger and more complete. The struggle has brought out several aspects of her personality not known even to herself. She surprises herself at every move. She has become an enigma, unpredictable. At some point, without her own realizing it, she has changed. She is no longer her former naive self. The experience has hardened her. She no longer requires the hard protective covering of a chrysalis. Nothing can destroy her now, for she has emerged not as a fragile butterfly but as an iron butterfly—strong and beautiful—a female hero who does not lose her femininity.

In the novels discussed above, the stages in the evolution of the Sheldonian heroine may overlap. Jill, in A Stranger in the Mirror, is transformed when she departs from the familiar areas, and the stages of pause and achieving action follow. In Noelle (Midnight), Jennifer (Rage) and Tracy (Tomorrow) the five stages are clear: happy childhood, betrayal by men or crisis, period of planning, action and achievement and, the final transformation. In the case of Tracy, the pause period is in the prison, where she gains inner strength. Kate in Master of the Game has never led an
uneventful life. She thrives forever on challenges and struggles against fate. She continues to plan and act till her ninetieth year. Stages three and four run concurrently in her case. Her transformation lies in that she becomes the company. In Windmills of the Gods, Mary's evolutionary pattern is clear, her crisis being her husband's death. In Megan and Lucia (Sands), though not very obvious, the pattern can still be traced. In The Stars Shine Down, Lara's crisis is her father's illness. She educates herself in the pause period, and goes on to action and achievement. The child who craved for affection becomes a practical woman, ruled by her head. The pattern is thinly traceable in Nothing Lasts Forever: Paige faces several crises—father's death, betrayal by her fiance, hurdles in the hospital, and the charge of murder, but she utilises her pause, becomes stronger, acts boldly and achieves success.

Leslie in The Best Laid Plans goes from a normal, happy life to the crisis of being let down by Oliver. She struggles against the pain and embarrassment and goes on to the pause period, wherein she plans her strategy of revenge. She is active and uses every opportunity to taint Oliver's public image. But her revenge backfires and she becomes a laughing stock. The pattern is clear, though with slight changes.
In *Tell Me Your Dreams*, Ashley's emergence is very-clear. She goes through the stages of happy, uneventful days to a crisis—her father's sexual abuse of her at a tender age. She suffers unfamiliar psychological trauma and then acts violently, through her alters, and becomes a predator literally. She is finally transformed from a disintegrated personality to a unified, whole, complete being—bold and confident. The pause period is not very clear as Ashley's murders are not pre-planned but executed on the spur of the moment.

Sheldon's heroines resemble the archaic hero in their encounter with destructive forces. They seem to follow Campbell's monomyth pattern. The following chapter will trace this pattern and analyse the archetypal elements in Sheldon's heroines.