

Compelling Heroines: Empowered Voices of Modernity & Resilience

(Sidney Sheldon's *If Tomorrow Comes* and *The Stars Shine Down*)

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Abstract: *Sidney Sheldon's novels If Tomorrow Comes and The Stars Shine Down present compelling heroines who embody modernity, resilience, and empowerment. Tracy Whitney and Lara Cameron, the protagonists of these novels, navigate a world dominated by power struggles, deception, and ambition, redefining traditional gender roles through their intelligence, determination, and unyielding spirit. Tracy, wrongfully imprisoned and seeking justice, transforms into a master strategist, while Lara rises from a troubled past to become a self-made real estate mogul. Both heroines challenge societal constraints, demonstrating that resilience and adaptability are key to survival and success. This paper explores how Sheldon crafts his female protagonists as symbols of empowerment, reflecting the evolving role of women in contemporary literature. By analyzing their journeys, struggles, and triumphs, the study highlights how these characters inspire and redefine narratives of female agency in modern fiction.*

Keywords: Heroines, Intelligence, Gender Politics, Female Agency, Modernity, Resilience, Power, Success, Narrative authority

1. Introduction

"Human nature is "elusive, indeterminate, multiple, often implausible, infinitely various and essentially irreducible."¹

The perception aligns with August Strindberg's philosophy in view of human nature as complex, contradictory, resistant to rigid categorization and psychologically fragmented by constant inner turmoil, elusive, irrational, and shaped by subconscious forces. His works often defy conventional storytelling, embracing fragmented structures, dream-like sequences, and symbolic elements (especially in plays like *The Dream Play*). Compared to the old times Sheldon novels are highly structured, gripping, and cinematic, often featuring strong female protagonists navigating ambition, determination, confidence, forcefulness, assertiveness, etc. His novels explore the themes of power and survival, and his narratives emphasize agency and strategic thinking, with characters shaping their own destinies through intellect and willpower. Sheldon, though acknowledging complexity, tends to streamline human behaviour into a more digestible, compelling narrative. If Strindberg explores the unpredictability of existence, Sheldon crafts narratives of mastery and control in a world driven by ambition and desires. Sidney Sheldon's novels are renowned for their complex, ambitious female characters who often embody traits traditionally associated with masculine models of power, control, assertiveness, and strategic thinking. By internalizing these models, Sheldon's women are portrayed not as passive or secondary figures but as active agents who take charge of their destinies, often navigating environments dominated by men. This blending of traditionally feminine and masculine traits makes his female characters multidimensional, reflecting both the opportunities and struggles of women in the patriarchal societies and the world at large. Sidney Sheldon's portrayal of women characters represents a significant evolution in the depiction of female agency positioning women as ambitious, and self-resilient figures who actively shape their destinies. His protagonists transcend the perceptions of modernity and confine to power struggles through complex societal and political landscape

domains previously reserved for male characters. It shows that Sheldon attempts is a sheer conveyance that reflects the tensions between feminist agency and overcome the traditional gendered expectations. His portrayal of female strength is rooted in intelligence, adaptability, and an unyielding will to succeed, making his heroines stand out in the landscape of modernity which reminds about Knut Hamsun's observation suggests a fragmented, impressionistic approach to reality said as, "it an attempt to break down into successive fragmentary moments of time even the most commonplace events of life (like a path of falling leaf)(the) realer level of reality might be recorded- and also in those more impressionistic attempts to catch something of the moment-to- moment working of the mind..."² This aligns with his modernist literary techniques, particularly his focus on subjective experience and psychological depth rooted within the patriarchal conflicts. While his works challenge traditional gender roles, they do so within narratives that remain deeply entrenched in patriarchal structures, reflecting both the limitations and the evolving perceptions of gender politics in popular literature.

2. Sheldon's Sirens: Legacy and Cultural Impact

Sheldon's ability to craft powerful heroines within the framework of success patterns stresses the modern notion of fragmented identity and moral relativism, where the distinction between hero and antihero becomes blurred. Unlike classical literary heroines who operate within strict moral framework, Sheldon's female protagonists exist in a liminal space where ambition often requires compromise, deception, or even ruthlessness. This narrative choice line up with theorist Michel Foucault's perspective on power as fluid and situational, rather than inherent or fixed within hierarchical structures. Sheldon's heroines, rather than being granted power, they must seize it through intellect and adaptability, mirroring the existentialist ideas that identifies agency are constructed rather than predetermined. Sheldon aided to redefine the mainstream portrayal of women in literature while the existing constraints on gender politics had

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immense reactionary effects. On the outset Sheldon heroines proactively shape women empowerment representing women who sought independence and self-determination beyond traditional gender constraints. Sheldon's heroines are capable and independent, their empowerment often emerges as a response to betrayal, injustice, or male-dominated structures. This echoes Simone de Beauvoir's assertion in *The Second Sex* that women must navigate male-dominated spaces by adopting traditionally masculine traits to assert authority. Sheldon's novels integrate strong female figures within them, making his work more commercially accessible yet still progressive for its time. Sheldon's heroines, such as Kate Blackwell in *Master of the Game* and Tracy Whitney in *If Tomorrow Comes*, embody a fluid, morally ambiguous power that challenges conventional gender roles. Kate, for instance, is a Machiavellian business magnate, leveraging manipulation and strategic foresight to sustain her empire, the traits typically associated with male corporate figures. Tracy Whitney, on the other hand, subverts the traditional victim narrative by transforming from a wronged woman into a highly intelligent and resourceful con artist, using deception as both a weapon and a survival tool. Unlike the passive or overtly romanticized female protagonists of earlier popular fiction, Sheldon's heroines are neither damsels in distress nor mere femme fatales; instead, they occupy high ground of complexity, where power is acquired through intelligence, adaptability, and strategic manoeuvring. This places them in position with the archetype of the "New Woman", a literary and cultural figure of modernity. Sheldon's heroines are designers of their own fates, resilient through intellect, adaptability, and strategic agency. By crafting women who do endure hardship to reshape their destinies, Sheldon not only breaks the conventional storytelling models but also contributed to the broader literary discourse on gender and power politics. His work, though rooted in entertainment and mass-market appeal, subtly, engages with themes of feminist agency, existential self-creation, and the fluid nature of power, securing his legacy as a writer who brought nuanced female protagonists into the mainstream popular fiction genre. To interpret, "...it points to a discontinuous experience of time, space, and causality as transitory, fleeting and fortuitous"³ Frisby, who was influenced by thinkers like Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, often analyzed the effect of modernity on human perceptions. He argues that modernity, with its rapid changes, overwhelming stimuli, and unpredictable events, people no longer experience time, space, or cause-and-effect relationships in a stable, unified way. Instead, life feels fragmented, momentary, and shaped by coincidence rather than clear, logical sequences. In essence, Sheldon's heroines live in a world where stability is an illusion, and their experiences make parallel with Frisby's inception of modernity. Sheldon's heroines frequently jump between different periods of their lives, often in nonlinear ways. Flashbacks, abrupt life changes, and sudden reversals of fortune create a sense that time is not experienced in a smooth, continuous way but rather as a series of dramatic shifts. For example, in *If Tomorrow Comes*, Tracy Whitney's life transforms overnight from a promising future to a nightmare when she is framed for a crime she didn't commit. Her past success becomes irrelevant in an instant. They are often uprooted from one place to another, experiencing vastly different environments in rapid succession, prisons, luxury mansions, remote hideouts, bustling cities. For instance, in the

novel *The Stars Shine Down*, Lara Cameron moves from humble beginnings to a life of immense wealth. Her life is shaped by chance encounters, betrayals, and unexpected twists yet, stable progression.

3. Breaking Boundaries: The Journey to Self-Realization

Sidney Sheldon's novel *If Tomorrow Comes* (ITC-1985) attempts to organize the essential element of change in women's position. Typically, he sketches Tracy Whitney to rebel under the pressures of failure and her longing for emancipation gets visualized. However, she is shown frustrated by the social and sexual discrimination, but, procures the rational schemes of survival and is set to play the chords of modernity occupied by material and social circumstances. Tracy Whitney appears to be the twentieth century re-incarnation of Moll Flanders. Tracy Whitney by the identity super woman fits the strings of modernity by getting seized to the social and material condition of the modern world. The concept of modern woman through strenuous process from the past to the present is made, remade and altered so as to state the "demanding old fashioned respect (along with) the modern esteem, banking on the old magic and their (new) rights."⁴ Hence, the character Tracy Whitney's pursuit for victory demands the perceptions of modernity and her situation to cope up with it. The theme of the novel rests on how innocent people get trapped especially when it is a woman as a victim by the modern havocs. "Since women is opaque in her very being, she stands before men not as a subject but as an object paradoxically endowed with subjectivity; she takes herself simultaneously as 'self' and as 'other', a contradiction that entails baffling consequence"⁵

Tracy Whitney beautiful and intelligent falls prey to the fascination of the conventional marital institutions. Her wish to become a wonderful wife to Charles was her dream. She imagines herself as a fairy queen; "I feel like a princess in a fairy tale, Mother, I never believed anyone could be so happy. Tomorrow night I'm meeting Charles's parents." (ITC, p: 04) She deepens her voice as though making a pronouncement. However, fate never allows her playing the role of a fairy queen instead the queen who rule the anxieties of ultra-modernity. All her dreams are crushed when she receives the news of her mother's death. She finds the truth behind her mother's death was Joseph Romano who forced her mother into bankruptcy and drove her to commit suicide. She thinks to take revenge against her mothers' conspirator Joseph Romano. She attacks him foolishly and get caught by the police in 'attempt to murder' case and locked up in the jail. She fails to get solace from her rich lover Charles. She realizes later that Charles was in need of a beautiful wife to maintain the status of his family name rather than a lovable husband. She becomes a criminal by the plan designed by Joseph Romano, the lawyer Perry Pope, the Judge Henry Lawrence and the underworld mafia leader Anthony Orsatti. Her experience in the prison makes to understand much about the modern world. She learns things which were never been taught in her school or college. "She played the teaching game: Name three absolute impossible things to teach...To teach an ant the difference between the Catholics and Protestants. To make a bee understand that it is the earth that travels around the sun. To explain a cat the difference

between communism and democracy. (ITC, p: 66) All her hopes during her prison life make her believe that if tomorrow comes she would teach the world how to make things possible in an impossible situation. "...she was not exercising her body, (but) her mind. She lay in the dark, doing complicated mathematical equations. (ITC, p: 65)

When she is harassed by two of her cell mates, the black women Ernestine, from Puerto Rico, and Paulita from Mexico, she weeps for the sick world in which she has to survive. She was in a situation that anyone else would have considered hopeless. But there was a strong force within herself to say "I will survive.... I face my enemies, and courage is my shield. she would survive as her ancestors had survived." (ITC, P: 64) Simon de Beauvoir's assumption on women's strength says; "when she makes weapons at once of her weakness and strength, she seeks salvation spontaneously in the way that has been imposed on her".⁶ Tracy Whitney in her anguish imagines as insane and pleads herself to gain strength. To her own surprise, she challenges her enemies in the prison who knocks her down and becomes a super model woman. During her plans for escape she instinctively helps the Jailer's child, Amy who falls in the swimming pool. This incident confirms her as a citizen believed by the court not as a threat to the society and get released from the prison but, the agony she faces outside the prison makes her the real criminal. After her release, Tracy's previous employers weren't willing to take her back for the job. Even though she was declared by the court as innocent, society never accepts her. Even her computer records fail to give her a job, she finds ways to survive bearing her criminal record. Unwillingly by no other option she surrenders her intelligence of upgrading her criminal record, becoming successful in aggravated burglary. With an awful experience she declares: "there was something exhilarating about being on the edge of danger. She felt daring and clever and invincible. She felt absolutely great". (ITC, p: 181) She starts enjoying it. Her success is seen from the fact that police of various countries think that Europe is attacked by a gang of women criminals. Various acts of trickery are shown in the novel like stealing of a very famous painting from a museum in Paris, looting the precious jewels of an Italian director's wife, and other burglaries. She meets a man named Jeff who is also a criminal by the situational facts as like her. However, in the beginning she despises him, but later falls in love. They both decide to marry and give up their criminal profession forever. But before that, they decide to complete a last mission operation on a big project. The police of Belgium were in search for them. But they deceive the police and complete their mission successfully. She feels proud of herself saying that: "Great is not good enough. Best is what counts. And I am the best." (ITC, p: 225) She actively demands her rights of power and no doubt though her act was unfair yet, her protest against the ambiguous situation is seen complicated by the modern tactics for survival. She is forced to confirm her living to the conditions of the modern world. She harmonizes the ideas of women's combat with the chaotic world. In this way, Tracy Whitney the arc of Sidney Sheldon heroine embodies the defiance of patriarchal oppression. Initially a victim of systemic injustice betrayed by a corruptly system, male dominated society, she evolves into a figure of empowerment. Her transformation can be analysed through Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "becoming" (The Second Sex), where

a woman moves beyond societal definitions to carve her own identity. Tracy's journey parallels Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" but deviates in significant ways that highlight her as a modern female protagonist. However, women sometimes suffer injustice, but, then, when enough opportunities are found, they think, act, and indeed do react naturally.

4. The Phoenix Rises: Feminine Power and Narrative Authority

The novel *The Stars Shine Down* (1992) exposes the politics of women in business by placing the character Lara Cameron at the stratum of real-estate business. There are thousands of stars in the sky and some are very bright because of their own special powers. Lara Cameron like a Sirius star shines bright and brilliant in the business world. The novel explores women's anxieties of modern deprivations and the upper echelon of business politics. Lara is seen as an enigma, a lonely figure with a secret history since her childhood dreaming of being non-dependent and to earn money independently. Her obsession for money persuades to do everything to what her mind demands. She fights her way up and meets the challenges by any consequences came in her way to gain wealth. However, her life been concealed with terrible uncertainties yet, she makes her possible efforts to acquire prosperity. Lara Cameron seems to possess everything that life offered her. Being young and beautiful, she wanted the whole world to view her as a worthy woman. She represents as a revolutionary individual making progress in the business world. She outshines her competitors and reaches success with great intelligence. However, her overwhelming desire for money tries to destroy her but finally she is able to succeed. She falls in love with Philip Adler a world-famous piano player. They both have their own views of life. She tries to win him as easily as she won a prime piece of waterfront property. But, soon, she realizes that life and money are two different aspects in life. She makes realize the power of relational values. The novel opens up with the sequence of Lara Cameron on her way to celebrate her birthday party where her guests including the dignitaries from both the political and the business world are gathered to wish her. However, the hint of the opening scene suggests Lara's success but, then the troubles she faces to obtain success makes reasonable analysis of women's problem in men's world. Sidney Sheldon extends his usual practice of making a beautiful and intelligent woman as his chief protagonist. He projects Lara Cameron fitting into the wilderness of business politics. In this way, he tries to harmonize women's capability to resist their position in professions equal to men. This was true with women of 21st century in the corporate world where they had to face open conflicts for their willingness to earn money and power equal to men. Women had unprecedented opportunities to choose their career and life style with exceptional freedom. Yet, discrimination against women in business is a complex issue shaped by historical biases, structural barriers, and socio-cultural expectations. Below is a literary and academic exploration of the subject, incorporating feminist theory, economic perspectives, and real-world implications as a preview of this article.

Women in men's professions faced increasingly the remnants of inequalities. Occupationally, women were considered as disadvantaged compared to men in business. The

disparagement regarding women's intellectual ability for example, Dorothy C. Hodgkin (a woman scientist) who won the noble prize in 1964 had been mocked as, grandmother wins award in the New York Times. The period (1970-80) exposed women's struggle for recognition. A few experts and feminists blamed women's own fears which blocked their professional success. Beyond all these obstacles, however, a few women who found professional success unfortunately, their options were very limited towards flourishing. Kunds in focused on the problems of women in business and analyzed women ability and intellectual capacity "to execute power in business made them strong enough to follow the ethics oriented to male attitudes such as; aggressive, belligerent, and forceful, but, have been criticized as a "defective male".⁷ Real estate business being multifaceted, encompassing activities such as; renovation, re-lease of existing building, purchasing of raw land and developing it with creative ideas was particularly identified by male domination because they risk locating, creating, imagining, funding, controlling and scoring to the process of development. The word development itself was mediocre for women. Lara took all the chances to prove herself becoming successful. She progresses intelligently and wins many targets. The concept of Power feminism well matches Lara's eagerness for success. It fits Lara's character as a pictogram of woman's success in man's profession. Naomi Woolf in *Fire with Fire* suggests: "Power Feminism means letting go by overcoming the visceral impulse to dictate to women what they will do with their money, their sex, their power."⁸ Power Feminism supports the ideas regarding women's economic conditions. However, it is seen that women have the fear of making their own money Wolf tries to bring out the ambivalence of fear and encourage them to earn money. Indeed, very long back Virginia Woolf expressed about the freedom of money and the liberty in *Room of One's Own* that, women should not be deprived by money. They should know that they are as capable as male to earn their living. Lara Cameron is focused to the qualities of self-thinking and self-assured individual. In the novel Lara in an interview courageously declares herself equal to men; "How does it feel to be your position- to have accomplished all the incredible things you've done, ...You're a role model for so many women. 'You're one of the most successful real estate developers in a business that's usually considered a man's domain. How do you operate? How do you decide for instance, where to put up a building? 'I don't choose the site,' Lara said. 'The site chooses me. I'll be driving along and I'll pass a vacant field-but that's not what I see. I see a beautiful office building or a lonely apartment building filled with people living comfortably in a nice atmosphere. I dream and you make those dreams come true. We'll be right back after this commercial'". (TSSD, p:09) Lara Cameron implies the truth that, earning money and power is easier than being dependent and obeying the unpitiable orders of patriarchy. This is significant when she remarks; "...it was easier to make a hundred-million-dollar deal than it was to try to borrow fifty thousand dollars. (TSSD, p: 10) And the truth was that she never faced problem in earning money, because she had the brains to think and act. Her trouble was with her sex, a woman surrounded by men like; Howard Keller, Paul Martin, and Philip Adler. Their attitude towards her was intolerable. Howard Keller thinks she is "just a woman to be loved", Paul Martin thinks she is an "angel in bed", and Philip thinks she

would make a "good house wife" more than being a business magnet. Perhaps, men do not tolerate, if women seem to be intelligent. Their increasing egos are seen through disgraceful statement "The Iron Butterfly is a bitch on wheels," (TSSD, p: 13) There are always such clouts for women, when they are advanced in professions equal to that of men. Lara developed the attitude of being confidence, intelligence, perseverance, and willingness. However, there is an inconsistency about her entanglement with her past history, yet, she tries to make her social position to what she currently occupies. She intentionally hides the actual position of her past that she was born in poverty-stricken family, the daughter of an abusive alcoholic father and had grown up as un-loved child. Her eagerness to say that her father was from a great family and was very much devoted to her is consciousness of self-esteem and self-dignity. She began her career by doing her father's job by collecting the weekly rents for Mac Allister who was a banker having some valuable property. When she is offered the share of her money twenty-five dollars for her trustful job, the surprise in Lara is extremely confident. "Lara held the money in her hand, and it was like a taste of freedom. It was the first time she had ever been paid for what she had done." (TSSD:p:40) Fortunately, she meets Charles Cohn who comes to stay at Mac Allister's boarding house. He finds Lara the most creditable woman with sharp intelligence. Her capacity to manage the problems persuades him to offer her a business. "If I owned a location that you liked, and if I put up a building on it, would you agree to lease it from me for five years? Which was rather a hypothetical question, for Charles Chon to evaluate Lara's capability? (TSSD, p: 53) Lara makes up her mind to make a deal with Charles Cohn. In this regard, she requests Mac Allister to lend her a lone of twenty thousand dollars. His demand in exchange of money, "I'd like to go to bed with you." (TSSD, p: 53) Left with no choice she unconsciously reveals: 'I'll go to bed with you'. (TSSD, p: 54) Women are traded in such a way that their sex becomes a product of exchange. Women in business have been experienced increasingly the sexual assault. Perhaps, Lara the dynamic, tries to symbolize the modern ethics who thinks; it is a game in which there is nothing to lose and everything to win. The philosophy of Alasdair Macintyre's interpretation on *Political and Philosophical Principles*⁹ the current modern values are fragmented, incoherent, and conflicting, of no standards which cannot be applied to evaluate the truth. No standards are involved in the disputes of moral values rather willing to accept, because any standard may dispose the truth of the contending positions. One of the examples Macintyre uses was the abortion issue in the United States. As for the debate inclined to draw its interpretation by the Christian ethics and asserts that abortion was a murder and hence is morally unacceptable which deserves legal punishment. The other side draws its interpretation on the conception of privacy and rights and asserts that women should have their right to make a private decision about terminating a pregnancy and therefore, abortion is morally accepted. Apart from legal and religious interpretations the public opinion about abortion issues in the United States shows that it was based on circumstantial needs of reasons. In this respect according to Macintyre views, the objectiveness is based on reason. He argues that one cannot agree of what morality should aim at and during the same time, what counts as a reason, since reasons are impossible to measure the depth of truth. All that remains for any individual is to attempt or to

manipulate their own situations and Lara's choice cannot be exceptional. She prefers money because she knows that it would change her future. Lara thinks rational for her survival. The invincible truth of her inner soul bargain with the situational demands. "I 'm selling myself, she thought. Like a whore. But it's all I've got to sell, and at least he thinks I'm worth two hundred thousand dollars. My father never saw two hundred thousand dollars in his life. (TSSD, p: 57) Finally, the turmoil she undergoes, "Lara turned her face away so he could not see her revulsion. She limped into the bathroom, sore and bleeding. She stood in the shower, letting the warm water wash over her body, and she thought, It's over with. I've done it. I own the land. I'm going to be rich. (TSSD, p: 59) Naomi Wolf protests "woman's sexual choices are more legitimate than any others"¹⁰ One can have real reasons to make a choice of what life demands. In such situations, any individual can always have their own reason that might persuade for a meaningful commitment in life. Hence, the choice made either consciously or unconsciously is arbitrary but, the circumstantial need has its reason as a strong ground. Perceptibly, Lara's choice was not ready to lose anything that came in her way of success. The novel ends as Lara being an inspirational model for the world of women in business. She symbolizes as an icon of inspiration "if she can accomplish this, why not me?" (TSSD p: 178) proves that women can win with their intellectual powers. Life is right in any circumstance, if things progress virtually on its command.

5. Conclusion

Sidney Sheldon's novels have long been celebrated for their fast-paced narratives, intricate plots, and, most notably, their strong female protagonists. If Tomorrow Comes and The Stars Shine Down are two such works that exemplify the resilience and reinvention of modern women navigating a world dominated by power, deception, and ambition. Both novels present compelling heroines Tracy Whitney and Lara Cameron who, despite facing immense adversity, carve their own paths through intelligence, determination, and sheer willpower. They deal with situational and circumstantial demands to assert their confidence. A significant feature of Sheldon's female characters is their fierce economic independence, freedom of choice, and opportunity. Their determination is to succeed the modern world filled with pandemonium. However, they face immense personal and emotional challenges, loss, betrayal, and tragedy but instead of being overwhelmed by emotions, they often maintain control and channel their energy into more practical pursuits. While resilience is often attributed to male heroes in literature. Sheldon's women are remarkable for their ability to endure hardship and emerge victorious. They don't simply survive; they learn from their struggles and grow stronger, embodying masculine ideals of perseverance and toughness. Through these narratives, Sheldon crafts a vision of modern femininity that balances vulnerability with unrelenting determination. This analysis will explore how If Tomorrow Comes and The Stars Shine Down reflect the evolving role of women in contemporary literature, examining the ways in which resilience, ambition, and power shape the destinies of Tracy and Lara. They redefine the gender politics and represent a deeper and more radical redefinition of female agency Yet, their stories also raise critical questions about the cost of success and the sacrifices required to remain at the top.

Through these novels, Sheldon not only entertains but also presents a nuanced exploration of modern womanhood, where resilience and reinvention are key to survival. Tracy and Lara are not merely characters, they are testaments to the evolving portrayal of women in literature, representing a blend of strength, intelligence, and complexity. Their stories affirm that power is not given; it is taken, shaped, and redefined by those bold enough to claim it.

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