

# **The Other Side of Midnight Short Guide**

## **The Other Side of Midnight by Sidney Sheldon**

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# Characters

The billionaire shipping tycoon, Constantine Demiris, is a fictional version of Aristotle Onassis. Sheldon enjoys presenting men like Demiris, whose mere presence seems overwhelming. He is given no redeeming features and is pure malice. He can be frighteningly vindictive, the most subtle avenger in the novel which features several people for whom revenge is a prime motive. Demiris destroys many innocent people.

The two young women Catherine Alexander and Noelle Page are not well developed. The first is almost as vulnerably naive at the end of the book as she was at the beginning, even though she should have learned something from her association with men in power, first as an assistant to a key political figure in Washington, D.C., and later after associating with Demiris. The second is the daughter of a Marseille fish seller who sells her to a wealthy merchant who makes her his mistress. She escapes and becomes a great actress in Paris. She is left pregnant by Larry Douglas and becomes obsessed with getting back at him.

Larry Douglas is a fantastically handsome and slender figure who comes from South Boston and becomes an outstanding fighter pilot in two air forces in World War II. He is selfish and irresistible to women, a fatal combination for both heroines. A dashing heel at the beginning of the novel, he becomes a murderous one toward the end when he and Noelle plot Catherine's death. A much more adept plotter, Demiris, destroys them both. The characters in this book advance the plot by their actions, but are typical romantic figures otherwise.

## Social Concerns/Themes

Sheldon enjoys using topical issues in his books. During the early 1970s the public was following the marriage of Jacqueline Kennedy to Aristotle Onassis. He had risen from obscurity to become one of the world's richest and most powerful men. Horatio Alger's books are the prototypes in American popular fiction for how an impoverished person, through his determination and talents, can overcome all obstacles and become wealthy. Alger's heroes were morally perfect characters; however, the abilities that bring success to a magnate may also mark him as a very dangerous man.

The world of business transcends all national frontiers, so a reader can learn a great deal about modern Greece and the other locales Sheldon uses in this novel, as well as about World War II.

Sheldon typically makes beautiful women the victims of his ruthless tycoons. In the highly melodramatic plot, Catherine Alexander becomes the object of Demiris' lust and the victim of his vindictiveness.

# Techniques

Sheldon prides himself on doing careful research for the background of his novels. He had direct experience with the Army Air Corps and read accounts of the wartime RAF. His knowledge of filmmaking is helpful also as he shows Catherine and Larry working together on propaganda films.

Like Catherine, he studied at Northwestern University. The author is much more skillful in providing authentic settings than he is in making his plots and characters believable. He knows Chicago, his birthplace, London, Paris, and Athens as well. His professional life kept him busy in Los Angeles for many years.

The principal characters are introduced effectively in the Prologue. Everyone who has known Larry Douglas, and particularly Noelle Page, gather in Athens to see them on trial for murder.

The trial itself shows the dramatic skills Sheldon developed while he was writing and producing screen plays, Broadway shows, and television series.

# Adaptations

The film version of *The Other Side of Midnight*, released in 1977, was dismissed by critics as an unimaginably bad movie. It starred Susan Sarandon, Marie-France Pissier, Clu Gulager, John Beck, and Raf Vallone.

# Key Questions

Sheldon has been publishing his formulaic potboilers for a quarter of century now, one on the average of every two years. *The Other Side of Midnight* set the pattern that Sheldon would follow. Are critics unfair to this popular writer when they roundly condemn books as schlock, insipid soap operatic garbage? Sheldon takes his writing very seriously. He usually calls himself a storyteller, and his books are at first dictated, not written.

After dictating a mass of material, he spends at least a year eliminating incidents and polishing others. The manuscript, when finally finished, has been rewritten as often as twelve times. Few writers have had as many of their books rise to the number one spot on the New York Times and Publishers Weekly best sellers lists. Granted that his books are potboilers, is Sheldon a type of genius at this kind of writing?

1. Since Sheldon dictates every book, creating the plot and characters as he goes along, might this account for the clichés and stereotypes which characterize the style of his novels? Cite some examples.
2. The action in *The Other Side of Midnight* takes place over several decades. Does Sheldon effectively control the flow of time in his plot?
3. What do critics mean when they call Constantine Demiris a "melodramatic villain?"
4. Sheldon has said that Demiris is based on Aristotle Onassis, the Greek billionaire who married Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. To what extent has he fictionalized Onassis?
5. When choosing the setting for one of his novels, Sheldon usually spends some time there to make sure that his information is correct. Has he successfully made Greece and its people seem authentic?
6. Noelle Page initially arouses the reader's sympathy and admiration. From a wretched childhood she works her way up to becoming a noted actress. Why does Sheldon later make her one of the villains of his novel?
7. Catherine Alexander is plotted against by all of the book's evil characters. What is the advantage for the author to make his heroine so vulnerably naive?
8. Larry Douglas is a product of a South Boston childhood. He becomes a heroic fighter pilot first, and later a handsome heel. Does he seem in any part of the novel to be a fully realized human being?
9. Sheldon began his career as a writer of screenplays and television sitcoms. Does *The Other Side of Midnight* read like a movie script in some of its scenes?

# Copyright Information

## **Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults**

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994