

Tom clancy essay



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When choosing an author for my paper, I chose international suspense because I am very interested in foreign relations and the technology of modern day war. I have read stories by Edgar Allen Poe, with suspense and vivid imagery, which reminded me of Clancy's work. I decided to choose Tom Clancy because of his talent to weave such realistic tales of international suspense. Clancy creates the scenes in his books with such detail, it makes the reader feel like he/she is there. My first choice for this paper was Dr. Sues, but because he has passed away, I had to keep looking. I knew very little information about my author before writing this paper. I had read two of his books, but had no real knowledge of his personal life or past history. Tom Clancy, a successful American author of international suspense, has captured his love of military and technology and profitably employed it in the books he writes.

The life of Thomas L. Clancy Jr. started like any other, but changed with the success of his work. He was born the year 1947, in the City of Baltimore, Maryland. His father was a postal carrier and also a store credit employer (Speace 98). Clancy spent his life educated in only Catholic schools. Because of this Clancy says, " I was never swept up in the drugs or music"(Cohen 2). He attended Loyola College in Baltimore Maryland, and earned a degree in English (Speace 98). At that time, Clancy then tried to enlist in the army. He was excused though, because of a case of myopia. " I thought I would have made a good tank commander"(Speace 99) , said Clancy, whose childhood dreams had been broken when he was kept from entering into the military. He then took on a career as an insurance agent in Baltimore Maryland, and kept that job until around 1973 (Speace 98). He then became a business

owner from 1973 to the year 1980. In 1969, Clancy married a woman named Wanda Thomas, who was an eye surgeon and an insurance agency manager (Speace 98). They had four children, Michelle, Christine, Tom, and Kathleen, and a dog named Freddie (Cohen 115). They lived on 400 wooded acres in Maryland, along the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. Standing on the front lawn is a tank, given to him as a gift by his wife at the time (Schindehette 114). On the property there are also two tennis courts, two basketball courts, a full length football field and a shooting range (Greenberg 132). In one interview, Clancy was asked if he ever thought of changing houses. Clancy answered, " Why should I change? I'm not going to make more money anywhere else" (Zaleski 4).

In the past 5 years, Clancy had some difficulty in his personal life. In 1995, Wanda Thomas filed for divorce. She had found out that Clancy had been having an affair with a woman named Katherine Huang. The tank that stood on their lawn was then seen as a metaphor for their years of marriage (Schindette 1). " I thought our marriage was as fine as most people's", said Wanda, " I will always love him in a certain way as the father of my children" (Schindette 2). After the divorce, Clancy wanted to marry a lady named Alexandra Llewellyn, a 31 year old former television reporter. He had been introduced to Llewellyn by one of her relatives, retired Gen. Colin Powell. The two got married on Saturday June 26, 1999, and are now living happily together in Clancy's estate on the Chesapeake Bay. Wanda Thomas received custody of the children, while Clancy pays \$6, 500 a month in child support, a payment that he considers to be a very serious one. Clancy has a firm belief in the importance of family, " Family is the beginning and end of

everything that we are supposed to be working for” (Greenberg 65). Clancy believes even stronger in the role of the father though, having been quoted saying, “ If you don’t take care of your kids, what the hell good are you? I’ve certainly had a couple of hard lessons in that. And one of the things I fear is to be lying there waiting to die and thinking, why didn’t I spend more time with my children?”(Greenberg 65). A friend of their’s said, “ The suddenness of success

put an unbearable strain on the marriage. Fame and money are what destroyed it.” (Schindette 2). Despite the rocky endings and solid beginnings Clancy has struggled through in his personal life, there is no doubt that his work has in no way suffered.

Though Clancy did not publish any books till later in life, he became involved in writing at an early age. Clancy remembers that “ The writing bug bit me when I was in highschool. I was having a rather hard junior year, so I got myself a typewriter and began putting things down on paper” (Cohen 2). In 1971, Clancy read the book Day of the Jackal, by Frederic Forsyth, which inspired Clancy to begin writing thrillers (Cohen 3). Clancy then quit his job, bought a typewriter and began to write on his kitchen table. Clancy’s feelings on beginning to write were, “ I was going to devote time to doing something I’ve wanted to do really since high school, which was to write a book and have it published and see my name on the cover” (Cerasini 59). Clancy wrote from November of 1982 to February of 1983, to finish the book later published as The Hunt for Red October (Cerasini 59). When Clancy had finished the book, he took immediate steps for it to be published, “ The next day I drove it up to the Naval Institute in Annapolis and just left it there and

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waited for their judgment, which came three weeks later. They said they really like it" (Cerasini 59). However, what followed was something Clancy never imagined would happen. He describes his hopes for the outcome of his writing by saying, " When I wrote Red October I thought maybe we'd sell maybe 5, 000 or 10, 000 hard covers and that would be the end of it. I never really thought about making money" (Greenberg 123). Clancy was mistaken, since the sales for his new books had been tremendous and even Ronald Reagan had been quoted calling it " The perfect yarn" (Cohen 114). " One of my gifts is, you give me 30, 40 minutes to talk to somebody, and I can look at the world through his eyes"(Zaleski 5). Clancy's search for direction in his writing career was brought to an end after talking to his agent for the first time, " When my agent approached me for the first time one of the first questions I asked him was, Do you think I'm good enough to do this for a living?', and he said, Yeah I think you probably are.', It turns out he was right" (Greenberg 59). Possibly even more amazing than Clancy's talent at creating believable international thrillers is his ability to describe the military technology so accurately, without ever having been in contact with it. Clancy was asked after writing The Hunt for Red October, " How could you have written Hunt for Red October without ever having gone on a submarine"(Zaleski 4). Clancy tells of how he has many friends in the military and government from whom he borrows information in order to write his books. His hunt for information from friends is not always successful though, " I know the people there and I have friendships, and nobody ever, ever, ever gives me classified information. The fact is, I can make up the classified stuff very easily. Sometimes I make up stuff that later turns out to be real." (Zaleski 5). Though to Tom Clancy at the time, The Hunt For Red

October was only a small project, what was to follow would exceed his every expectation.

A long list of accomplishments followed the creation of *The Hunt For Red October*. Clancy continued writing, releasing such popular books as *The Cardinal in the Kremlin*, *Patriot Games*, *Clear and Present Danger*, *Red Storm Rising*, *Sum of All Fears*, and *Debt of Honor*. Each book earned Clancy a monstrous amount of money. He received 14 million dollars just for signing the contract to write *Without Remorse*. In a majority of his books, the main character is a man named Jack Ryan, who is best described as “ a family guy and president’s buddy”(Cohen 3). One interesting part about Jack Ryan, his wife, and other Clancy characters and story lines is that they often have a lot to do with Clancy and his own life. For starters, Jack Ryan’s wife is an eye surgeon, the same job as Clancy’s first wife Wanda. Another example is Jack Ryan himself, who represents Clancy and the type of life that he has always dreamed of living, “ You put a lot of yourself in all your characters Ryan has more of me than most. I made a conscious decision that he was going to be a normal guy with a wife and kids that he cared about. He did the best he could in a work job.”(Greenberg 66). A life of military involvement and international mystery was the kinda of life that Clancy aspired to live when he was younger. Because that life was not possible for Clancy, he has chosen to use his own writing as an escape into that life. Clancy began to do what he loves best, write popular stories, incorporating his “ all-consuming interest in military hardware”(Zaleski 2). When asked about that deep interest, a friend of Clancy’s was quoted saying that “ Clancy likes weapons the way Hugh Hefner like women”(Zaleski 2). Tom Clancy himself simply says, “ I have

shown people that if a dream is all you have, you still have a hell of a lot. I have shown people you are only a beat away from your dreams coming true”(Cohen 115). In addition to writing multiple best sellers, a number of Clancy’s books have been adapted into movies and television series. Clancy also created his own company called Red Entertainment, which markets software games and other multimedia developments. These are all based on books or ideas by Tom Clancy. “ Ten years ago, the world was a very different place and it’s changed—in historical terms—virtually overnight” (Cohen 114), said Clancy when asked to comment on why the expansion into software development. It is estimated that Clancy earned 16 million dollars in 1996, and 34 million dollars in 1997(Schindehette 2). Clancy has also become involved in the education of the military. He has done lectures for the FBI Academy, CIA, and the NSA. Clancy has also made a large impact on the audio world of literature. An expert in the audio book field could best describe Clancy’s work by saying, “ His techno-thriller idiom had a cinematic feeling that lent itself readily to spoken adaptation”(Zinsser 1). No matter what the entertainment community has demanded of Clancy, he has been able to assimilate his work for a recipe that equals nothing but success.

How Clancy is able to take the brilliant imaginations formed in his head and put them down on paper is a question often wondered by many. Clancy starts his explanation of the tedious process by describing his schedule, “ Generally I work from about eight o’clock until lunch, and it’s usually all I can stand to do on a continuous basis.” (Greenberg 58). However, Clancy finds the forming of the storyline to be slightly easier, “ You start off with a basic idea: what if? What if an American tourist got in the way of an assassination

attempt in London? Follow that thought to what you hope is a logical conclusion.”(Greenberg 57). The conclusion to the “ what if” statement is often not as obvious to Clancy as many would think, “ I write my 5 to ten pages and it’s as much a discovery process for me as it is for the reader.” (Greenberg 58). The fact that every story is a whole new adventure for Clancy, is just one reason why Clancy enjoys his work so much, “ I am living the life I wanted, not actually, but through the books I write”(Cerasini 78). There is no doubt that Clancy will be able to continue living this fantasy.

Though there is no question that Tom Clancy’s books have reached a level of popularity that some authors only dream of, not all those who read his books are complete Clancy fanatics as I learned from reading the critics views. One of the most abundant criticisms I found towards Clancy’s work is that of his lack of character development. One reviewer put down Clancy by saying, “ Clancy is a Master of Hardware”(Lichtenstein 1). His characters are viewed by many critics to be either larger-than life heroes or the traditional dark evil villain. They possess no human or personal characteristics which would make them real to the reader. In the reviews of Clancy’s book Rainbow Six that I read, the comments were for the most part negative. The action and conclusion in the book, are said to be predictable and dull. One critic said, “ It is amazing how the determined reader can plow through 700 pages of a thriller on a timely topic by a novelist who always tops the bestseller charts and still not come away with a single provocative idea or a single interesting character” (Lichtenstein 2). Clancy is not like most popular authors of this time though, gaining the respect of the critics early and later become their favorite target. Instead his earliest novels also took on a lot of flack. When

Clancy's book *Op Center* was reviewed, it received just as much negative publicity as *Rainbow Six*. One critic wrote that he "never thought Clancy's geopolitical thrillers make for wonderful books" (Hiltbrand 1). The critic said that the story was very exciting and suspenseful, but that it really only "resembles a cheap copy off of an episode of *Mission Impossible*" (Hiltbrand 1). Clancy's stories are seen by the critics as being almost the same every time. An international terrorist group is running some sort of lucrative scheme against a government and a team of American special forces go in, led by the everyday Joe. This lack of dynamic theme and cardboard cutout characters is the main cause for the Critics to give it nothing but bad reviews. These bad reviews still do not at all affect the popularity of Tom Clancy's work among the public audiences. After being out for only one week, *Rainbow Six* had already earned 10% more than John Grisham's newest novel, *The Street Lawyer* (Maryles 1). In 1996, Clancy sold 91,000 copies of *Executive Orders* in its first week, and in 1998, he sold 81,000 copies of *Rainbow Six* in its first week. Not to mention the outstanding success of Clancy's movies, it is as though the critics never existed.

I personally have two opinions about Clancy's books. One opinion I had formed when I read a few of his books years ago, and the second opinion would be from writing this paper and reading two more of his books this year for the paper. My first opinion of Clancy's work was a very positive one. I found his stories to be very interesting and enjoyed his use of strong imagery when describing the military hardware used in the action sequences. I also found that I had a strong interest in foreign affairs and military strategy. It interested me to see through the eyes of those who

called the shots in times of war, how they dealt with the life of the country, and at the same time, the life of their own. I enjoyed reading about the common soldier in times of war and what he thought and felt about what was going on. Another interesting thing about Clancy's books to me was his use of the CIA and other intelligence agencies of the world. I found it very interesting to read about the classified information and how they managed to "save the world" behind the backs of the "common man". After completing the research behind this paper though, my opinion of Clancy's work changed. By reading the negative reviews, I found myself unable to take my focus off of that which was talked about in a negative light and concentrate on that which I had enjoyed. I find that I agree now with the critics. In my opinion, Clancy's work is just a story filled with countless paragraphs describing dull military equipment and characters whom have no real personality with which to identify them, all jumbled into books that are over 800 pages most times. Don't get me wrong, I still have a strong respect for Tom Clancy the person, but I do have a revised view on his work as an author. Who knows, maybe so would the rest of his fans if they had done the same research as I have.

So far in this paper, I have discussed Tom Clancy the author, family man, and business man, now I want to discuss Clancy and his extracurricular involvement. In Tom Clancy's basement, he has a gun range, "my favorite gun is the Smith & Wesson .45-caliber revolver"(Cohen, 114). Clancy's love for guns is strong and is seen in his work very continuously. A friend of his commented on a time when he and Clancy visited the White House, "He really liked the CIA guys. Clancy kept asking to see their guns" (Schindette

2). Though he is a huge fan of firearms, Clancy also like to watch wildlife, but never kills them (Cohen 114). Another hobby of Tom Clancy's is being a owning major league sports franchises. Right now, he is the owner of 23% of the Baltimore Orioles. Clancy also made a \$60, 000, 000 bid to buy the Minnesota Vikings, but at the last minute pulled out for unknown reasons (Schindette 3). Clancy also purchase a summer camp called Camp Kaufman. Camp Kaufman is a summer Camp for poor Jewish kids, and when asked about the camp, Clancy simply answered, " It is a place I want to protect"(Cohen 115). This is Clancy's way of giving all that he has earned back to those less fortunate.

Tom Clancy, the American master of international techno-thrillers, uses experiences from his own life and his dreams to write successful books. Unfortunately, despite my attempt in contacting Tom Clancy, I was unable to receive any information back from him. By writing this paper, I learned a lot about Tom Clancy. I found that Tom Clancy is a man whose success lies only in the event that his real dreams had failed. I also found that it is possible for a man with such a strong belief in the family, to have a large amount of trouble with keeping his own together. Lastly I found that a man who writes a bestseller once a year, owns a multi-million dollar company, and is the owner of a summer camp and professional baseball team is still able to enjoy his life and is not bogged down by his many commitments in the world, while the rest of humanity seems to spend their lives stressed and looking for a way out. I found that Tom Clancy, while not a total recluse, gives very few interviews and tends to spend his time in the comfort of his own home. If I had to do the paper over again, I think I would definitely look into doing Shel

Silverstein or Dr. Suess, because I enjoy their work and find them very fascinating. I am happy that I did my paper on Tom Clancy, because I learned a valuable lesson about never letting go of your dreams when there are obstacles in the way.

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