

An Analysis of Stoic Characters from The Lies I Tell by Julie Clark

Absaraus Rajakumari A.*

Abstract

The research delves into the analysis of stoic characters from The Lies I Tell in various perspectives. The argument rests on those character's specific characteristics of being a stoic person and following the philosophies of the stoic human. Using a literary-philosophical approach, the analysis explores how both protagonists demonstrate the stoic ideal in distinct ways. Meg Williams, in her calculated acts of retribution, exhibits controlled reasoning and a deep, though unconventional, sense of justice. Kat Roberts, whose mission for truth is tempered by personal trauma, reveals inner strength, moral growth, and moderation. The paper closely examines several pivotal moments in the narrative that reflect stoic responses to adversity, emotional regulation, and ethical decision making. It offers a contemporary canvas for the exploration and reinterpretation of stoic philosophy in modern literature. This study critically examines the embodiment of stoicism in the novel's two central characters, Meg Williams and Kat Roberts, by analyzing their behaviors, choices, and inner conflicts through the lens of the four cardinal virtues of stoicism—prudence (wisdom), fortitude (courage), temperance (moderation), and justice. While the novel is primarily a story of deception and personal vendetta, it is equally a narrative about moral resilience, emotional discipline, and the pursuit of ethical balance in complex circumstances. Furthermore, this research addresses the broader significance of stoicism in contemporary fiction and how classical philosophical frameworks continue to shape the moral architecture of modern literary characters. By positioning the novel within the lineage of stoic literature, the study argues that stoic values not only endure in today's storytelling but also evolve to reflect present-day complexities. Ultimately, the analysis affirms that Clark's novel contributes meaningfully to philosophical literary discourse, offering readers a layered understanding of how ancient virtues remain relevant in interpreting character, choice, and justice in the modern world.

Keywords: Fortitude, justice, prudence, stoic literature, stoic philosophy, stoicism, temperance

INTRODUCTION

The exploration of Stoic characters in literature offers a rich field for analysis and discussion. In the novel, the major characters portray Stoic characteristics in their specific day-to-day lives. A Stoic character is defined by resilience, wisdom, self-discipline, and commitment to virtue. It is built on the idea that external events are beyond our control, but our reactions, judgments, and actions are entirely

within our power. This research can serve as a foundation for in-depth discussions and analyses of Stoic characters in literature and novels, facilitating a deeper understanding of how Stoic philosophy is represented and its impact on narrative development.

Background

Stoic literature encompasses a rich tradition of philosophical writings focusing on virtue, reason, and self-control. Originating in ancient Greece, Stoicism has influenced countless individuals and remains relevant today [1].

*Author for Correspondence

Absaraus Rajakumari A.

E-mail: absarausrajakumari1222@gmail.com

¹Independent Researcher, Department of English Literature, Kalas lingam Academy of Research and Education, Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, India

Received Date: June 25, 2025

Accepted Date: July 07, 2025

Published Date: February 13, 2026

Citation: Absaraus Rajakumari A. An Analysis of Stoic Characters from The Lies I Tell by Julie Clark. Emerging Trends in Languages. 2026; 3(1): 8–12p.

One of the classical stoic literary works is “Meditations” by Marcus Aurelius, a collection of personal writings by the Roman Emperor reflecting on his stoic beliefs and practices [2].

“De Brevitate Vitae” (On the Shortness of Life) by Seneca: An essay discussing the nature of time and the importance of living a meaningful life [3].

Modern Interpretations of stoicism are based on Ryan Holiday’s Works: A modern author who has popularized stoicism among contemporary audiences, including professionals and athletes [4].

Aim of Research

- How do the characters embody Stoic virtues such as wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance?
- In what ways does the character’s stoic demeanor influence their relationships and interactions with others?
- How does the character apply Stoic principles to navigate personal or external conflicts?
- Does the author portray the character’s Stoicism as a strength or a flaw?
- What personal growth or setbacks occur as a result of their Stoic philosophy?
- What lessons can readers learn from the character’s stoic approach to life’s challenges?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Stoic Literature comprises of so many stoic characters,

The Immortal King Rao by Vauhini Vara (2022) [5]: The protagonist, King Rao, rises from humble beginnings to become a powerful tech CEO. Throughout his journey, he exhibits stoic traits such as rationality, self-discipline, and acceptance of circumstances beyond his control. His ability to adapt to and maintain composure in the face of personal and professional challenges underscores his stoic character. This analysis highlights the stoic character.

Second, Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations is a series of five books that delve into Stoic philosophy, addressing topics such as the contempt of death, bearing pain, and whether virtue alone suffices for a happy life. These dialogues provide insights into Stoic principles and their application to human experiences [6].

Third, there are stoic elements in Shakespeare’s tragedies; for instance, characters like Brutus in Julius Caesar and Hamlet in Hamlet exhibit stoic traits, grappling with reason, virtue, and emotional restraint amidst their respective dilemmas.

Fourth, contemporary analyses have identified Stoic themes in modern literature. For example, the protagonists in Ernest Hemingway’s novels often display Stoic characteristics, confronting adversity with courage and composure. These scholarly explorations highlight the enduring influence of Stoic philosophy on character development across various literary periods in the West.

Theoretical Background

Stoicism, an ancient Greek philosophy founded in the early 3rd century BCE, has experienced a resurgence in modern times, offering valuable perspectives on resilience, virtue, and rationality. Integration with Modern Psychotherapy: The principles of Stoicism have significantly influenced contemporary psychotherapy, particularly cognitive behavioral therapy. Psychotherapists, such as Donald J. Robertson, have explored this connection, highlighting how Stoic practices align with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques to manage emotions and develop psychological resilience [7]. Influence in Business and Technology, Stoicism’s emphasis on self-discipline and rational decision making has found a receptive audience among business leaders and technology entrepreneurs. Figures such as Ryan Holiday have popularized Stoic teachings, making them accessible to a broader audience. His work has resonated with professional athletes, politicians, and tech CEOs who appreciate Stoicism’s focus on virtues such as courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom [4].

Application in Stress Management: In today's fast-paced world, Stoicism offers practical strategies for managing stress and uncertainty. By focusing on what is within one's control and accepting what is not, individuals can maintain inner tranquility amidst external chaos. This approach has been recommended for coping with anxiety related to unpredictable events such as political developments or market fluctuations [8, 9]. The enduring relevance of Stoicism lies in its practical guidance for leading a virtuous and resilient life, making it a valuable philosophy for both personal development and professional contexts.

DISCUSSION

The *Lies I Tell* is a psychological thriller written by Julie Clark and published in 2022. The novel weaves a complex narrative of deceit and revenge and the blurred lines between justice and retribution. Meg Williams: A masterful con artist who assumes various identities, such as a college student, life coach, and real estate agent, to execute her schemes. Her ability to adapt and manipulate makes her a formidable figure [10].

Women like Meg embody stoic qualities such as Emotional Mastery (*apatheia* – equanimity); A Stoic does not allow emotions like fear, anger, or sadness to dictate their actions. They acknowledge emotions but are not ruled by them, maintaining inner calm in all situations [11]. Meg mastered her emotions to successfully finalize her revenge, and her early childhood incidents led her down this path.

Rationality and Wisdom (*Logos* – Reason), Stoics prioritize reason over impulse, making decisions based on logic and virtue rather than fleeting emotions. They practice self-reflection to refine their thinking and judgment [11]. Meg used all means to make herself knowledgeable so that she could not be caught by any loser whom she conned. She was practicing it to attain justice for the loss in her childhood, and hence her path had no emotions over people. She learned all the ways to con her prey.

Virtuous living (Arete—excellence of character): The core Stoic virtues are wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance. Everything else—wealth, reputation, and comfort—is secondary to living a morally good life [11]. Hence, Meg also chose both primary and secondary characters in incidents like stalking over people, living alone by hiding in the car, controlling her emotions in her workplace to run her day-to-day life, and stepping into strangers' lives to con them.

Justice and Duty to Others, Stoicism is not about isolation but about fulfilling one's duty to family, society, and humanity. A Stoic acts fairly, treating others with respect even when wronged [11]. There are incidents when Meg gave all her con money to girls who cannot afford an education, and she also gave to single mothers to take care of their children. She did this because she never wanted anyone to live the life she had.

Kat Roberts: A journalist whose life was derailed by Meg's actions a decade before. Kat has been awaiting Meg's return, determined to expose her and seek retribution. Kat portrayed stoic characteristics, such as Acceptance of Fate, Resilience, Endurance and Self-Discipline, and Simplicity [10].

Some arguments to prove her stoicism are Acceptance of Fate (*Amor Fati*—Love of Fate); A Stoic embraces whatever happens, recognizing that much of life is beyond personal control [11]. Kat was raped by her boyfriend's friend, which incident turned her to accept the fate of her life, as it happened beyond her control. Next, in contrast to resisting hardship, Stoics see obstacles as opportunities for growth. Resilience, Endurance, Hardship, and suffering are seen as natural parts of life, not reasons to complain [11]. Kat was forced by her mother to become a journalist; to fulfill her mother's dream, she endured all the hardships in the path of becoming a journalist. She never complained and accepted it as it was. Thus, a Stoic remains steadfast in adversity, practicing voluntary discomfort to strengthen their will. Self-Discipline and Simplicity, they avoid excess, whether in material possessions, emotions, or desires [11]. Kat ran her daily spending on her own earnings. She was very subtle and simple in her nature. She was not luxurious in her life decisions. She always maintained discipline in controlling her life. By keeping life simple, a Stoic maintains focus on what truly matters: virtue and inner peace.

The novel delves into themes of identity, manipulation, and moral ambiguity of vengeance. It challenges readers to consider the ethics of deception when it is used as a tool for perceived justice. A Stoic character is forged through daily discipline, self-examination, and deep commitment to personal growth. It is not about being emotionless but about being unshaken by external events, living with wisdom, and acting with integrity.

Stoic philosophy, rooted in the teachings of thinkers such as Zeno of Citium, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, emphasizes the development of a strong character through virtue, rationality, and emotional resilience. Stoicism, an ancient Greek philosophy, has been explored and interpreted by numerous philosophers throughout history. The following are some notable figures associated with Stoicism [1].

Ancient Philosophers, such as Zeno of Citium (c. 334–c. 262 BC): The founder of Stoicism, Zeno established the philosophy in Athens. He taught that virtue is the highest good and is based on knowledge, asserting that the wise live in harmony with the divine reason that governs nature [1]. Meg was knowledgeable, but she uses it in conning techniques due to a horrible childhood, and she was able to fulfill her dream of revenge using her wise learning. Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC–AD 65): A Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman, and dramatist, Seneca's works, such as "Letters to Lucilius," delve into ethical questions and practical advice for daily life. His writings are among the most important primary sources for ancient Stoicism [3]. Epictetus (c. AD 50–c. 135): Born a slave, Epictetus became a prominent Stoic philosopher. His teachings, compiled in the "Discourses" and the "Enchiridion," emphasize the distinction between what is within our control and what is not, advocating for personal responsibility and inner freedom. Meg tried to control her deeds as much as she can in the incidents like meeting the journalist around her, facing her con targets, staying away from police and people from being caught [1]. Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180): Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher, his work "Meditations" is a series of personal writings reflecting his Stoic beliefs, focusing on self-discipline, virtue, and the transient nature of life [2].

Modern Philosophers and Writers, such as Donald J. Robertson (b. 1972) [7], a cognitive behavioral psychotherapist and author, have integrated modern CBT with ancient Stoic philosophy. His books, such as "The Philosophy of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy" and "How to Think Like a Roman Emperor," explore the relevance of Stoicism to contemporary psychological practices. This study highlights the relevant stoic principles. Ryan Holiday (b. 1987) [4]: A modern writer and media strategist, Holiday has popularized Stoic philosophy through his books, such as "The Obstacle Is the Way" and "Ego Is the Enemy." His work has resonated with a wide audience, including professional athletes and business leaders, emphasizing the practical applications of Stoic principles [4]. This is similar to Meg using her conning techniques in business and practically applying all virtues in her life to succeed in her revenge plan.

These philosophers, among others, contributed to the development and dissemination of Stoic thought by adapting its principles to their respective eras and audiences.

Central to Stoic philosophy is the belief that virtue is the sole good and is sufficient for achieving eudaimonia or a well-lived life. The Stoics identified four cardinal virtues: prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice [11]. They advocated living in accordance with nature and reason, emphasizing self-control and fortitude as means of overcoming destructive emotions.

Stoicism divides philosophy into three interconnected areas: logic, physics, and ethics. Logic involves the study of reasoning and knowledge, physics pertains to understanding the natural world, and ethics focuses on how one should live. The Stoics believed that by mastering these disciplines, individuals could achieve inner peace and resilience to external circumstances [1]. Meg, the central character, portrayed the character of self-living. She learned about technological developments and understood the world and people in all ways by living and conning many men. The ethics in her life were reasonable for her personal satisfaction; they cannot be compared to the normal human life of someone who follows all the rules and regulations of society. In the entire research, the only difference

in character analysis is that Meg followed the stoic characteristics to live her peaceful life but through wrong means. She is not like a normal human being; she was rooted with extreme negativism, and to balance them, she helps many people who are financially suffering. She takes all things from people who have a lot and gives to people who do not have; in this process, she portrays stoic characteristics.

In recent years, stoicism has experienced a resurgence, particularly among professionals seeking practical guidance for personal growth and resilience. Authors such as Ryan Holiday have popularized Stoic principles through works such as “The Daily Stoic,” which offers daily meditations on wisdom, perseverance, and the art of living. Holiday’s writings have garnered attention from athletes, politicians, and tech CEOs who appreciate Stoicism’s teachings on virtues such as courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom [4]. Meg learns these characteristics from social media, magazines, and books to make her life easier.

The enduring appeal of stoicism lies in its practical approach to ethics and its focus on cultivating an inner life resilient to external fluctuations. By emphasizing virtue, reason, and alignment with nature, Stoicism offers timeless guidance for achieving tranquility.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of cultivating a Stoic character are deeply rooted in the pursuit of virtue and harmonious living with nature. Key goals include achieving eudaimonia (flourishing life): the ultimate aim is to attain a well-lived life through the consistent practice of virtue. Practicing the Four Cardinal Virtues: Stoicism emphasizes prudence (wisdom), fortitude (courage), temperance (moderation), and justice (fairness). These virtues guide moral behavior and decision making. Living in Accordance with Nature: Aligning one’s life with the rational order of the universe is central to the Stoic philosophy. This involves understanding and accepting the processes of the natural world and one’s role within it. Developing Emotional Resilience: Stoicism teaches the importance of self-control and fortitude in overcoming destructive emotions, leading to a tranquil and stable mind. By focusing on these objectives, individuals aim to cultivate a character that is virtuous, rational, and resilient, leading to a fulfilling and harmonious life.

REFERENCES

1. Rogers TJ. Stoicism. In: Nederman CJ, Bogiari G, editors. Research handbook on the history of political thought. Cheltenham (UK): Edward Elgar Publishing; 2024. p. 99–109. doi:10.4337/9781800373808.00018.
2. Bourdieu P. Pascalian Meditations. Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press; 2000.
3. Inwood B. The will in Seneca the Younger. *Class Philol.* 2000;95(1):44–60. doi:10.1086/449470.
4. Rosenberg J. The grueling class: why Silicon Valley loves Stoicism. *Mother Jones.* 2020;45(1):55–59.
5. Singh R, Gibu SM. Exploring the transformative potential and the challenges of artificial intelligence in Vauhini Vara’s *The Immortal King Rao*. *Rupkatha J Interdiscip Stud Humanit.* 2023;15(4):1–15. doi:10.21659/rupkatha.v15n4.06.
6. Kaster RA. Cicero: Tusculan disputations [Marci Tulli Ciceronis Tusculanarum Disputationum]. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2026.
7. Robertson DJ. The Stoic influence on modern psychotherapy. In: *The Routledge handbook of the Stoic tradition*. Abingdon (UK): Routledge; 2016. p. 374–388. doi:10.4324/9781315771588-39.
8. Shapiro M, This T. The life and times of Donald Trump: an unauthorized biography. Riverdale (NY): Riverdale Avenue Books LLC; 2016. p. 1–236.
9. Huffington A. (2024). Why You Shouldn’t Let Election Polls Stress You Out. [online] TIME. Available from: https://time.com/7094498/election-polls-stress-arianna-huffington-essay/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
10. Kellman SG, Lvovich N. *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism*. Abingdon (UK): Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group; 2022. p. 165–176.
11. Brunt PA. Stoicism and the principate. *Pap Br Sch Rome.* 1975;43:7–35. doi:10.1017/S0068246200008217.