

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

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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

Exploring Stoic characters in literature offers a rich field for analysis and discussion. In the novel, the major characters portray the stoic characteristics in their specific day-to-day lives. A Stoic character is defined by resilience, wisdom, self-discipline, and a 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. The research can serve as a foundation for in-depth discussions and analyses of Stoic characters in literature and the novel 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 that focus on virtue, reason, and self-control. Originating in ancient Greece,

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Stoicism has influenced countless individuals and continues to be relevant today [1].

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 about stoicism are Ryan Holiday’s Works: A modern author who has popularized Stoicism among contemporary audiences, including professionals and athletes [4].

Aim of the Research

- How does the character embody Stoic virtues, such as wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance?
- In what ways does the character’s Stoic demeanor influence those 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 draw from the character’s Stoic approach to life’s challenges?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Stoic Literature comprises of so many stoic characters,

Firstly, *The Immortal King Rao* by Vauhini Vara [5] (2022): King Rao, the protagonist, 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 and maintain composure in the face of personal and professional challenges underscores his stoic character. This analysis highlights the stoic character.

Secondly, 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 insight into Stoic principles and their application to human experiences [6].

Thirdly, there were 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.

Fourthly, Contemporary analyses have identified Stoic themes in modern literature. For example, 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.

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 like Donald J. Robertson have explored this connection, highlighting how Stoic practices align with 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 tech 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 like 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 in both personal development and professional contexts.

DISCUSSION

The *Lies I Tell* is a psychological thriller by Julie Clark, published in 2022. The novel weaves a complex narrative of deceit, 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 like Emotional Mastery (Apatheia – Equanimity), A Stoic does not allow emotions like fear, anger, or sadness to dictate their actions. They acknowledge emotions but do not become ruled by them, maintaining inner calm in all situations [11]. Meg was mastering emotions to successfully finalize her specific revenge, and her early childhood incidents led her into 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 her knowledgeable so that she cannot be caught by any loser who she conned on. She was practicing it to attain justice for the loss in her childhood and hence her path had no emotions over people. She learnt all 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, 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 life by hiding in the car, controlling her emotions in her work place to run her day today life and stepping into strangers' life 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 for education, she also gave to single mothers for taking care of their child. She did this because she never wanted anyone to lead the life she had.

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

Some arguments to prove her stoic 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 has turned her to accept the fate of her life, it happened beyond her control over life. Next character of stoic, instead of resisting hardship, they see obstacles as opportunities for growth. Resilience and Endurance, Hardship, and suffering are seen as natural parts of life, not reasons to complain [11]. Kat was forced by her to become a journalist; to

fulfill her mother's dream she endured all the hardship in the path of becoming a journalist. She was never complaining and accepted it as it is. Then 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 spends by her own earning. She was very subtle and simple in nature. She was not luxurious in life decisions. She always maintained her 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 the moral ambiguity of vengeance. It challenges readers to consider the ethics of deception when used as a tool for perceived justice. A Stoic character is forged through daily discipline, self-examination, and a 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 like Zeno of Citium, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, emphasizes the development of strong character through virtue, rationality, and emotional resilience. Stoicism, an ancient Greek philosophy, has been explored and interpreted by numerous philosophers throughout history. Here 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 horrible childhood and she was able to fulfill her dream of revenge using her wise learnings. 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 like Donald J. Robertson [7] (b. 1972): A cognitive-behavioral psychotherapist and author, Robertson integrates modern cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) with ancient Stoic philosophy. His books, such as "The Philosophy of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy" and "How to Think Like a Roman Emperor," explore Stoicism's relevance to contemporary psychological practices. This work highlights relevant stoic principles. Ryan Holiday [4] (b. 1987): A modern writer and media strategist, Holiday has popularized Stoic philosophy through his books like "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 practical applications of Stoic principles [4] which is like her Meg using her conning techniques in business and practically applies all virtues in her life to succeed in her revenge plan.

These philosophers, among others, have contributed to the development and dissemination of Stoic thought, 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 to overcome 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 against external circumstances [1]. Meg being the central character portrayed the character of self-living, she learned about technological developments, understood the world and people with all ways by living and conning many men. The ethics in her life was reasonable for her personal satisfaction, it cannot be compared to the normal human life who follow all rules and regulations of the society. In the whole research the only difference about character analysis is Meg followed the stoic characteristics to live her peaceful life but on wrong means, she is not like normal human being, she was rooted with extreme negativism and to balance them she helps so many people who are financially suffering, she takes all things from people who have a lot and gives to people who are not having, in this process she portrays the stoic characteristics.

In recent years, Stoicism has experienced a resurgence, particularly among professionals seeking practical guidance for personal growth and resilience. Authors like 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 like courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom [4]. Meg learns these characteristics from social media, magazines, and books to ease her life.

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 on achieving tranquility.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of cultivating a Stoic character are deeply rooted in the pursuit of virtue and living in harmony 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. 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 Stoic philosophy. This involves understanding and accepting the natural world’s processes and one’s role within it. Developing Emotional Resilience: Stoicism teaches the importance of self-control and fortitude to overcome 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.

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