

Stoicism, Temporality, and Ustopia in Ted Chiang's "The Merchant and the Alchemist Gate" as Philosophical Science Fiction

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Abstract

The article examines Ted Chiang's novelette, "The Merchant and the Alchemist Gate" (2007) as a philosophical manifesto of stoic wisdom. It argues that postmodern science fiction is a fitting genre to interrogate faith in human reality amid temporal crisis. The author coalesces three absorbing parables presenting a fictional account of Kip Thorne's defense of the theoretical existence of a time portal and its adherence to Einstein's theory of Relativity. Each parable delivers an insightful response to the learning quotient of the characters who oscillate through the time travel Gate of Years. The article investigates the stoic principles of fate, virtue, realization, and acceptance while past, present, and future blend together. To begin with, it addresses the relevance of stoicism interweaved within Chiang's fictional fabric, and how it helps the characters towards accepting their destiny. Next, the article employs the scientific theories of "block universe" and "closed time curve" to interpret the metaphysics behind time travel parables within the novelette. Finally, it delineates the *ustopian* (to use Atwood's term) dimension running through the text and its link with the concept of "eternal return" within the philosophical dynamic. This subsequently contributes to developing the ontological acumen of the central protagonist while responding to the ethical dilemma that he encounters throughout his time-shift journey.

Keywords: Stoic, ustopia, time-travel, science fiction, philosophy, temporality

Introduction

"It is in the philosophical form that science fiction attains its highest level of artistic achievement."

(Pecorino 7)

“The goal of Chiang’s work is to signal the philosophical and literary diversity of the author”

(Modzelewski 195)

Over the years, science fiction has emerged as an intriguing genre inviting interdisciplinary insights. Philosophy is one such predominant branch of knowledge that has embellished the science fiction genre with its credo of considerate inquisitions and conundrums. The critical link between the two offers an extrapolative insight into the intricacies of human existence by positing an ethical dilemma around the enigmatic questions of determinism, predestination, and free will. Ted Chiang is one of the promising science fiction writers of the century who does not just compose stories around the themes of fantasy, science, technology, time travel, posthumanism, and artificial intelligence but also threads his fictional worlds with pedantic references to philosophy, mythology, and folklore. In his 2014 interview with Avi Solomon, when asked about his writing being classified as philosophical fiction, the author unhesitatingly asserts his preference of the science fiction genre to interrogate philosophical dimensions of the universe. Chiang, as an author is interested in examining the nature of reality and our sense of humanness within its dynamic praxis. In fact, experiments in philosophy often delineate speculative frameworks, making both the genres as equally appropriate for interdisciplinary studies.

To emphasize this further, the author has also added a separate section of “Story Notes” preceding his most recent anthology where he delineates thought experiments and philosophical questions which act as an inspiration for his present novelette. Therefore, it won’t be unjustified to affirm that “by speculating about present trends and future possibilities, science fiction can offer much to philosophers, and philosophy can offer much to science fiction writers in terms of understanding the interrelations, extensions, and implications of ideas, concepts, and visions (Pecorino 4). This article is an attempt to illustrate the application of stoic philosophy in Chiang’s fascinating novelette. It interprets the use of fundamental stoic principles in the context of his 2007 speculative fable, “The Merchant and the Alchemist Gate” (primarily published by Subterranean Press and later republished as a part of his latest volume *Exhalation* in 2019). Next, it connects the stoic argument with the temporal consciousness of the story with specific reference to the theory of “block universe” and “closed time curve.” Finally, the article reads the ending of the novelette characterizing an apparent *ustopian* impetus that restores a stoic faith within Chiang’s

fiction.

Orchestrated as a circular narrative with a story within a story (within a story) formulation, Chiang's novelette insightfully highlights the essential problems of fate and determinism. To understand this, the article investigates the novelette, "The Merchant and the Alchemist Gate" as a composite palimpsest of interconnected revelations that guide the characters towards self-discovery. Set in the cities of Bagdad and Cairo, the story revolves around the destiny of characters that travel through the time-shifting gate, an action that teaches them to have a fresh look at their present. Besides, Chiang fashions his novelette at the allegorical backdrop of *One Thousand and One Nights* featuring uncompromising desert treks, tales of wealth and poverty, polemics of love and betrayal, and nostalgic reminiscences narrated to caliphs through an embedded narrative technique. The motif of time travel adds a scientific element to the classic folklore dressed within a Middle Eastern culture, foreign to the author.

In fact, through the "Story Notes" section preceding his rich compendium of stories, Chiang also contends the theoretical conjecture behind this riveting tale. He describes Kip Thorne's idea of creating a time-travel device based on Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Corporeal teleportation through this machine takes place through a pair of doors where each door represents a specific timeline in the past and the future respectively. However, as per mathematical calculations driving this premise, past remains unchanged owing to a single and self-consistent timeline across the spatio-temporal axis.

The novelette introduces a rich merchant, Fuwaad Ibn Abbas walking through the district of metal smiths to purchase an ingenious gift for one of his clients. During his search, Abbas comes across an emporium of adroit craftsmanship that captivates his attention with its hampers made of brass, and silver. To his surprise, the owner of the shop, Bashaarat, invites him to have a proximate look at his fascinating merchandise and even demonstrates his expertise in alchemy. What leads further is an engrossing parable of a time travel series oscillating back and forth at specific intervals. The novelette circles the time travel Gate of Years allowing its users to meet their future selves to relearn the importance of life from the latter.

Precisely, the narrative recounts the speculative tales of Hasan, the fortunate rope-maker, Ajib, the weaver who stole from himself, Raniya, Hasan's wife and finally Abbas, the rich merchant. Each of their stories carries an

implicit and remarkable observation of the unfolding mechanics of their lives (better or worse) and how it helps them to comprehend their present reality. However, at the latent level of these unfolding mechanics lies the epistemological caveat that raises the pertinent challenge of unalterable choices, participation, and acceptance. It means that no matter how many times the time traveler enters and exits the timeline between past, present, and the future or no matter how much he/she tries to modify the events, what the traveler finally discerns is that nothing changes at the magnitude of history. The difference occurs at the level of the unraveling of facts and the acknowledgment of truth which changes everything. For example, post his time-travel journey into his past twenty years ago, Abbas consciously asserts, "My journey to the past had changed nothing, but what I learned had changed everything." (35). The article elucidates the philosophical dimension of Abbas's statement in the context of the overall plot of the novelette. It also purports the presence of temporal paradoxes and how these couple with the circular narrative of the story.

Science Fiction and Stoic Philosophy: An Illuminating Synthesis of Ideas

Stoicism is the Hellenistic philosophy of life that allows one to learn and blossom as the best version of oneself. Tracing its origins in Athens in the 2nd Century B.C, Stoicism was started by Zeno of Citium and later practiced by famous philosophers such as Epictetus, Cato, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius. The word 'stoic' in English means "the unemotional endurance of pain" (Holiday 11). However, its optimal application goes beyond the lexical meaning that, on intensive analysis, converts the notion of pain into acceptance and unemotional endurance into a compassionate ground for satisfaction. In ethics, stoicism partakes the epistemic relevance of appropriate judgments which stand detached from the situations that one cannot control. Further to this, stoics emphasize the significance of decision making through correct choices, logical reasoning while controlling desires and passions so as to achieve true happiness. (Bowman 52).

Philosopher critic Robin Campbell justifies this teleological stoic perspective as an all-encompassing fraternal community network governed by a supreme providence. Campbell defends Almighty's will and affirms a man's utmost obligation towards bearing conformity with the will of the divine. To attempt this, one must relinquish avarice, ambition, and luxury and completely, and uncomplainingly surrender to fate, and never question or try to amend what the Providence decides for him/her. Only by fulfilling this caveat could one achieve the ultimate peace, and contentment in life (6).

Thus, stoic philosophy espouses the presence of an omnipresent God responsible for the existence, and balance of the universe (Worth 59). This means that the will of the Almighty stands supreme for the stoic practitioners and the acceptance of this will has the ability to engender goodness and perfection. In addition, Stoic philosophy propagates human *arête* (virtue) as a necessary condition for achieving *eudaimonia* (happiness). Seneca in his *Letters to Lucilius* notes the importance of virtue and associates its relevance with well-being, and happiness (26). Yet at the same time, this happiness does not exist in isolation but features as a correlative of one's internal response to judgments and behaviors and does not rely on events external to the human mind. Most of the stoic arguments are premised on this correlation. For example, Epictetus in his *Discourses* distinguishes between two external and internal category of events, (1) one which we cannot control, and (2) the other which we can control as per our choices in life" (cited in Holiday 43).

Jonas Salzgeber in his *The Little Book of Stoicism* recognizes the pivotal essentialness of good life and its function in developing one's character, choices, and actions as opposed to the uncontrollable phenomenon of the world (4). However, human virtue comprises a conscious reservoir of one's thoughts and habits that, as per the Stoic belief system, remain under individual control. This is because of one's reiterative firmness in the overarching acceptance of one's destiny. It subsequently enhances one's vigor and intensity in a quest towards a happy and meaningful life. In other words, "we don't control what happens in the world around us, but we do have the power to control our opinions about these events" (Salzgeber 77). It is this potency of our opinionated selves that makes generous room for our ability to effectively comprehend situations at hand and deal with challenges especially when undergoing emotional turmoil.

Science fiction carries ample ground to ruminate across stoic insights within their speculative narratives. It ushers a repertoire of powerful themes and questions that, on outright interpretation, could draw reliable inferences. What science fiction does is to portray a society (in the past or future) that, at the surface happens to be different, but when looked upon pervasively, constitutes the contemporary condition of the immediate world. Lucie Armitt considers this representation as an encompassment of an alternate reality, looked afresh, from an outsider's perspective. She summates that the SF genre is appropriate in delineating an intrinsic link between reality and its futuristic representation in alternate systems. This depiction of alternate reality creates an estranged perception of everyday scenarios which we perceive around us so as to allow the focus on the

existing reality external and afresh (9).

Reading science fiction, as an alternate reality, from the discursive lens of stoic philosophy is what this article endeavors to establish. Some of the pertinent stoic tenets in science fiction comprise virtue, fate, fortitude, justice, and acceptance. Each parable in Chiang's novelette alludes to these philosophical principles and acts as a guiding force for characters located across different timelines. Before Bashaarat offers the time-travel service of the Alchemist Gate to Abbas, he narrates three stoic tales to the latter. Each of these tales proves as a remarkable learning experience for the people who get the magical opportunity to interact with their older selves.

Determinism, Temporality and the Metaphysics of Virtue: The Three Stoic Parables

This section enumerates the link between temporality and virtue in Chiang's stoic parables. Each tale features as a driving force in ascertaining the metaphysical denomination of the events across the axis of time. The first tale that Bashaarat recounts is that of a young man called Hasan, a rope maker by profession. As soon as he enters the Gate, Hasan is mesmerized by the wonderfully transformed city of Cairo as if the city is a canvas of a "scene embroidered on a tapestry" (9). It is no later than a few moments that he can find his older self, a renowned and well-settled merchant of the future city of Cairo. From hereafter begins a frequent exchange of warnings and suggestions between the two selves. Each of the insights offers a noteworthy perceptivity to younger Hasan and allows him to delve deeper into its exuberance until one fine day when finally he can dig out the "bronze chest of finely studded jewels. This further enables the younger Hasan to, with the grace of Allah, make appropriate use of the newly found riches and climb up the social ladder while practicing adequate humility and generosity towards the poor. In his way Hasan, by following the wisdom of his older self can comprehend the true essence of predetermined virtue and how, by adhering to its righteous principles, one can achieve success and happiness. Tad Brennen in his chapter, "The Stoic Theory of Virtue" describes the concept of Virtue in the following words:

Virtue, says the Stoics, is the finest of all things, outshining pleasure, wealth, and even life itself, as much as the sun outshines a candle. Indeed, it is the only good thing, and all of the things that we mistakenly value and pursue are merely indifferent, with no tendency to bring us happiness. Virtue is necessary for our

happiness, sufficient for our happiness, and indeed the sole component and contributor to our happiness. Whoever has virtue is perfectly happy, and indeed no less happy than Zeus himself (31).

Thus, Hasan emerges as a fine example of stoic virtue that enables him to live a fruitful life. This comparison between God (Greek, Christian, Arabic, or otherwise) and stoic follower adds to the philosophical quotient in Chiang's fiction as Abbas, right at the beginning of the novelette, hails "Allah as the beginning of all things" (3) and despite he stands covered in misfortune, he is still at peace. At this point, the purpose of this article is not to differentiate or form similarities or contradictory distinctions between Greek, Christian, or Arabic ideas of God but to discern the connection between stoicism, determinism, and predestination. This connection becomes all the more intricate when the individual (Hasan in the present context) wholeheartedly accepts the divine blessings of the Stoic God and becomes one with him. Without any premonitions, he can realize God's omnipotence and firmly believes that the Stoic God is responsible for every cause and phenomena. He is the one who plans the holistic development of the world, from inception to finality (Sedley 41).

Therefore, every phenomenon of the universe is a pre-devised plan as per God's will. And the individual has to trust and follow it without interrogating the reasons behind such fate. Chrysippus in his first book *On Nature* establishes the incorporation of determinism in Stoic philosophy as, "for no particular thing, not even in the smallest can have happened otherwise than by the common nature and its reason...that nothing at all, not even in the smallest is in a qualitative state or moves otherwise than by the reason of Zeus which is the same as fate (Quoted in Bobzien 28). According to Determinists, all specific events take place due to the composite interplay between a chain of antecedents, consequents, and the laws, principles, and other mechanisms, governing the interrelations among them" (Ferrailolo 7). This means that timelines are fixed and self-consistent similar to a "block universe" and individuals only perform as per a predetermined set-up already engineered by God (Parker 138). Raniya's tale and the tale of the Weaver are veritable examples of this temporal inertia.

The theory of "block universe" denotes a static and unchanging spatio-temporal representation in the 4-D framework. Proposed by Kristie Miller, the "block universe theory" (also known as B-theory) denotes the universe as a giant block of all temporal events coming into action. These events are by no means differentiated on the premise of their place and time of occurrence. It means that all coordinates in space and time exist as

uniform entities where “there is no essential difference between past and the future because there is no present time defined to separate them... without an objective present, time does not flow in any real sense: the passage of time is an illusion” (Ellis 242). Thus, past and future merge and flow into one another challenging the dynamicity of the present. Rudolf Rucker in his book *Geometry, Relativity and Fourth Dimension* exemplifies it as a perpetually conscious mechanism where the author asserts that:

Every instance of your life always exists. Time does not pass...the past is gone and the future doesn't exist yet. If the past existed, it would be possible for me to jump my consciousness five minutes back. But there is no consciousness to jump back and forth: you are always conscious at each instant of your life. The consciousness of five minutes ago is unalterable (60).

This unalterable consciousness forms an incredible time loop (what Maartijn Loos (10) terms as temporal simultaneity), popularly known as the “Closed Time Curve” (CTC), in which the events return to the same space-time coordinates as when they began. According to Tobar and Costa, these curves enable their observers to undertake time-travel, back and forth, and have a conversation with their past and future selves. It means that it is impossible to transform the events of the past but this irreversible past can reflect on the outcomes of the future.

Chiang's novelette epitomizes this “temporal simultaneity” (Loos 10) in the tale of Hasan's wife, Raniya. Titled, “The Tale of the Wife and her Lover,” it opens with Raniya's account of her happy married life and recalls the day when she saw her husband dine with his younger version. Here, the timelines intersect to create an extraordinary exchange of thoughts between Hasan of the past and that of the future. Although, Raniya does not speak to Hasan's younger self but still tries to eavesdrop on the conversation between the two. The charm of her husband's younger self attracts the older Raniya compelling her to pursue his youthful charisma. This subsequently leads Raniya to the time-shifting Gate of Years that transports her to the Cairo of her youth. However, the tricky unfolding of events makes Raniya step back and forth through the Gate of Years to assist and protect the younger Hasan. Precisely, Raniya discovers the younger Hasan trying to sell a necklace (that he will gift the future Raniya, his wife). However, the thieves, who hid the riches underground, identify Hasan as the one who took those riches. To retrieve their lost fortune, the thieves contrive a vicious plan against the younger Hasan. But since Raniya overhears them, she decides to help him. She is aware of the fact that Hasan would not

have sold the necklace because she still possesses it. She also knows that the thieves would not have killed Hasan. The entire situation urges her to contemplate her instrumental role at this moment leading to her eventual decision of helping Hasan to escape from this dire crisis.

Thus, although Raniya is unable to believe that her husband died in the past (even if the thieves try to rob him of or kill him), she showcases a firm belief in fate and undertakes a positive approach towards coming to Hasan's assistance (in incognito) in the time of crisis. To accomplish her restored faith, she travels back from the Gate of Years, takes out her necklace that Hasan gifted her in the present, and ends up meeting her older self (an aged Raniya of twenty years in the future). In the future, she convinces her older self to help the younger Hasan in the past. Finally, both women can deceive the conmen and act in favor of the younger self of their husband. This impressive interaction between the past, present, and the future as well as the enthralling turn of events reflects Chiang's prolificacy in mapping diverse thought-provoking facets in his mainstream novelette. Even more to this lies the temporal efficaciousness of the tale that manifests a spatial resonance of characters back and forth across the stringent timeframes. Indeed, as Bashaarat admits, "the past and the future and the past are the same. We cannot change either, but we can know both more fully" (25). In Raniya's tale, one can observe the formation of a "block universe" spanning over sixty years (comprising younger Hasan of the past, Raniya of the present, and that of the future) into a wholesome segment. This timespan acts as a "closed time" loop where the parables eventually return to the same space-time coordinates from where they started.

Next is "The Tale of the Weaver" where the concepts of "block universe" and "closed time" are explored even further. Ajib is a young weaver of rugs who, after listening to Hasan's story of fame and glory, decides to use the time portal. Confident of his being rich and generous just like Hasan, he seeks to interact with his older self in the city of Cairo, twenty years in the future. However much to his astonishment, he finds his future version of living an ordinary life with his wife. On further scrutiny, he stumbles on a chest of drawers filled with gold dinars, kept safe and untouched by the older Ajib. After much reasoning and contemplation, the younger Ajib decides to steal his riches on the ground that "tak[ing] his older self's wealth would not be stealing...because it was he who would receive it" (16). Everything goes well after Ajib is back to the present. He can afford a luxurious life and adequate savings in his bank account and is even able to marry Taahira, the love of his life.

But things take an unusual turn when, one day, thieves ransack his house, steal all precious adornments, and kidnap his wife. The next day, the kidnapers demand a ransom of ten thousand dinars if he wants his wife's safe return to him. Without a second thought, Ajib gathers all his money, including the amount he saved in his bank account to save his beloved wife. This is the moment when he realizes that he has been thrifless all this life making him a prisoner of his fate. To correct the mistake (of stealing from his older self), Ajib and his wife shift to their old house and start saving every penny they earn. Thus, what the younger Ajib considered ordinary was a life of prudence that only a "closed time" loop can demonstrate. On the philosophical dimension, Ajib's tale illustrates the stoic doctrine of "eternal return" and that is:

...when the planets return to the same position, concerning inclination and declination, to which each was at the beginning when the cosmos was first established, at specified periods they bring about the conflagration and destruction of things. And when again the cosmos returns from the beginning to the same state, and when again the heavenly bodies are similarly disposed, each thing that occurred in the former period will come to pass indistinguishably (White 142).

MJ White argues that the stoic concept of "eternal return" conjuncts with the theory of "closed time." Here, "eternal return" refers to the state of affairs that eventually unfold as indistinctly as they should leaving no room for disjuncture within the time loop. And if anyone tries intruding within the loop and altering the course of events (even for good), the outcome remains unchanged. This fixity may lead to regret upon the inability to achieve the desired outcome. However, this is not the end of Chiang's magnanimous vision. The last part of the novelette translates this regret into a modest learning experience on the part of Abbas, the final parable in the story.

"All is Well that Ends Well": Evocative Restoration of Peace and Faith in the Almighty

This section describes the turning point in Chiang's novelette and that is the emotive transformation in Abbas's character. After listening to the three enthralling parables, Abbas decides to use the Gate of Years. However, his wish is not to know the future but to revisit his past, and for this, Bashaarat asks him to travel to Cairo and use the Gate of Years to wander through the days of his youth. But before using the time-shift portal,

Bashaarat reminds Abbas of the stoic vision that the Gate of Years engenders and that is, “what is made cannot be unmade....[and] you cannot avoid the ordeals that are assigned to you. What Allah gives you, you must accept” (27). Paying a deaf ear to this contention at the moment, Abbas gets ready for his journey into the past. While on his way to Cario, he contemplates the mistakes of his past. He narrates his tragic anecdote in which he recounts the argument between him and his wife, Najya, and how she reprimanded his idea of trading in slaves to procure profits in business. Ignoring her genuine plea, he still perambulates towards his megalomaniac quest for power and accumulation of wealth. However, while Abbas is away, the Mosque building collapses, leading to Najya’s injury and eventual death. Abbas gets to know about his wife’s demise only after he is back to Cario. Her death causes a pernicious void in his heart making him feel as if he killed her with his own hands.

However, Bashaarat’s Gate of Years and the three time-travel parables provide a moral assurance to Abbas that he may be able to play a role in his past to learn the unknown. He anticipates the wisdom of Bashaarat’s stories which uncompromisingly claim the non-transformative dimension of the past. However, he still decides to travel through the Gate of Years, and similar to Raniya’s Tale, speculates to play an instrumental role in knowing the hidden secrets of the past.

Abbas expands his utopian imagination to the extent that he feels Najya could have been alive and it is possible to have her beside him in the present. However, when he reaches Cario of his youth, he receives the same setback for the second time and that is the death of his dear wife. This moment records the climatic turnover of utopian hope into dystopian despair where Abbas stands at the threshold of broken memories and ceaseless anguish until he receives a revelatory message from Maimuna, Najya’s nurse who tended her before she died. She carries a message for Abbas, which is no less than the voice of predestined will itself and that is, as Maimuna conveys that Najya recalled the beautiful moments which she spent with Abbas, and her last thoughts were considerate towards the health, and well-being of her husband.

This revelatory message and its miraculous discernment brims Abbas’s heart with molten emotion. It allows him to grapple with this reality and overcome the poignancy of his past errors. This reality carries a probing thrust into the convoluted dimension of life and death. It makes him realize the stoic truth of life that is, the past remains as a repository of nostalgic memories which can never be erased. One could only repent, atone,

and forgive the mistakes of the past, and nothing beyond. This realization posits a deep understanding of the predestined will of God, similar to what Marcus Aurelius notes in his *Meditations* and that is:

Providence is the source from which all things flow, and allied with it is necessity and the welfare of the universe. You are a part of that universe; and for any of nature's parts that are assigned to it by the World-Nature or help to keep it in being is good [Book 2, 3].

Therefore, Abbas's tale presents an "eternal return" of the disoriented persona and that too a wiser one by the end of the novelette. It unleashes his potential as a thoughtful individual who tastes the fruit of glory even in his loss. This is nothing but the emergence of a *ustopian* enigma that stimulates the dovelike ingenuity of the novelette. Chiang's *ustopian* outlook provides a virtuous solution to this distressing dilemma. The term *ustopia* refers to "an imagined perfect society and its opposite - because... each contains a latent version of the other" (Atwood 66). Or else put this, the final parable in the novelette "no longer retain[s] utopian hope outside the pages but instead keep the utopian impulse within the work by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel" (Gheluwe 8). It means that there is no prototypical utopia (an ideal society) or dystopia (utopia gone wrong) but every event carries a galvanizing blend of both. Chiang outlines this quintessential penchant in his "Story Notes" too. He writes

Most time-travel stories assume that it's possible to change the past, and the ones in which it is not possible are often tragic. While we can all understand the desire to change things in our past, I wanted to try writing a time-travel story where the inability to do so wasn't necessarily a cause for sadness (341).

Thus, Abbas's parable is an insightful commentary on this *ustopian* impulse. Chiang makes sure to protect his protagonist from subjugation and defeat at the end and with this, he keeps the *ustopian* sentiment intact despite him being engulfed in perennial remorse. This makes Abbas feel "fortunate beyond measure" (35) as, with the grace of God, he can rectify his former misdeeds and is lucky enough to possess the most precious knowledge of the world. This knowledge comprises the true essence of life as an epitome of a "closed time curve" that has no scope of divergence across the temporal chronology. Yet, magnified experiences enrich the individual throughout the sensational journey and encourage him toward a

fulfilling life ahead.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Chiang's novelette is a touchstone of gripping emotions and provocative temporal scenarios. Each parable is a perfect incision in exploring the futuristic implications of past errors paving a stoic way to understand the epiphany of the present. This article fuses philosophy with metaphysics while evaluating the notions of virtue, determinism, and free will. It deciphers each of the crafted stories as an impeccable configuration of time-shift relativity while maintaining implicit faith in its determinist outcome. In the end, the novelette stands as a philosophical revelation of the function one plays in understanding the future through a vital reassessment of the past. It enables one to accentuate the implicit connection between the philosophy of time and the metaphysics of stoic humanness. And with this, one can achieve the saturation moment of ecstatic bliss. This is the moment where each person learns something different and Chiang novelette stands imperative to this unparalleled inclination through breathing a new life into the science fiction genre.

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