A CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE THEME OF LOVE IN SHI TIESHENG'S NOVEL NOTES ON ABSTRACT TALKS

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, a literary analysis and Christian critique is given to the contemporary Chinese writer Shi Tiesheng’s philosophical-religious novel Notes on Abstract Talks in 1995. It is established in this research paper that Shi Tiesheng’s writing manifests his sophisticated literary techniques, reveals his deep interests in fate and salvation, and demonstrates his unique efforts to find a way out of human predicaments through love.

At the same time, this research paper also identifies Shi Tiesheng’s understanding of love in terms of Eros, which has several unavoidable limitations according to the analyses of the relationships between disability and love, class origin and love, morality and love, and devotion and love in this novel. Several characteristics of Eros and Agape will be then described to show from a Christian point of view that it is Agape not Eros that possesses a salvation capacity to deliver people from suffering and predicament.

The general goal of this thesis is to affirm the literary and philosophical value of Shi Tiesheng’s Notes on Abstract Talks, while pointing out its limitations and answer from a Christian perspective its questions about love.
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Introduction

Shi Tiesheng (史铁生)’s novel *Notes on Abstract Talks* (务虚笔记) was originally published in the widely circulated Chinese literary journal *Harvest Literature Magazine* (收获) in 1996. It took Shi Tiesheng four years to finish this 400 thousand-character novel. *Notes on Abstract Talks* is Shi Tiesheng’s first novel and a very unique work in contemporary Chinese literary scene. It has been evaluated by Zhao Yiheng (赵毅衡) that: “in today’s Chinese literary scene filled with commonplace and pretentious works, *Notes on Abstract Talks* is not only a stimulating work, but also a milestone as the first real religious-philosophical novel in the history of Chinese literature.”¹ In the meanwhile, however, more than a few scholars have admitted that this novel has not drawn as much attention and serious analyses from literary critics as it deserves, probably because of its speculative content, abstract theme, and complicated structure.

Shi Tiesheng has spontaneously become one of the most philosophical novelists among numerous contemporary Chinese writers. From his early stage of creative writing, Shi Tiesheng has never stopped inquiring the meaning of life, the will of God, the nature of love, and the reason of suffering, etc., in his essays, short stories, and his only one novel. What particularly characterizes his thinking and writing is that most of his philosophical inquiries come directly from his own experiences.

In 1972, when Shi Tiesheng was 21 years old, his legs were suddenly paralyzed; he could hardly do more than meditate in his wheelchair for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, his interests and concerns were turned from the outer world to his inner existence, in which he continues to search for the significance of his life and the true relationship between this world and himself.
Owing to his personal experience, Shi Tiesheng particularly concentrates on issues of fate and salvation. In his works, salvation is often expressed in forms of love, writing, art, and philosophy, which may be able to deliver human beings from situations of suffering. From my understanding, the religious nature of Shi Tiesheng’s writings does not lie in certain religious terms he cites, such as God, Original Sin, Buddha, Nirvana, etc., but stems from his interests and concerns in salvation that normally constitutes one of the core subjects in any religion.

In *Notes on Abstract Talks*, Shi Tiesheng deals with a series of overlapping love stories, through which he suggests the theme of this novel: ideal love is the only promising therapy for loneliness, frustration, fear, and all other forms of human suffering. The novel’s structure is not established according to chronological order, but organized in terms of developing possibilities of various characters’ fates. The main plots are composed of several parallel or overlapping stories: Teacher O (女教师 O) and Politician WR, Teacher O and Artist Z (画家 Z), the disabled C (残疾人 C) and his lover X, Doctor F (F 医生) and Director N (女导演 N), Poet L (诗人 L) and his lover, etc. In each story, the characters look for their former lovers and indeed seek the lost love itself. A main character, Director N, is even making an experimental movie which has only one simple plot: a young couple who are passionately in love with each other lose each other in a crowd and anxiously look for one another to the end, until they are getting very old and white-haired. This movie, in fact, implies the same fate for Director N herself and for other couples in *Notes on Abstract Talks*. 
After reading a series of different love stories, the reader gets the general impression, which is also suggested by Director N, that “love is the only thing we might lose and we truly desire to find” —爱情!—. In other words, the search for former lovers is actually the search for love itself; this is clearly seen in Teacher O’s life. Teacher O constantly cherishes love as a beautiful fairy tale and as an ultimate purpose in life, but eventually commits suicide after she finds a fatal logical contradiction in her fairy-tale love: although she is a believer in the purity and equality of love, what she practices is actually based on unequal adoration-like love. It seems that both her life and her death are for the sake of love.

Having read a series of love stories, the reader may gain a vivid picture of the nature and characteristics of Shi Tiesheng’s theme of love.

Compared to a large number of contemporary Chinese literary works that depict modern society as pessimistic and frustrating and that have no offers of hope, Shi Tiesheng’s writing demonstrates his unique efforts to find a way out of human predicaments and thus, to some extent, have a capability to comfort those who suffer. In this point, I personally place high value on Shi Tiesheng’s works. Nevertheless, there are also some questions I raise in my mind about the theme of Notes on Abstract Talks while reading this novel:

Why do those characters struggle so much to achieve ideal love but ultimately fail to go anywhere beyond ordinary limitations in real relationships? Why does Shi Tiesheng seemingly still stay in a confused state, now that he has already clearly set the ultimate
value of love? Furthermore, does Shi Tiesheng’s ideal love truly carry a function in salvation? And are there any other types of love beyond Shi Tiesheng’s theme of love?

To answer these questions, this thesis will analyze the theme of love in Notes on Abstract Talks from a Christian point of view, then identify Shi Tiesheng’s understanding of love in terms of Eros, and finally, will illustrate that it is Agape instead of Eros that possesses a salvation capacity to deliver people from suffering and predicament.

This thesis takes a Christian position, and my method is to apply Christian viewpoints on love to a close reading and literary critique of Notes on Abstract Talks. The traditional Greek classification of love will be used, dividing love into four types, Storge, Philia, Eros, and Agape, among which Eros and Agape will be the focus in this thesis.

The first two chapters concentrate on the theme of love in Notes on Abstract Talks. Chapter One analyzes the limitations of love in the novel. As mentioned above, almost all characters in this novel are looking for their former lovers and their lost love as well. Obviously, it is a consequence of former relationships lost; what leads to this loss rests in the innate limitations of love. Thus four expressions of love’s limitations will be demonstrated through a series of major stories in this novel. In Chapter Two, a conclusion will be reached, after displaying a few characteristics of Shi’s love, that Shi Tiesheng regards love as the ultimate treatment for human sufferings, but this type of love is in fact a conditional and imperfect love.

In next two chapters, the main concern is shifted from love to God/fate. Chapter Three deals with Shi Tiesheng’s concepts of God and fate in Notes on Abstract Talks. After close reading, a clear difference can be found between Shi Tiesheng’s
understanding of God and a Christian understanding of God. Shi Tiesheng’s God is described as an apathetic play director who has sovereign will above this world and every single person, but enjoys making troubles for powerless human beings; however, it is believed by Christians that God is not only the almighty One but also the loving One. Shi Tiesheng somehow deprives God of His loving personality, and only leaves Him the role of a dominator, behind which we may find that his real interest rests on fate issues rather than on God. While Chapter Three analyzes the issue of fate in terms of theme, Chapter Four copes with the same issue from the perspective of literary writing techniques, such as interchangeable fates, symbolic names, and “door of fate” as a metaphor etc. Several examples of the possibilities of characters’ different fates will be given.

Chapter Five combines and develops the two major scopes of love and God/fate which are discussed in Chapters One through Four, evaluating Shi Tiesheng’s understandings of love and God in Notes on Abstract Talks from a Christian viewpoint. First of all, the four types of loves, according to traditional Greek classification, will be briefly introduced. And then I shall respectively examine the characteristics of Eros and Agape, based on some Christian writings of love as well as Shi Tiesheng’s novel.

Finally, the Conclusion will be drawn that only Agape, namely, God’s love, is able to carry function in salvation and thus exists as the ultimate love.

The general goal of this thesis is to affirm the literary and philosophical value of Shi Tiesheng’s Notes on Abstract Talks, while in the meantime, to point out his limitations and answer his inquiries about love from a Christian point.
Chapter One: Limitations of Love in *Notes on Abstract Talks*

In *Notes on Abstract Talks*, Shi Tiesheng suggests that the search for love is a consequence of lost love, while lost love is a result of love’s limitations. Therefore, an understanding of love’s limitations becomes crucial to comprehend the concept of love in *Notes on Abstract Talks*. Four typical aspects of love’s limitations in this novel will be discussed as follows:

**Disability and Love**

The story of the disabled C and his lover X is told very early, right after the initial statement of Narrator “I (我).” C shares a very similar fate with the author himself: in his twenties, C’s legs are suddenly paralyzed and he is forced to sit in a wheelchair from then on. As a logical starting point for several main stories later on, this story poses some significant questions. For instance, do all people experience love equally? Is there equality in love? How do the disabled respond to discrimination and pressure regarding their love and relationships? Is it fair for them to take responsibility for their uncontrollable fates?

Shi Tiesheng uses two chapters, Chapter 2 “Disability and Love (残疾与爱情)” and Chapter 17 “Fear (害怕),” to develop C and X’s love story. The events of their relationship are shown in a flashback. Chapter 2 “Disability and Love” displays a satisfactory denouement, in which C and X eventually get married after every long wait
while in Chapter 17 "Fear" the author describes how the two struggle in their courtship against the pressures from other people.

Among several main love stories, the story of C and X is very special, partly because it is the only story in the whole book with a happy ending where Shi Tiesheng places the hope that love will deliver people from their suffering. This story begins with X’s return from South China after many years of separation from the disabled C. What she brings back to the disabled C is not only the hope of experiencing love, but also the hope of starting a family:

The word “home” suddenly appears from a remote place and almost moves them to tears. Even this word “home,” lingering on in boundless silence, is simply able to move them to tears. They are going out together. Shut the gate. Home is right here waiting temporarily; it is right here waiting. A small house in sunset is waiting for their return. They are leaving together, looking back; although without speaking, they both cherish the word “home” in their hearts.

“家”这个字忽然从遥远或是陌生中走出来，使他们感动得几乎落泪。“家”——甚至这个发音，在弥漫无边的空寂之中余音袅袅，让他们感动涕零。他们一同出去。关上家门，关上，就是说它暂时等在这儿，家，等在这里。斜阳中的一座小屋，随时等你们回来。他们一同离开，回头又看一眼，不说但心里都有一个“家”字。(17-18)
Home is where people are supposed to find hope for support, comfort, and understanding and where the senses of security and freedom are provided, especially in a turbulent environment. In a word, home is a place of love. The conception of home sounds so warm and appealing to the disabled C and his lover X that they eventually decide to start a family in spite of others' objections and doubts. Thus, for the disabled C, love and family become a kind of salvation that delivers him from twenty years of suffering.

In retrospect, the disabled C concludes that there is a secret code in his life: the combination of disability and love. For him, disability is destined to come before love, which constitutes his tragic fate. As soon as his lover, a healthy and pretty girl named X enters his life, the disabled C immediately realizes the truth that he is destined to be excluded from a normal life that includes love and relationships. On the one hand, love is a stimulus that intensifies the suffering caused by C’s disability; on the other hand, love is a consolation that has the capacity for healing his wounds. His life is filled with numerous overlapping reactions between disability and love, which leads him to the conclusion that the secret code in his life is the combination of disability and love.

Among many factors causing their hardship, what worries C and X most is public opinion. Although they truly and deeply love each other, it is obvious that other people do not understand or encourage this relationship at all. As a result, C and X have to face a great deal of doubtful eyes and receive interrogations from people around them, even from relatives and close friends; accordingly, C and X have to explain themselves over and over again to them. A detail in Chapter 17 “Fear” vividly expresses C’s feelings, in
which he is deeply hurt once he finds that X's family are hiding in the dark, watching him while he is waiting for X in front of her house. Also in Chapter 17, various comments from their close friends disappoint and distress them so much that they even think of separation. Both of them are labeled as "selfish" people: the disabled C is willing to "selfishly destroy a nice girl's young life," while X is willing to "make a miserable person more miserable by fulfilling her sympathy." Due to public opinion, C and X painfully realize that they could not make their beloved ones happy unless they give up their relationship.

A direct response to public opinion is fear, which is also the title of Chapter 17. C and X fear being judged by others and fear making a choice between being a "good" person, which means surrendering their right to love, and being a "selfish" person, which means insisting on their right. X has an impressive monologue expressing her fear:

Forgive me. Pardon me. I am weak. I’m afraid... standing at the altar, X says, I’m afraid of the roofs and the crowds like mountains and seas, of the lights brighter than stars, and of the silent mouths and speaking eyes... Those sneaky expressions seem to suggest that I am not a normal person... I’m afraid that I’ll have to explain all the time; I’m afraid that in fact I’ll have no chance to explain; I’m afraid of the boundless eyes of suspicion and inquiry. Under the boundless suspicious and inquiring eyes, our love seems abnormal and furtive, as if stolen from somewhere... I’m afraid that we’ll probably have to live like this forever...
I’m afraid of my parents. They will be driven mad, even to death... I’m afraid of the condemnation from my brothers, sisters, and other people; I’m afraid of their accusing expressions... I’m also afraid of your inquiry and perseverance... I’m afraid that I cannot marry you; I’m afraid of the remarks that my feeling toward you is nothing but sympathy and that I intend to fulfill my sympathy at the cost of your torture. All of these things make me fearful... People used to praise me for goodness, which makes me fearful. I’m afraid that I have to be such a “good” person for the rest of my life and that, in fact, I am not the kind of “good” person that people imagine I am. The reason that I’ve approached you is by no means to be a “good” person. I’m afraid that if one day I want to leave you I won’t be a “good” person any more... Let
us separate! I'm weak. I'm afraid of everything people say; I'm afraid all the time...

我害怕我的父母，他们会气疯的，他们会气死的……我害怕别人的谴责，我的兄弟姐妹，还有别人，我害怕他们谴责的面孔……
我也害怕你的追问，害怕你这样不肯放弃……我害怕我不能嫁给你，我害怕别人说我只是怜悯，说我只是为了满足自己的怜悯却让你痛苦，这些都让我害怕……人们曾经说我是好一个好人，这样的称赞让我害怕，我害怕因此我得永远当这样的好人，我害怕我并不是人们所认为的那样的好人，我并不是为了做一个好人才走近你的，我害怕有一天我想离开我就不再是一个好人……让我们分开吧，我是个软弱的人，不管别人说什么我都害怕，每时每刻我都感到恐惧…… (522-23)

Unfortunately, the consequence of their fear is separation. X goes to South China, while C still stays in the northern city, earnestly waiting for her return. Public opinions, or customary conceptions, deprive disabled people of their normal right to love because of their physical deformities. C used to believe a “fairy tale” his mother told, in which he is entitled to a normal life as long as he does not consider himself different from others. Eventually, however, C realizes that in this society he cannot totally ignore the “normal” people’s suspicious eyes.
What hurts the disabled most is an unavoidable truth that in reality, they cannot equally enjoy the right to love, although they might want to cherish it as an ideal. The disabled C cries out, “Can disability cause love to a mistake 是不是残疾可以使爱成为错误? (521)” Thus the author puts C in a difficult situation, in which he is forced to take the responsibility for his uncontrollable fate, for disability is not what he intentionally chooses but the fate he has to accept.

Shi Tiesheng further suggests that disability should be understood not only literally but also symbolically. He believes that all human beings suffer because of the limitations of their human nature. No one intends to suffer, but people cannot escape their deformities nor control their own lives. On this point, all human beings are disabled. Consequently, the secret code of the disabled C’s life, disability and love, can be properly applied to all mankind, as stated in one of Shi Tiesheng’s informal essays:

I think, the most essential code written by God on human nature is disability and love. Disability means incompleteness, limitation, and obstacle… It is a physical matter, belonging to reality. Love, on the other hand, is a spiritual matter, a dream. Love is a longing for perfection, the infinite possibility of breaking through all limits, and the remedy for incompleteness.

我想，上帝为人性写下的最本质的两条密码是：残疾与爱情。残疾即残缺、限制、阻碍……是属物的，是现实。爱情属灵，是梦
It is clearly shown in the above statement that Shi Tiesheng regards love as the ultimate remedy for human beings’ limitations and suffering.

To be sure, it is love that heals the disabled C and brings him many wonderful things such as a warm, caring family and a sense of security; however, a dark cloud remains over his head. When C and X go to register their marriage, he still feels embarrassed and even a little angry due to the questioning by the old female clerk. The narrator says, “I used to believe that the dark cloud of disability had been driven out thoroughly from C’s heart after so many years have passed, but at this moment I begin to realize that the dark cloud will be his constant experience through his whole life. 这些多年的时光，我们已将那残疾的阴影扫除干净，现在我才相信，那将是他永生永世的际遇。（24）”

This detail shows that love cannot thoroughly erase C’s mental shadows, especially his fear of the perceptions of others. In contrast to C’s love, a Biblical verse points out a different situation: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:18) From this point of view, C’s love fails to be an ideal type of love that is able to completely end fear and save people from suffering. Although the love that C finally enjoys is healing and comforting, it can hardly carry the ultimate function of salvation for all human beings, because it is heavily influenced by outside factors such as public opinion and is usually unequally expressed in practice. This section not only
demonstrates love's fascinating features but also points out its limitations through the analysis of the story of the disabled C and his lover X as a metaphor.

**Class Origin and Love**

In this part, two love stories will be used as examples to illustrate the great impact of class origin, or family background, on love and relationships. The story of Artist Z and Teacher O, which can be situated in any environment, is more universal, while the story of Doctor F and Director N is mainly concerned with a certain historical context, the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

Story I: The story of Artist Z and Teacher O is so important in this novel that Shi Tiesheng narrates it in at least six chapters: Chapter 3 “Prelude of Death (死亡序幕),” Chapter 4 “The Gate of Childhood (童年之门),” Chapter 15 “Little Street (小街),” Chapter 19 “Differential (差别),” Chapter 20 “Space of Infinite Dimensions (无级之维),” and Chapter 21 “Guess (猜测).” Unlike presentation of the story of the disabled C and his lover X in which the two characters share similar perspectives and feelings, the protagonists’ voices are evidently in conflict in the story of Artist Z and Teacher O. Thus this analysis will be developed from two different perspectives: those of Artist Z and Teacher O.

From Artist Z’s perspective, his philosophy of life, career decisions, and ultimate beliefs are all determined by his childhood experiences, especially a small but meaningful event which occurs on a winter evening when he is 9 years old. After visiting the high-class family of the girl whom he likes, little Z is deeply hurt by the disdainful words of
the girl’s mother, realizing that he belongs to an inferior class. This experience drives him to initiate a continuous pursuit of superiority through art and music as well as to produce a bitter intention of revenge. At last, Artist Z reaches his own definition of love – “love is conquest” – clearly shown in his relationship with his wife, Teacher O.

In the narration of the little Z’s defining event, Shi Tiesheng uses many symbols to express the superiority of the upper class in little Z’s eyes, such as the beautiful orange-colored building, the countless number of doors, the piano music in the background, and most importantly, the white feather of a huge bird in a porcelain vase that can be seen through the only open door. The white feather looks gorgeous and proud in the winter sunshine, which turns out to be a significant motif in most of Z’s later paintings. “At that moment, Z’s little figure is standing still in the glow of the setting sun, as if he were a devotee listening respectively to an oracle Z’s little身影在那一刻的夕阳的光照之中一动不动，仿佛聆听神谕的信徒 (56).” The white feather represents not only Z’s strong longing for beauty, superiority, and excellence, but also his self-abasement and even self-hatred for being an obscure person. This mixed feeling is strongly exaggerated by the beautiful but cold voice of the girl’s mother which Z happens to hear: “how could she take those street urchins… that little outsider… home… tell her, she shouldn’t bring them home any more… 她怎么把那些野孩子……那个外面的孩子……带了进来……告诉她，以后不准再带他们到家里来……(63)” His feeling is gradually changed to a strong hatred towards high-status people. Feeling rejected and insulted, Z spends most of his life drawing the picture of that cold winter afternoon, symbolized by a white feather. The symbolic motif of a beautiful but unapproachable white feather stands for his understanding of elegance and superiority as the purpose in life and as an ideal life.
Clearly knowing that it is impossible to attain high social status in his life, Z chooses art and music as his way to escape from mediocrity and to fulfill his spiritual aspiration, the only true value to him. It seems that “the elegant and solemn music has withstood that beautiful but cold voice 这些高雅庄重的音乐抵挡住那个美而且冷的声音(139),” and what also greatly relieves him is a famous saying by Beethoven: “there have been many princes, and there will be thousands more. But there is only one Beethoven 爵爷有的是，可贝多芬只有一个!(618)” In pursuing high status in an artistic and spiritual sense, Artist Z is mainly concerned with confirming the value of his life, to avoid being ignored again, and to make highly-privileged people adore a “street urchin;” at the bottom of Z’s heart, however, are his weak self-esteem, strong hatred, and severe selfishness, which are obvious in his conception of love and in his relationships with the women he loves.

Artist Z used to love another woman, M, before he got to know Teacher O. M is Z’s step-sister, but does not have any consanguinity with Z. She is a very loving and considerate girl, but more importantly, she is also the first person to discover Z’s talent for drawing and sincerely appreciates it so that “from the expression in M’s eyes, Z found his confidence and satisfaction as an artist for the first time Z 从 M 的目光中感到了一个画家最初的自信和满足(446).” In other words, Z finds his value and gains his dignity through M’s response. Yet as soon as the young Z realizes that his feelings towards M are no longer the love between sister and brother, this 17 year old young man falls into panic and anguish, not on account of any concerns for ethics or public opinion, but because he immediately understands that if he decides to live with M, he probably will remain a
lower class person for rest of his life. As a result, Z chooses to continue seeking superiority, hiding his true feeling.

When Artist Z, now in his thirties, meets Teacher O, who is originally from a high-ranking family, he is very impressed by O’s elegance and desperately falls in love with her. Z believes that O is the only woman who can inspire his artistic creations, while O also enjoys their “perfect love” through the adoration of Artist Z. However, a more probable explanation for Z’s love for O is that he consciously or subconsciously regards O as an adult substitute for the little girl of his sad childhood experience. He wants to be adored by the one he used to adore. At last, Teacher O herself understands that “whom Z really loves is the little girl in that beautiful building, not even the girl herself, but everything associated with the girl, as he says, adoration and conquest Z 爱的是那所美丽的房子里的女孩，甚至不是那女孩儿本人，而是由那女孩儿所能联想到的一切，正像他说的，是崇拜和征服 (699).”

According to Artist Z, love is conquest; love is adoration. Love is to conquer the most graceful object through spiritual superiority. There is no equality or morality in love, for people are only attracted to those who look appealing. In Artist Z’s experiences, we find that class origin is considerably influential on people’s conceptions of love as well as on human personalities; sometimes an indigent family background can result in an unbalanced outlook on life and a cynical attitude towards love.

If we look at the same story again from Teacher O’s perspective, we will probably get a better, more complete understanding of the fates of Teacher O and Artist Z. In Chapter 3 “Prelude of Death,” Teacher O commits suicide by swallowing bits of a beautiful but poisonous globefish; afterward the plot is gradually developed through
flashbacks of significant events in her life and through various guesses by different characters and the narrator on the reasons for O’s suicide. Teacher O is described as an uncompromising, childlike woman who is never willing to give up her dream of pure, true love. In other words, love is the ultimate purpose of Teacher O’s life.

Three men – WR, her ex-husband, and Artist Z – successively emerge in Teacher O’s life. WR, a bold, honest, and diligent country boy, is O’s close friend when they are very young. Although they love one another deeply, WR and O have to separate; WR is exiled to the frontier as a result of his bold challenge to government authority.

After twelve years of waiting, Teacher O happens to witness the wedding of the released WR and another woman. Desperately, O marries a kindhearted man, even though she does not love him. Their marriage remains untroubled until one day Teacher O meets Artist Z.

“Z belongs to the exact type of man whom O has dreamed about from her early youth: coming from a poor family, having gone through tough experiences, being diligent and thrifty, standing aloof from worldly concerns, and attaching importance to spirit rather than wealth… Z, 正是 O 从少女时代就幻想着的那种男人。家境贫寒、经历坎坷、勤奋简朴不入俗流、轻物利、重精神……(593)” In fact, Artist Z’s personalities and experiences are very similar to young WR’s; in other words; Z can be considered a mature substitute for young WR and the unfulfilled dream of O’s early life.

Teacher O finds that she can not endure the love-free marriage with her kind yet mediocre ex-husband; therefore she divorces her ex-husband and marries the artistically gifted Z. Despite Z’s narrow-mindness and cynicism, the new married O believes that their love and relationship are perfect. Z’s younger brother remarks, “It’s hard for others
to imagine how much O used to adore my elder brother... simply... simply like a believer worships God 别人很难想象 O 曾经对我哥有多崇拜，简直……简直就像信徒对上帝 (593).”

Ironically, while Artist Z, who is from a lower class family, strives for conquest and superiority of love, Teacher O, who is from an upper class family, seeks purity and equality in love. Z and O’s opposing positions are clearly seen in their argument about superiority, ultimate value, equality, and love in Chapter 19 “Differential.” Disagreeing with Artist Z, Teacher O believes that there are several ultimate values in people’s lives, or the ultimate meanings of and reasons for their existence, such as equality and love. From her point of view, the disabled C’s inquiry has been answered: each person is equal in love. Teacher O regards love as a pure and priceless treasure, which is equally given to each person, even if the object of love is not lovely in appearance and character.

On the other hand, O’s idealistic view on love is harshly damaged by Z’s response: “as for love, it is even more impossible to be equal. An obvious fact is that if you can equally love each person, why did you leave your ex-husband and fall in love with me? 至于爱嘛，就更不可能是平等的，最明显的一个事实——如果你能平等地爱每一个人，你为什么偏要离开你的前夫，而爱上我? (642)” Silently, Teacher O feels deeply hurt, not only because of the bitterness behind Z’s condemnation, but also owing to her realization of a big contradiction that she is actually practicing an unequally adoring love while firmly advocating the equality of love. Thus she falls into a helpless and confused state where she does not see any hope of making her dream and practice consistent.

Regardless of the opposing positions of Artist Z and Teacher O, there is a common point in both of their pursuits, that is, to seek a certain goal other than a real person.
Teacher O is definitely right when she points out that her husband does not love anyone except for his conception of love – adoration and conquest – and that the total significance of her in Artist Z’s life is to be an elegant stimulus of conquest. However, Teacher O remains unaware of the fact that what she faithfully loves is not her spouse either, but her perfect dream, the love of love. More precisely, what Teacher O loves is love and being in love.

By seeking pure passion, Teacher O gets enthusiastic about the type of resolute and diligent men who come from miserable families, contrary to her background, and also involves herself with the experiences associated with suffering, which to some extent stimulates the sense of being in love in her heart. Her ardent pursuit of pure passionate love itself sheds light on some of her puzzling acts, such as divorcing her ex-husband even before knowing whether Artist Z also loves her and later on committing suicide in the presence of Artist Z although his feeling towards her remains the same as before etc.

Indeed, the more she suffers for the sake of passionate love, the more fulfilled she gets. Eventually she sacrifices her own life on the altar of love so that the fulfillment of her dream, the love of love, can be sealed forever by death. When French philosopher and critic Denis de Rougemont analyzes *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult*, a well-known European myth, he incisively demonstrates that “Tristan does not love Iseult in her reality but to the extent that she revives in him the delightful cautery of desire. Passionate love tends to grow like the exaltation of a kind of narcissism . . . for he believes that the intense and devouring flame of passion would make him devine”⁵, which can also be applied for the real motivations of Artist Z and his wife Teacher O.
Although there are over eight different conjectures on the reason for Teacher O's death in Chapter 21 "Guess", in my opinion, two of them are most likely: Teacher O may be disillusioned with the truth of Z's inner life and possibly also with the irremediable contradiction between her own ideal of love and her practice of love. Nevertheless, apart from these two possibilities, a main reason for her death could be reside in the fact that she mixes up conditional love and unconditional love together by putting a perfect hope on an imperfect person and on the relationship with him as well as by pushing herself to practice out her perfect dream of love, resulting in a perplexing suicide. Eventually, as Teacher O wishes, the triumphal death, otherwise miserable in the eyes of regular people, has sealed the perfect passionate love which she had constantly sought throughout her life. There is no more class origin differential, no more unfulfilled love, no more fatal contradiction, and no more unequalness or imperfection in her pure love.

In summary, the story of Artist Z and Teacher O enables the reader to comprehend how much class origin and childhood experience influence people's adult personalities, relationships, and the conceptions of love. The reader is also greatly impressed by the sad ending of Teacher O, which is essentially caused by mixing up conditional imperfect love and unconditional perfect love.

Story II: The story of Director N and Doctor F is depicted in two chapters: Chapter 5 "Lover (恋人)" and Chapter 11 "White Poplar (白杨树)." N and F get to know each other when they are very young and date for a long time. However, after N's father is labelled a Rightist because of a fairy tale he published in 1957, F and N surrender to political pressure and give up their relationship so that F's future will not be damaged by the
political problems of his girlfriend's family. Afterwards, both of them get married to people they do not love.

On the evening of their separation, the courageous young N inquires, “can class origin cause love to a mistake? (84)”, a question that parallels disabled C’s: “can disability cause love to a mistake? (521)” As victims of external pressures, both Director N and disabled C feel that it is not fair for them to take responsibility for their uncontrollable fates; at the same time, however, they cannot find a way out of their helpless situations. N and C further supplements their question by saying that, “I don’t refer to reality, but to logic. Reality, let it go! I simply want to seek confirmation 我不是指现实，我是指逻辑，现实随它去吧我只是想求证...(84)” What Director N truly cares about is whether or not love is able to exist for itself, even if only in an ideal form?

Very courageous, dedicated, and determined, N repeatedly insists that she is not fearful of political pressure or any other obstacle. In the meantime, she places the same hope on F. “As long as you are also not fearful, N says, as long as you insist... I believe that we haven’t made a mistake. If we truly love one another, N says, we shouldn’t be in fear of anything 只要你也不怕，N 说，只要你坚持，我相信我们没什么错儿，如果 我们是真心相爱，N 说我们就什么都不用怕...” (83)

Facing her perseverance, young F can hardly do anything more than remain silent, clearly revealing the cowardly aspect of his personality. He has to make a difficult choice between his lover and his parents, since his parents try to coerce him to break up with the Rightist’s daughter on the pretext that if F does not obey their command his future will be completely ruined and his parents will suffer heart-attacks. Due to the threats and
implorations from his parents, F eventually compromises; he leaves N without a word. From then, Doctor F's life is split into two completely separate parts: days and nights, or reality and dreams. During the day, he is a reticent, responsible, and dull doctor who concentrates only on medical science, but during the night, he is thoroughly immersed in his brilliant dreams filled with unforgettable memories of his lost love:

If God does not permit a person to completely forget his dreams, hopefully He will allow his dreams to remain in the most beautiful place, and then put a period there, or an ellipsis. This most beautiful place, Doctor F believes, is not necessarily the most pleasant place; instead, it could be the most painful or the most grievous place, the place of the greatest suffering.

Twenty years later, however, things have changed dramatically. While the divorced Director N is making an experimental movie in which a loving young couple lose one another in a crowd and anxiously look for each other, Doctor F finally wakes up from his still and spiritless dream-like reality and decides to look for his former lover, Director N, in order to give final answer to her question: beyond reality, love is still true... It takes N
and F over twenty years to draw this conclusion in which the true value of love is acknowledged. Unfortunately, Director N and Doctor F are not able to achieve the value of love in this real world; instead, they have no choice but to cherish it in dreams, as Doctor F does, or put it into art, as Director N does. Hence both their lives and their love are split into two separate parts, caused by external pressures, in terms of reality and ideality.

To conclude, in the story of Director N and Doctor F, the reader witnesses one of the limitations of love, or more accurately, how external factors such as ideology, class origin, and family pressure distort and even destroy an ideally “pure” love, with the result that this kind of “pure” love can only exist in people’s dreams or certain forms of art. Although the characters are willing to acknowledge the precious values of love, in fact, however, they lack the capacity to put their ideal love into practice.

Morality and Love

Shi Tiesheng raises a rather tricky moral dilemma in the story of Z’s uncle and his lover, the Betrayer (女叛徒), which covers Chapter 13 “I Sunflower Woods （葵林故事上）” and Chapter 16 “II Sunflower Woods （葵林故事下）.” In this story, betrayal serves as a point of entry for the issues of morality and love.

As a young revolutionary, Z’s uncle imparts some Communist ideas to his lover and draws her into their secret activities. Afterwards, however, when they encounter some danger, Z’s uncle escapes capture himself, while his girlfriend, driven by her passionate love, voluntarily distracts the pursuers to help Z’s uncle escape. As a result, she is
captured by the enemy, and later reveals some secrets under torture. As a betrayer she has to suffer ignominiously for the rest of her life, while Z’s uncle becomes a revolutionary hero after the Communists’ victory. Here a tricky question is raised: she betrays their revolution, while he betrays their love. Who is the real betrayer?

The Betrayer acts like a courageous warrior when she is motivated by revolutionary romanticism and a dedicated love, earnestly devoting herself to ensure the security of Z’s uncle without considering her own forthcoming fate. However, she is destined to face the dilemma of either dying nobly or living with shame. If she were shot at that point, she would become a heroine. But fate leads her onto a more bumpy road where she encounters some difficulties even tougher than death. After various cruel persecutions, to coerce her into revealing secrets about her comrades, the enemy even captures and tortures her mother and sister so that the only alternative to abandoning her family members’ lives is to turn in her comrades. Facing such a difficult moral dilemma, she is not able to logically weigh the suffering of her mother, sister, and herself against the interests of her comrades. In this case, it seems that the only reasonable choice for her is to commit suicide, leaving this moral dilemma behind, but the enemy does not allow her to escape from the predicament in such a fashion. Whatever her choice is, in fact, she has already been deprived of the right to be a normal person; in other words, she has to choose between being a shameful betrayer or suffering continuous torture that probably would have led to a final betrayal:

Even though she is not going to be killed by the enemy or by her “comrades,” she is already dead. In the future, she will exist only as
a betrayer, a wicked and shameful symbol, and a background to provide a contrast to heroes and conquerors. To her, the future is nothing but a long period awaiting death.

即使她不被敌人杀死，也不被“自己人”除掉，她也已经死了，在未来的时间里她只是一个叛徒，一个可憎可恶可耻的符号，一种使英雄豪杰志士仁人得以显现的背景比照。未来的时间对于她，只是一场漫长的弥留了。(386)

Subsequently, Shi Tiesheng further examines the deep motivation of people’s common hatred of betrayers, discovering that the real reason is not the betrayers’ abandonment of previous beliefs, but the possibility that the revealed secrets would bring disaster or the same moral dilemma to others. Actually, very few people are confident of being faithful and unyielding under merciless torture, which makes them afraid that they might face the same situation as the Betrayer. Under people’s “righteous anger,” Shi Tiesheng further explores the common features of human cowardice and weakness.

She Tiesheng also spends many words in describing various visible or invisible punishments that the Betrayer receives from surrounding people, and even from herself. To her, the most hurtful punishment is not flogging, but the harsh discrimination and total isolation from her own comrades and relatives. She is labelled as a betrayer and an outcast who is deprived of most basic rights of a normal life. In the story of C and X discussed above, the disabled C is deprived of a normal love by public opinion and customary ideas only because of his disability; similarly, here the Betrayer too is exiled
by the same pressures because of her betrayal. Shi Tiesheng summarizes several types of punishments she receives:

The crudest punishment is not from beasts, but from human beings. Real discrimination is not from the enemy, but from relatives. Loneliness is not what you feel when you are drifting about alone in the bleak vast ocean, but what you feel when you are in a dense crowd, at the beginning of a beautiful life, finding that there is no room for you. This is probably not the crudest punishment. The crudest punishment is that even though you feel remorseful, everything is unchangeable, like time that cannot be reversed. The punishment that makes a coward who fears death surrender is not the crudest; the punishment that causes a coward who fears death to seek death is the crudest one.

最残酷的惩罚，不是来自野兽而是来自人。歧视不是来自敌人，而是来自亲人。孤独，不是在空茫而寒冷的大海上只身漂流，而是在人群密聚的地方，在美好生活展开的地方——没有你的位置。也许这仍然不是最残酷的惩罚，最残酷的惩罚是：悔恨，但已不能改变（就像时间不可逆转）。使一个怕死的人屈服的惩罚不是最残酷的惩罚，使一个怕死的人想去寻死的惩罚才是最残酷的惩罚。(397)
When the released Betrayer finally realizes that even if Z’s uncle returned back in triumph, he would not marry a woman who betrays their revolution, she is so desperate that she looks for poisonous mushrooms to commit suicide. At the very moment that she is released from custody, she is deprived of the right to love as a normal woman, which is crueler than punishment by death. However, she is rescued by an ordinary man who secretly admires her for quite a long time. With a broken heart, she marries this man, which is her second betrayal: betraying love one year after betraying the revolution.

Besides her punishment from others, the Betrayer herself also indirectly believes in torture, believing that she is a sinner and deserves harsh punishment. After her husband dies and her children leave, she lives a lonely life yet apologetically smiles at anyone who derides or curses her. She tries to atone for her betrayal by silently accepting all kinds of punishments. “She cannot seek death; she understands that she should not commit suicide, for only enduring endless discrimination and loneliness while alive can express her sincere desire for atonement. 她不能去死，她知道她不应该去死，活着承受这不尽的歧视和孤独，才是她赎罪的诚心(472)”.

Ironically, forty years later, when the Betrayer constantly writes on sunflower leaves that “I am grievously sinful, but I never doubt my previous beliefs 我罪孽深重，但从未怀疑当初的信仰(473),” Z’s uncle is enjoying the privileged comfortable life of a senior Communist cadre, while his wife has unscrupulously abandoned their Communist beliefs and is running a prosperous Chinese restaurant in the United States.

The Betrayer betrays their revolution, while Z’s uncle betrays their love. Who is the real betrayer? In Chapter 16 “II Sunflower Woods” there is an investigation and an explanation between the narrator and Z’s uncle. The “moral righteousness” of Z’s uncle
is based on the excuse that he has to escape in order to protect the key secrets and the cadres of Communist revolution; this is sharply challenged by several of the narrator’s comments. “You convert her to your beliefs and then you escape on your own, leaving her alone to face the two alternatives provided by the enemy 你把她领进了那个信仰，然后你跑了，让她独自去面对敌人给她的两种选择 (474).” “Making use of the young girl’s innocence and passion, making use of her love towards you, you alone escape from the dangers 你借助那个少女的单纯和激情，借助她对你的爱，自己跑掉了 (477).” “Only because you run faster than she does, or she ‘matures’ slower than you do 那只是因为你比她跑得快，或者只是她比你‘成熟’得晚 (481).” Through a series of sharp inquiries by the narrator, the moral weakness of Z’s uncle is exposed to the readers, which enable us to rethink the issues of genuine morality and unacknowledged immorality.

Despite his moral cowardice hiding behind superficial righteousness, Z’s uncle’s deep feelings toward the Betrayer are unforgettable. Consequently, he returns to their hometown to look for her three times. The first time, he discovers that she is the pregnant new wife of another man, then withdraws without a word. Forty years later, cherishing the same dream, Z’s uncle starts his search again, meets the widowed Betrayer in the same sunflower wood where they parted, and spends a couple of weeks with her there. Yet in the end, the Betrayer successfully persuades Z’s uncle to leave, for she insists that she is not worthy of loving him and does not want to burden him. At the end of the story, however, Z’s uncle decides to go back to their hometown and spend the rest of his life with his lover, even though his wife is still living in the United States. Their story can be regarded as a real version of Director N’s experimental movie: although the two
characters suffer a great deal both physically and mentally during a long period of time, they eventually find each other and enjoy a delayed but passionate love.

To conclude, in the love story of Z’s uncle and the Betrayer, Shi Tiesheng reexamines several moral issues of betrayal, discrimination, belief and atonement, etc., and discovers a common hypocrisy and a hidden weakness behind people’s “righteous anger” toward betrayers. He further affirms the betrayers’ basic desire to seek survival, which is usually ignored by other people.

In the meanwhile, Shi Tiesheng also explores in depth the love at the bottom of Z’s uncle’s heart, in which the author sees hope for stopping the cruel circle of punishment and hatred in this world and in asserting the existence of the values of those exiled to another world.

On the other hand, the story of Z’s uncle and the Betrayer also proves that moral values and the values of love are not always consistent. The purpose of love between two lovers is to fulfil a longing for each other at all costs, while moral virtue is to practice rightness, faithfulness, or honesty according to a certain duty, obligation, or principle. In many cases, the values of morality and of love are inevitably in conflict, thus leaving people some difficult dilemmas like the ones that Z’s uncle and the Betrayer once faced.

**Devotion and Love**

The story of Poet L and his lover deals with the nature, characteristics, and limitations of love through a series of reflections on devotion in Chapter 9 “The Wall of
Summer (夏天的墙),” Chapter 12 “Desire (欲望),” and Chapter 18 “Solitude and Loneliness (孤单与孤独).”

From the description of L’s childhood in Chapter 9 “The Wall of Summer,” the reader may be impressed by the little Baoyu⁶-like L’s sincere and pure admiration toward all of the girls around him, who constitute the spiritual pillar in his world, and who make his life more cheerful and bright. As he grows up, young L develops a desire for carnal pleasure with women, but still hopes that he will continue enjoying unconditional love with the tender, lovely women, in which nothing cheerful would be changed even if these women can see L’s intentions, both innocent and vulgar.

Poet L is possessed by two different desires: longing to be honest and longing for women, which lead to three stages of pursuing honesty and love in his life. In the first stage, L seeks honestly and he frankly confesses his strong interest in other women to his lover in the hope that she can fully understand and forgive him. However, what deeply frustrates him is that his lover decides to leave him because she believes that only devotion can verify the value of love and a lover, although Poet L had never been unfaithful in reality so far. This proves that Poet L is not able to achieve his love while insisting on being honest and frank about his real desires for women. Thus, this inflicted and perplexed poet can not help but ask a series of questions about love: Is it possible to love more than one lover equally? Is devotion necessary in courtship? If love is a key that promises to resolve all human problems, why not share this beautiful thing with more partners? Finally, holding up a map of the country, Poet L sets out to seek his former lover and lost love.
In the second stage, L pursues his longing for women, gives up his devotion, and dates more than ten women simultaneously. This results in L painfully involving himself in endless schemes of deceit and trickery in order to continue to date each woman but keep his relationships a secret from each lover. To fulfill his desire for women, Poet L has to surrender his honesty. Such an experience convinces him that it is devotion and exclusiveness that characterizes love in courtship and that it is impossible for him to maintain his many lovers while never being guilty of trading his honesty.

In the third stage, Poet L abandons both honesty and love, indulging himself in a number of sexual relationships with various undistinguished and unfamiliar women as he looks for his former lover. Poet L ceases his pursuit of honesty and spiritual love, but starts to enjoy the relaxed feelings of "pure sex," until one day, in a dream, he meets his lover again but cannot find a unique form of sex to express his unique love for her.

Despite his various efforts to overcome the limitations of love, Poet L finally realizes that devotion is indispensable to maintain a successful courtship and that equally sharing love with more than one lover simultaneously is but a Utopian dream. In fact, this dream is not only impractical, but also self-centered. Indeed, its fulfillment will definitely deprive L's lovers of their equalities by reducing them to the tools of L's "equal love" thus emptying them of their personalities. A true mutual love brings about the equality of both sides instead of insisting on one's "equality" at the cost of the others'. The Holy Bible tells us, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." (Matthew 7:12). This Golden Rule also has a counterpart in Confucian Analects, one of the most influential Chinese Classics, "Not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself 己所不欲，勿施于人." Now that Poet L himself cannot accept the
possibility that his lovers might regard him merely as one of their lovers, it is by no mean
equal to apply a differential principle to his lovers by depriving them of their uniqueness.
In Poet L’s confused inquiry and his lover’s sudden departure, what we find are
unfortunately self-seeking and self-protection instead of mutual trust and care of the other.
Poet L eventually admits that he is not able to fulfill his longing to be honest and his
carnal desire at the same time.

Shi Tiesheng continues to answer the disabled C’s question on the definition of love
with Poet L’s story. In Chapter 18 “Solitude and Loneliness,” Shi identifies the real
source of love as the fated loneliness of human beings: “from birth, people are fated to
live among other people in a populous world, yet are mutually unable to communicate
properly: this means loneliness. He regards loneliness as a fundamental predicament of mankind
which can only be healed by love. In this sense, Shi Tiesheng expresses his key
understanding of love through the words of the disabled C: “Nothing can prove love; love
is a proof of loneliness. Therefore the existence of love is based on the human need to relieve loneliness.

In addition, Poet L gives a few positive descriptions of love: Love is a “mutual
opening and complete unfolding” between two hearts (338).
“Love cannot be forced; love is freedom. Love does not need hiding; love is peace. Love
is not勉强的，爱情是自由。爱情是不要遮掩的，爱情是平安(546).” Loneliness
drives people to seek a thoroughly proper communication where there is no need to
pretend to obtain false security.
Furthermore, love is also a confirmation of the value in one’s existence. People get a great sense of fulfillment knowing that they are unique and precious in the eyes of their spouses or lovers, which is shown in their various expressions of devotion. Poet L’s lover leaves because Poet L does not make this kind of confirmation, not necessarily due to jealousy of any particular woman. An example of her uncertainty about her own values is when she ponders: “What is the difference between a number of other women and me? (340)” “Only because of the fact that I am your sexual reality, while they are your sexual illusion, right? (341)” What she really cares about is that “I am a fortuitous matter in your life, while a woman is inevitable to you? (341)” What she really cares about is that “I am a fortuitous matter in your life, while a woman is inevitable to you?” which displays her struggle for her uniqueness and identity among billions of people.

If love is a therapy for people’s fated loneliness, a shelter for open communication between individual hearts, and a confirmation of the life values of each person, why does it have so many limitations which hinder people from freely enjoying it? In the process of presenting the story of Poet L and his lover, the narrator also ponders:

What is devoted (loyal, consistent) love? If it is prevailing, inborn, and natural, why do human beings praise it? If our various fantasies (or desires) are unfeigned and imperishable, why do human beings advocate devoted love? If love is a beautiful feeling, why should it exist only between two people?
According to Shi Tiesheng's explanation of the relationship between fated loneliness and healing love, everybody's loneliness is so unique that it can hardly be understood by others, and loneliness definitely requires an equally unique love to be a possible healer. Any love lacking in distinctive features is doomed to failure, because it denies the unique values of different individuals and thus has nothing to do with the fate of ultimate loneliness. Zhou Guoping, a modern Chinese philosopher and writer, comments on this issue in his literary critique "Notes on Notes on Abstract Talks" that:

Loneliness and the search for love are the condensation of a person's serious sense of fate, while the multilateral love from a lover reduces this sense of fate, reducing a solemn life tragedy to a frivolous social comedy. Similarly, if a person sincerely seeks to end loneliness, whom he seeks must be one person rather than many. It is true that he might like or even be infatuated by more than one woman; however, in this case, his loneliness does not truly come on stage, or
more accurately, his loneliness is hidden from view, watching its owner pretending. Only when he believes that he has found the right person, to whom he can trustfully hand over his loneliness, is he really in love with someone.

孤独和爱情的寻求原本凝聚了一个人的沉重的命运之感，来自对方的多向的爱情则是对此命运之感的蔑视，把本质上的人生悲剧化作了轻浮的社会喜剧。与此同理，一个人倘若真正是要为自己的孤独寻找守护者，他所要寻找的必是一个而非多个守护者。他诚然可能喜欢甚至迷恋不止一个异性，但是，在此场合，他的孤独并不真正出场，毋宁说是隐藏了起来，躲在深处旁观着它的主人逢场作戏。唯有当他相信自己找到了一个人，他能够信任地把自己的孤独交付那人守护之时，他才是真正地在爱。9

To summarize, in the story of Poet L and his lover, Shi Tiesheng gives a metaphysical explanation of the necessity of devotion in courtship by denoting the corresponding relationship between distinctive love and the unique loneliness in certain individuals’ fates. Because multilateral love reduces the solemnity of individual loneliness and denies the unique values that exist between lovers, it cannot work well in a courtship. Accordingly, as a crucial form of expressing love, sex also needs to be loyal
and consistent with moral integrity, so that people will not lose the distinctive expression of the special meanings of love.

Although it is well-acknowledged that love has far more connotations than romantic love suggests, there is no sufficient evidence in *Notes on the Abstract Talks* that can prove that Shi Tiesheng's concerns go beyond romantic love. Indeed, Shi Tiesheng idealizes romantic love so greatly in his novel that the impression the readers acquire is really an angelic passionate love. In the meanwhile, all the imperfect love stories belong to the impure reality which results from the descending of perfect love to the world.

However, I doubt whether there is necessarily a connection between people's ultimate loneliness and their romantic love. Can people's ultimate loneliness be thoroughly healed by this kind of angelic romantic love, a specific successful relationship, or a certain loving spouse? Will people still feel the need of further seeking something beyond their romantic love? I shall display some other types of love and their significance in human life later in this thesis, hoping that a whole picture of love can be restructured and discussed from a Christian point of view.
Chapter Two: Characteristics of Love in *Notes on Abstract Talks*

What is love? This is a question raised at the very beginning of *Notes on Abstract Talks*; namely, the story of the disabled C and his lover X. Through the whole book, different characters put forward different understandings of love. Artist Z believes that love is conquest and adoration through pursuing spiritual superiority. T’s father points out that love is an expression of our weakness by exposing our dependence on other people, on freedom, and on peace. Director N says that to love is to seek a free-willed commitment in an unfamiliar crowd. Teacher O who cannot give a positive definition of love tries to distinguish love from other things: love is not law; love is not conscience; love is not merely physical pleasure; love is not merely compassion either. The disabled C claims that nothing can prove love, while love is the proof of loneliness. Their warm discussion about love also reminds the readers of the theme song from the Bette Midler’s film *The Rose* (1979). There is a beautiful hope of love, as a seed of rose, deeply hidden beneath snow and waiting for the spring sunshine, regardless of what others will say:

Some say love, it is a river that drowns the tender reed.

Some say love, it is a razor that leaves your soul to bleed.

Some say love, it is a hunger, an endless aching need.

I say love, it is a flower, and you it’s only seed.

...  

When the night has been too lonely, and the road has been too long,

And you think that love is only for the lucky and the strong,
Just remember in the winter far beneath the bitter snows,
Lies the seed that with the sun's love in the spring becomes The Rose.

Though he leans towards the disabled C’s point of view, Shi Tiesheng himself does not offer a very clear definition of love. What he has done is that he has displayed a few features of love by describing the various fates of his different protagonists and by using such symbols as a white bird and a white feather to demonstrate the natures of ideal or abnormal love indirectly. The white bird appears over and over again whenever certain characters start to recognize spiritual or sexual longings for each other. In Chapter 25 “The White Bird (白色鸟),” for example, an illustrative paragraph talks about young WR and O’s first recognition of the strange subtle feeling between them:

The lengthy days remind me of the white bird that flew in Poet L’s sky that summer. It flew very high, very slowly, flapping its wings unrestrainedly and rhythmically, but seemed motionless in the vast blue sky. Surprised, WR and O stand together, looking up to the bird. It seemed to be flying there all along, flying beyond time, very high, very slowly, white and brilliant, and flapping its wings leisurely.

那漫长的时日使我想起，诗人 L 在初夏的天空里见过的那只白色的鸟，飞得很高，飞得很慢，翅膀扇动得潇洒且富节奏，但在广阔无垠的蓝天里仿佛并不移动。WR 和 O 站在惊讶里，一同仰望
This elegant white bird, which is flying beyond time and man-made obstacles, symbolizes perfect love in the author's eyes and suggests all kinds of associated senses of this kind of perfect love: free, relaxed, comfortable, pure, brilliant, elegant, and eternal. Furthermore, Shi Tiesheng also repeatedly associates the beautiful white bird with young girls' naked bodies throughout the whole book, which suggests that this kind of love has a strong connection of sex.

Like the symbol of the white bird, the white feather in Artist Z's paintings also has a symbolical meaning. Artist Z's younger brother HJ comments on Z's fate that:

Yes, humiliation and revenge. It is revenge that bites Z's heart, just like the feather that Z always draws. HJ says that the feather drops from a huge bird that is shot by hunters. The innocent bird used to fly freely towards the South, towards the warmth. But with a gunshot, a white feather loses its heat, floating down into darkness and coldness. Yet the feather is so unwilling to surrender to its fate that every tiny hair on it is still struggling...

是呀，屈辱和雪耻，是雪耻这两个字把 Z 的心咬伤了，就像 Z 总在画的那根羽毛一样。HJ 说：那是一只被猎人打伤的大鸟掉落的羽毛，那自由的鸟曾经纯洁地飞着，想要飞向南方，飞向温暖，
If the elegant white bird stands for integrated love, the white feather that drops from the injured bird implies a distorted love that is caused by human hatred and discrimination. Integrated love is warm and free and with healing power, while distorted love is bitter, cold, and struggling, though equally pure and beautiful, just like the deep feelings hidden in Artist Z’s heart.

In a word, Shi Tiesheng does not answer the question “what is love?” directly, but gives a couple of symbols that display a few key characteristics of the ideal love according to his understanding. This method is considerably effective and avoids possible distortion or limitation of a fixed definition, especially when the item is really not easily defined or classified.

Despite Shi Tiesheng’s efforts to discover a perfect love, however, the reader may find that what appears in many relationships in this novel is indeed a conditional love. This kind of love is not only heavily influenced by external factors such as public opinion (story of C and X), political pressure (story of N and F), and class origin (story of Z), but also determined by personal qualification, namely, how lovable the object of love is (story of Z and T).

Moreover, conditional love is not always consistent with moral goodness. Sometimes people seek love at the cost of morality and conscience, while in other cases, people intentionally use love to achieve certain moral purposes (story of Z’s uncle and his lover).
In addition, conditional love has an obvious quality of possession or exclusiveness (story of L and his lover). People who fall in love normally require their partners to be loyal and do not allow other people to share the same love and lovers, with possible reactions of jealousy or grief. Accordingly, unique love also demands exclusive sex as its distinctive expression.

After summarizing several characteristics of love based on a close reading of Notes on Abstract Talks, we shall further examine Shi Tiesheng's general ideas on love. In his thinking and writing, Shi Tiesheng seldom reflects on the issue of love separately; instead, his reflections on love are always tied to his concern for human fates, or more accurately, with his concerns for the ultimate predicament of the whole of mankind. He believes that there are three primary trials, or inherently restricted situations, which people cannot avoid or go beyond due to their innate limitations. In the preface of The Strings of Life, Shi Tiesheng says:

From birth, people are fated to live among other people in a populous world, yet are mutually unable to communicate properly: this means loneliness. From birth people have desires, yet the ability to realize their desires forever lags behind their capacity to desire: this means frustration. From birth people have wished not to die, yet all their life is a march toward death: this means fear.
Although suffering may be an occasional matter for certain individuals, it is a necessary element for human life as a whole from a perspective of universal order. Consequently, Shi Tiesheng starts to pursue a promising ultimate therapy that may be able to deliver people from the loneliness produced by their inability to communicate, the frustration caused by the gap between desire and capacity, and the fear brought on by the anticipation of death.

Shi Tiesheng points out that the healers could be fine art, music, literature, philosophy, etc., however, all these options are restricted only to a limited numbers of people who have certain gifts or are well educated. As to most ordinary people, nothing could serve as a hopeful healer of people’s primary sufferings better than love, which is priceless yet ordinary among human hearts. Therefore, love is regarded as a beautiful hope and an ultimate salvation, which has the capacity of rescuing human beings from their three fated tragedies, especially the first one, loneliness.

From his personal experiences as a paralyzed man confined to a wheelchair for thirty years, Shi Tiesheng has gained a strong interest in the issue of fate, trying to figure out the true meaning of life and the hidden reasons for human suffering. He himself is inclined toward the disabled C’s understanding of the relationship between loneliness and
love and also to his statement on the secret of life. In *Bing Xi Sui Bi 病麗隨筆*, one of his collective works of informal essays published in 2002, Shi Tiesheng writes:

The eternal power of love comes from the ever-present separateness among human beings. The constant intensity of love is due to the fact that every subject is lonely. Human beings not only happen to be cast into this world, but also are cast separately (49). Feeling lonely, people desire to mutually open their lives to each other – this is the source of endless love (50).

爱之永恒的能量，在于人之间永恒的隔膜。爱之永远的激越，由于每一个“我”都是孤独，人不仅是被抛到这个世界上来的，而且是一个个分开着被抛来的 (49)。孤独于是渴望着相互敞开——这便是爱之不断的根源 (50)。

I think the two most essential secret codes of human beings written by God are disability and love (69). Both hell and heaven exist on earth; that is, disability and love, or original sin and salvation (70).

我想，上帝为人性写下的最本质的两条密码是：残疾与爱情 (69)。
地狱和天堂都在人间，即残疾与爱情，即原罪与拯救 (70)。
According to these statements, it is clear that Shi Tiesheng's reflection on love as a possible salvation is based on the premise that loneliness is a given fated situation of all of mankind. In his vocabulary, love is a motivational power that enables people to rebuild unity from fragmented relationships and to break the invisible obstacles among human hearts. Disability or Shi's "original sin" is our inevitable limitations and it is like hell, while love or Shi's "salvation" is our earthly hopes and it is like heaven.

Although deeply impressed by Shi Tiesheng's beautiful idealistic images, which are built up on the desolate ruin of human predicament, I personally wonder whether this kind of conditional love, which can be affected or even changed by external forces, is able to take responsibility as an ultimate love that is supposed to amount to salvation. I think that Shi Tiesheng somehow idealizes this kind of conditional love and exalts romantic love to a divine position. It is unquestionable to comprehend his ideal romantic love from a lyric or aesthetic perspective. However, in a real world, this love is not likely to function effectively in deliverance and salvation because of its fundamental limitations of being an ultimate love, which will be further analyzed later in Chapter Five. Although it is hard to find out in Notes on Abstract Talks other kinds of love besides this conditional romantic love, there are still some other types, such as the love of family, the love of friends, and the love of God, which might functionally supplement this one and enable us to achieve an integrated and balanced experience.
Chapter Three: Characteristics of “God” in Notes on Abstract Talks

In Shi Tiesheng’s novel Notes on Abstract Talks, the word “God” is used many times. Unlike the Christian God, here God is described as an apathetic and merciless drama director, who still remains omniscient and omnipotent. The reason for Shi Tiesheng’s interest in God, as I understand it, is that he regards God as the designer of fate, and fate plays a central role in his philosophy. Like the “God” in his mind, Shi Tiesheng himself enjoys imagining the possibilities of his characters’ various fates and even mixes and exchanges their fates.

Moreover, Shi Tiesheng uses elaborate writing techniques to demonstrate his curiosity about issues of fate and to develop his critical analyses of fate. For example, all the characters’ names are symbolized by English initial letters, such as O, L, F, etc., which means that, like everything, their personal fates are universal and interchangeable. Shi Tiesheng also uses “the door” as a metaphor that represents fate, where every open or closed door stands for any possible outcome. Some of his writing techniques will be discussed in this section, namely the characters’ symbolic names, the characters’ open and interchangeable fates, and the door as a metaphor.

The general purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the position of fate as a central point in Shi Tiesheng’s writing and thinking by distinguishing his own conception of God and the understanding of God in Protestant Christianity. In fact, Shi Tiesheng’s deep concern for fate is closely related to the theme of love, since the whole novel deals with how people better understand their fates through love.

Before we start to analyze the characteristics of God in Notes on Abstract Talks, it
would be helpful to briefly examine some biblical quotations on this matter. In the Old Testament, God personally reveals his basic attributes to Moses: “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:6, 7)

Unlike the merciful and righteous God in Christianity who shares an intimate relationship with His chosen people, the God in this novel is described as a drama director who uses his sovereign will to please himself and to create various human comedies in this world. Although we powerless human beings might endure our different fated tragedies painfully, to the director God, all of these are part of his extemporaneous game. Facing the unforeseeable and absurd sufferings, which continuously occurs in people’s daily lives, Shi Tiesheng admits that human beings cannot understand the hidden reasons with their limited rational minds, and therefore attribute the irrationality of life to God’s improvisation. For instance, when the narrator talks about the possibilities of O, WR, and Z’s overlapping fates, he mentions God’s will concerning these human fates:

Now he [Z] becomes closer to O. Not the distance of space but the distance of fate has changed. Although any hint of this change was not foreseen, their fates are about to merge onto one road all of a sudden. Only God can see it. Thanks to WR’s separation from O, the last obstacle between O’s and Z, which has been lasting for dozens
of years, is removed. God is always interested in playing tricks, which is the gist of life and the basis of life's great charm. All of your astonishment and perplexity, your pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy, your persistence and so-called complete understanding are inevitably tied up with this hobby of God.

From Shi Tiesheng's understanding, God has an unlimited capacity to design different possibilities and manage various plots in human fates: in other words, God is omniscient and omnipotent. Yet the principal purpose of God's performance is to amuse the Godhead. Albert Einstein had a famous remark: "God does not play dice with the universe," by which Einstein characterized his understanding of God who reveals Himself in the orderly harmony of what exists. On the contrary, Shi Tiesheng's God is exactly the One who plays dice with the universe. From this perspective, the nature of tragedy in human life is reduced and is even changed into comedy.
Shi Tiesheng suggests that human beings would be better off to accept the absurdity of reality as part of God's game rather than to struggle with God's plan. Therefore, we can see that Shi Tiesheng's two spontaneous intentions are intertwined. On the one hand, he himself never stops his careful pursuit of the meaning of life; on the other hand, he escapes his serious search once in a while, willingly accepting the pessimistic or optimistic truth of fate with hints of humor and tolerance.

In Shi Tiesheng's novel, besides having a playful attitude, God also acts as the Creator of evil in human nature. Shi's God is not only responsible for people's absurd suffering fates but also for their inborn evil nature. Unlike the Confucian (儒家) doctrine of the goodness of human nature (性善论), on which Mencius (孟子) based his belief that all people have the ability to do good and become saints, Shi Tiesheng thinks that God, the fate and personality designer, intentionally creates some innate evil people, such as the Terrible Child (可怕的孩子) in Chapter 6 “Birthday (生日),” who purposely makes “I” feel excluded by forbidding other kids from hanging about with “me”:

I keep firmly in mind a terrible child. I don’t understand up to now why all children fear him, flatter him, and faithfully obey him... He excludes whomever he does not get along well, and then all children would exclude whomever he excludes. Bad luck for the excluded guy! ... Now I realize that he has a talent in accurately feeling the strong or weak distinction of all children so that he is able to appropriately arrange and administer their different positions. What an impressive talent! He likes to carry out his talent by controlling
these children. But it is unfathomable and mysterious for a child to have such a talent. Sometimes I think with fear and trembling that the terrible gift of the Terrible Child must be a result of God’s design.

From an evil yet strong-minded child, the narrator witnesses a kind of “original sin” in human nature, which seemingly exists as a God-provided gift. Later in Notes on Abstract Talks, when Shi Tiesheng reflects on people’s cruel behavior and irrational hatred in the Class Struggle feverishly advocated by Mao Zedong during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, he further explores the issue of “original sin” by extending one Terrible Child to numerous terrible adults, who used a similar “talent” to classify, exclude, and punish people throughout China. In this way, Shi Tiesheng attributes the
instinctive sinful nature of human beings, which seems beyond rational explanation, to God’s will and His improvisation.

With regard to the source of evil, however, Christianity refuses to agree that God is the Creator of evil. It is believed by Christians that at the very beginning the whole creation by God was good, but sin entered human world later on as a result of man’s misused his free will. When Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan, who was originally created as an innocent angle but fell into sin later on because of his pride and rebellion, they sinned by eating the forbidden fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3: 1-6).

In Genesis, the first book of the Holy Bible, we are impressed by the fact that “a major refrain in ch.1 is the affirmation that what God creates is good (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The final declaration (v. 31), ‘And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good,’ stands out from the terse, calm language of the chapter. No evil was laid on the world by God’s hand.” At the climax of God’s creation, mankind was created in the image of God and was given the freedom for service and fellowship with the Creator. Soon after God created the entirely good and orderly world, nevertheless, “chs. 2-3 disclosed how humans become sinners and corrupt the created order by willful disobedience. As a consequence of their action, the world of human experience becomes fractured and broken, alienated and chaotic.”

We see the fall of man as an event that happens in both prehistory and universal history. The tale in Genesis concerns not only a first fall and first man but a universe fall and universal man... Man is not created a sinner but becomes a sinner through a tragic misuse of his freedom.” Therefore, original
sin is not created by God as part of His creation, but exists as a “spiritual contagion” which is “passed on through biological generation.”

Shi Tiesheng has a constant concern for fate, or more accurately, for the possibilities of different people’s different fates. He believes that every situation of human life is not only a fortuitous matter in the eyes of man, but also a necessary knot in the weaving pattern designed by God. Starting from the same knot, different people are led to different roads as a result of personalities, environments, and one-time decisions. In this sense, every meaningful knot stands for a birthday for a newborn fate.

Interestingly, Shi Tiesheng himself plays the same role as the God in his novel. He also enjoys exploring various possibilities in his characters and even mixes them up to create new characters. The implied author in Notes on Abstract Talks works as an omniscient narrator and a limited character as well, changing his roles from time to time. Through a series of serious or playful creative writing, Shi Tiesheng reaches a much broader horizon to face the issues of fate and suffering, and enters into a deep discussion on how to understand and accept the truth of life. From the beginning of Shi Tiesheng’s creation of short stories, essays, and the only novel, the issue of fate constantly remains a core theme. In the literary critique “Notes on Notes on Abstract Talks” 赞《务虚笔记》的笔记” Zhou Guoping 周国平 concludes that:

We find that there are two main consequences in Shi Tiesheng’s search for fate: 1) reconciling with fate, and observing one’s own fate from a broader perspective of ‘weaving pattern’; and 2) being tolerant
to others and being cautious with moral judgements, because everyone might encounter the same fate.

In summary, Shi Tiesheng somehow deprives God of His loving personality, leaving Him the role of a playful fate designer, an uncompassionate ruler, and a mighty creator of evil as well as good. In fact, Shi Tiesheng’s real interest remains not in God sense but in the issue of fate. His description of God’s transcendence clearly displays his comprehension of the mysterious truth of fate, which is far beyond human understanding.
Chapter Four: Literary Devices Concerning Fate in *Notes on Abstract Talks*

**Interchangeable Fates of Different Characters**

As the title suggests, this novel deals with a series of abstract talks, in which each character is merely a train of thought, a folding or unfolding possibility of fate, or a certain aspect of Shi Tiesheng’s own personality. During the reading process, the reader may get a very confusing impression of the overlapping plots and the overlapping fates of characters. Quite a number of characters experience several of the same events, but their different reactions towards these same events distinguish their fates from one another. A few quotations from the novel will give us a better illustration of this point:

The scene where the Artist set out visiting the little girl is quite similar to one of my experiences. On this night of writing, The girl whom he visits is mixed up with the girl I visited.

画家 Z 动身去找那个女孩的情景，很像是我曾有过的一次经历。他曾经去找的那个女孩，和我曾经去找的那个女孩，在写作之夜混淆不清。(60)

I reexamine my whole world. The unforgettable birthday of the outcast always coincides with the autumn night when I go home.
alone, with the winter evening when Artist Z goes home alone, and
with the summer twilight when the Poet goes home alone.

我想遍了我的世界，一个被流放者的生日总来与我独自回家的
那个秋夜重合，也总来与画家 Z 独自回家的那个冬日的傍晚，
和诗人独自回家的那个夏日的黄昏重合，挥之不去。(129)

Because the absurd experience passed down for thousands of years is
still spreading, their [young Z and young WR] situations become
blurred and mix up in my impression, even coming together on the
night of writing.

由于那流传千年的荒谬故事继续地流传，在我的印象里他们[Z 和
WR]的少年景遇便不断混淆，在写作之夜有时会合而为一。(137)

If departure is destined to happen, although C and N are of different
genders, they are going to overlap and be mixed up together according
to their confused fates on that night of separation or those nights of
separation. As for X, she is going to be mixed up with F.

如果离别已经注定，在注定离别的那个夜晚或者那些夜晚，恋人
C 与恋人 N 虽然性别不同，也会在迷茫的命运中重叠、混淆。X
呢，重叠、混淆进 F。(519)
In Shi Tiesheng’s writing, each character is reborn and his or her fate becomes unique. It is usually a traumatic experience that forces a certain character to be given birth again as owner of an independent fate. For instance, here is a quotation in Chapter 17 “Fear” that describes the disabled C’s fate: “On the very point of the advent of disaster, fate is divided into a thousand roads, among which only one who sits in a wheelchair is clearly C (499).”

On suffering paralysis, the young C starts to think and act in his own way and raises his particular inquiry into the meaning of life.

Shi Tiesheng calls Chapter 6 “Birthday,” which implies the awakening of self-consciousness. For little “I”, the “birthday” is when “I” holds a broken soccer ball and feels deeply isolated and lonely after being excluded from the other children by Terrible Child. For little L, the “birthday” refers to when his trusting heart is harshly broken by a friend who reveals his secret of drawing a portrait of the girl whom he likes, which causes L to be bullied by other children. For little Z, the “birthday” comes when he leaves the home of the high-class family of the girl whom he likes, deeply hurt by the disdainful words of the girl’s mother and realizing that he belongs to a greatly inferior class.

According to the above cases, sudden spiritual or mental shocks in childhood tear up these characters and distinguish them from a large crowd of undistinguished people. It is the sharp trauma that appears in their life that awakens their self-consciousness, gives birth to their loneliness, and produces their individually particular fates. And at this point, a process of traveling starts from the individual loneliness to the mutual separation to the desire for communication to the open hearts and eventually to the termination of love.
By managing the starting points of various interchangeable fates of the characters, Shi Tiesheng suggests that different "birthdays" endow people with different perspectives to look at and get into this world. Moreover, different "birthdays" are not only determined by varied circumstances into which the characters enter, but also depend on their different attitudes, i.e. their present subjective states, towards these meaningful events.

Do those intersections, or "birthdays," in human life emerge by chance or exist necessarily? Shi Tiesheng examines the issue of the possibility of fates from different angles. There are two paragraphs in Chapter 4 "The Gate of Childhood", which gives us a few hints of Shi Tiesheng's understanding that fortuity and necessity are simply two sides of one coin:

If you stand at the spot of the four-year old O and look into her future, you might say that she has an uncertain feasibility or she has boundless prospects. But if you stand at the end to look at the entire track of her life, what you can see is only a fixed road.

If we are born into a certain fixed situation, if you wake up from nothingness (unmeasurable nothingness) and find that you are already situated in a tangled network, woven into a predetermined knot in the
network, and you cannot understand the past and future – this is God’s impromptu weave, then it is firmly proved that history exists.

如果我们生来就被规定了一种处境，如果你从虚无中醒来（无以计量的虚无）看见自己已被安置在一网纵横编就的网中，你被编织在一个既定的网结上（看不出条条脉络的由来和去处，这是上帝即兴的编织），那就证明历史确凿存在。(65)

By the first quotation, Shi Tiesheng suggests his understanding of fate: people can only know what fate was but never know what it is going to be. According to this quotation, when people stand at the entrance of a period of life, the future seems as an open existence, which conveys unmeasurable possibilities and changes. By contrast, when people look back at their past, every step seems fixed and has no room for change, since people can only choose one possibility among many at every intersection.

Although this statement sounds a little self-evident, it reminds us of the two different perspectives on God as “fate designer” and humans as “fate designees”. According to Christian teachings, one of the most important distinctions between God and humans regarding this issue is that God transcends time, which means God is able to perceive things whether past or future; while human beings are limited to a certain duration, which brings about their sense of uncertainty when they are situated at the entrance of a forthcoming fate. Thus we can reasonably imagine that we are looking into our future with all kinds of expectations and probably a sense of uncertainty, like the four-year old girl O; while God watches all kinds of our experiences and struggles, as
though He stands at the end of the road of life or even above the whole journey. In other words, God predestinates and thereby foresees our future, which is a fundamental point in the Christian doctrine of Predestination.

From the second quotation, we may find it clearer that Shi Tiesheng intertwines both sides of the possibility of fate more firmly. In other words, he further combines fortuity and necessity. Every human being has been “woven into a predetermined knot in the network” of his or her fate and “cannot understand the past and future – this is God’s impromptu weave.” Although human fates seem to be influenced or even determined by many irrational and accidental external factors, in God’s eyes everything is in its own track and has already been destined. Interestingly, Shi Tiesheng does not stop here but further points out that although there is no fortuitous matter in God’s plans, all kinds of human fates are indeed the results of God’s playful improvisation, which constitutes Shi Tiesheng’s unique understanding of the possibility of fate.

Indeed, Shi Tiesheng’s philosophy is very close to predetermination, an idea that “events are fixed in advance; that the apparent open nature of the future, contrasted with the fixed nature of the past, is in fact illusory.” In Shi Tiesheng’s understanding, a meaningful event is the cause and starting point of human identity, characters and future experiences; furthermore, such a meaningful event in which a person’s will or choice is fortuitous is already predestinated. For example, Poet L accidentally chooses to open one of the doors in the art gallery behind which he meets his future lover whom he will deeply love for the rest of his life. The contradiction between human beings’ apparent free will and their actual predetermined fate makes Shi Tiesheng assert that future is in fact illusory and that the fate Designer enjoys His extemporaneous drama.
The Protestant Christians' beliefs in terms of predestination, which differ from Shi Tiesheng's understanding of fate, are well demonstrated in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*: "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." Furthermore, "Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; yet hath He not decreed any thing because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions." (Chapter 3: 1-2)  

From the above quotation, we can notice that the Christian God foreordains all things according to His eternal purpose and absolute sovereignty, which is coupled with infinite wisdom, holiness and love. Considering the attributes of the Creator, nothing can be more comforting and reassuring to the believers than knowing that God is in control. By knowing this personal God, the believers gradually obtain the assurance that His eternal purpose is good and that He never plays dice.

As for the issue of free will, Christianity believes that, on the one hand, human free will is also part of God's predetermination and that, on the other hand, it has been damaged by our original and present sins. Actually, human will is free only in the sense that it is not controlled by any external force, but it has lost the ability to excise holy intentions. Martin Luther even declared that, "Free-will is an empty term, whose reality is lost. And a lost liberty, according to my grammar, is no liberty at all." I do not mean to reject human free will and their responsibility accordingly. I simply try to indicate that there is a higher harmony between the relative free will of human beings and the absolute
sovereignty and predestination of God, who never rules over the world by violating human will. Nor does He take away responsibility from human hands. In *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, Loraine Boettner cites an example from the Holy Bible to demonstrate this harmony between God’s eternal purpose and human free will:

A classic example of the co-operation of Divine sovereignty and human freedom is found in the story of Joseph. Joseph was sold into Egypt where he rose in authority and rendered a great service by supplying food in time of famine. It was, of course, a very sinful act for those sons of Jacob to sell their younger brother into slavery in a heathen country. They knew that they acted freely, and years later they admitted their full guilt (Genesis 42:21; 45:3). Yet Joseph could say to them, "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life...So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God;" and again, "As for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 45:5, 8; 50:20). Joseph's brothers simply followed the evil inclinations of their natures; yet their act was a link in the chain of events through which God fulfilled His purpose; and their guilt was not the least diminished by the fact that their intended evil was overruled for good.16
Generally, Shi Tiesheng uses the device of interchangeable fates to promote the description of individual stories to a deeper reflection on the possibility of fate itself. From his understanding, different “birthdays,” on which characters attain their self-consciousness through painful experience for the first time, lead people to enter this world in different ways and thus experience different fates. And those meaningful events that decide one’s fate could either be fortuitous or necessary, simply depending on which perspective one chooses to adopt.

Symbolic Names of Characters

Along with his concern for the issue of fate, Shi Tiesheng symbolizes most characters’ names in *Notes on Abstract Talks* with English initial letters, such as O, Z, L, F, N, etc., which implies that their personal fates are universal and interchangeable.

Normally, names are given to distinguish one person from another, and names often convey special meanings or desired qualities in a person. However, the main purpose in *Notes on Abstract Talks* is to discuss the issue of fate rather than to reconstruct someone’s particular life story; as a result, specific names are taken out together with their connotation of individuality.

In this sense, one person’s fate could be the fate of other people. For instance, C is not only one of the main characters in this novel who is disabled and who has a healthy lover named X, but also represents all disabled people in this world; moreover C also stands for all human beings who are as limited and restricted as the physically deformed.
The distinction between specific names is not very important in the search for the meaning and possibilities of fate; different individuals experience their fates from different entrances. In Chapter 12 "Desire," Doctor F tries to persuade Poet L that only human desire, which embodies itself in various individuals, lasts forever:

Desire will never die. Desire is always called “I” – “I” in English, with different counterparts in different languages, conveying the same meaning despite different pronunciations. ... It is not important whether “I” happens to own an earthly name; whether expressed as F, C, O, or N, “I” will definitely feel the pain from “my” angle and endure the suffering in “my” position.

Moreover, the symbolic names also strengthen the imaginary nature of fiction as a specific literary genre by giving readers an impression of a fictitious experience and thus effectively distancing the readers from what they are reading. As though playing a game of chess, Shi Tiesheng successfully impresses the readers with a sense of uncertainty of characters' interchangeable fates and of their woven relationships as well.
In a word, the writing technique of symbolic names, which prevails among modern novels, not only draws the readers' attention to the issue of universal and interchangeable fates, but also emphasizes the fictitious nature of the novel as a kind of literary genre.

The Door of Fate as A Metaphor

Metaphor is the most important and widespread figure of speech, in which one thing, idea, or action is referred to by a word or expression normally denoting another thing, idea, or action, so as to suggest some common quality shared by the two. In this sense, Shi Tiesheng displays the infinite possibilities of fate by describing the numerous doors in little Z’s childhood memory, suggesting a common quality of uncertainty between the doors and fate.

Shi Tiesheng selects a meaningful event, “the doors in childhood,” from his personal experiences, sets this event as a motif in Notes on Abstract Talks, and attaches much significance to it. When the author himself walked into the beautiful house of the little elegant girl’s family and got lost among numerous doors, he was gradually distracted from his subtle admiration for the girl, and his inferiority complex came into being for the first time in his life. 17

As a repeated motif, many characters in this novel experience this scene in their childhood, but their different personalities and different reactions accompany them to different fates, as though walking through different doors in that dream-like beautiful house. Take Z as an example, “It is probably the leading of fate: all other doors are closed; only this one is open. Sensitive as a destined artist, Z finds the elegant, exclusive feather
in the sunshine of winter, which fills the room 或许这就是命运的指引，所有的房门都
关着惟此一扇悠悠地敞开着，Z 以一个画家命定的敏觉，发现了满屋冬日阳光光芒中
那根美丽孤傲的羽毛 (55).” The only open door of childhood, or the only open
possibility of his fate, assigns him a road that leads to be a talented but malicious Artist,
who keeps drawing a cold white feather throughout his whole life.

As for Narrator “I”, Poet L, Teacher O, Director N, WR, T, etc., though they
experience the same event, their fates diverge into diverse directions from that point. For
example, at that moment, little L is so wholeheartedly attracted to the girl that he is
oblivious to her mother’s disdainful words. Little L’s admiration and longing for girls are
constantly strengthened until he becomes a sensitive poet who cherishes many ideal
dreams but also suffers from an endless conflict between his longing to be honest and his
lust for women. Growing up in her dream-like beautiful house, O constantly immerses
herself in colorful dreams, but finally commits suicide when she is disillusioned. Actually,
O never steps out of the symbolical house. As for Director O, she inherits a firm
disposition from her mother who has a beautiful but cold voice; she eventually attains
great career achievement outside of the dream-like house. The numerous doors in their
childhood experiences function as various branches at the intersection of fate, which
distinguishes one person’s fate and personality from another and leads to a particular life
that belongs to this person alone.

The above analysis is based on the view of a group of people; with respect to the
issue of individual fate, the most obvious characteristic remains the overlapping
relationship between fortuity and necessity, which we have discussed previously, in
certain person’s life.
In Chapter 12 “Desire,” when Poet L’s lover earnestly investigates her value in L’s heart, she is very disappointed when thinking that they just happened to meet each other in an art gallery, but that L is destined to meet and be attracted by a certain woman in his life after all, who is not necessary to be her. Therefore Poet L’s lover raises a series of questions on the necessity of their love and relationship:

She says, “I pushed out the right door, instead of the left one. So I walked down the hallway toward the West. At that moment the setting sun was at your back. I could hardly see you heading towards me. We didn’t know each other. None of us could have imagined that we were about to meet.”

She says, “It’s simply because I got lost. I would have pushed the left door instead of the right one. If that had happened, we might have missed each other forever.”

She says, “It’s very mysterious, isn’t it?”

She says, “Two people probably only have one chance of meeting or no chance at all.”

What she wants to say is that “I’m a fortuitous matter in your life.”

What she wants to say is that “but a woman is inevitable to you.”

She wants to ask, “If so, why is it impossible for you to have the same desire for other women?”
Being a passionate lover, she requests devotion and exclusiveness in their relationship; in the mean time, she also expects a necessary solid foundation for their love but disappointedly discovers the truth that the doors of fate are not only limited to one direction.

In fact, she is right when she claims that many significant events in our lives, which heavily affect our future, seemingly happen by chance. Nevertheless, she fails to understand that people’s different voluntary attitudes and reactions will result in different
consequences and, as a result, different responsibilities. Although God foreknows all of our intentions and actions, He is not going to carry out predestination by force. Therefore, we cannot deny our responsibilities by intentionally making the excuse that our actions have no influence on events because our fates have already been determined.

In short, to develop a literary investigation on the issue of fate in his novel *Notes on Abstract Talks*, Shi Tiesheng uses a few modern writing techniques, such as the characters’ symbolic names, the characters’ open and interchangeable fates, and the door of fate as a metaphor. With these writing technique, Shi Tiesheng suggests that God as a fate-designer has the sovereign will to control this world but often playfully makes trouble for miserable human beings. To some extent “God” is not a loving heavenly Father of mankind in Shi Tiesheng’s novel; instead, he becomes a synonym of “Fate”, which remains the real center of his thinking and writing. In Shi Tiesheng’s eyes, fate has infinite possibilities, some of which seem fortuitous, some of which seem inevitable, depending on which perspective one takes: Fate’s or that of humans?
Chapter Five: Love and God from A Christian Point of View

After an observation of the theme of love and an analysis of "God" and fate in Notes on Abstract Talks, we are going to combine and develop these two essential topics of love and God discussed in the first four chapters, then evaluate Shi Tiesheng's understanding of love and God in Notes on Abstract Talks from a Christian viewpoint.

Four types of love, Storge, Philia, Eros, and Agape, will be introduced according to traditional Greek classification, among which Eros and Agape remain the focus. After a close examination, we will encounter some typical characteristics of Eros and Agape respectively. Based on these characteristics, we may find that the love in Notes on Abstract Talks, on which Shi Tiesheng puts his hope of healing peoples' wounds, really belongs only to Eros, and therefore does not have the capacity for salvation in the Christian sense.

The Four Types of Love

In the Greek language, there are at least four words that convey the meaning of love: Storge, Philia, Eros, and Agape. Although some people also consider Epithymia a kind of love, I have decided to ignore it in my thesis because of its strong connection with libido, a merely physical desire, which has little to do with a deep feeling of fondness within the connotation of love. The content of four kinds of love are described as follows:
**Storge**: a natural affection developed from consanguinity, such as the love between parents and children in a family. Generally, we are quite familiar with this kind love, since all of us more or less experience Storge in our life, though in different degrees and ways.

Storge is a gift-love, with which one intends to work and serve for the sake of the object of love. A parent with the feeling of Storge gains more joy and fulfillment while watching his or her children feel happy and satisfied. Storge also moves people to love the object without discrimination and to be tolerant towards the deficiency of the beloved one. Appearance, intelligence, and appeal are not necessary in children for them to gain their parents' affection. Even a retarded child could enjoy a selfless love from his or her tender mother.

Compared with other passionate feelings, Storge appears modest and plain, yet enables people to gain a sense of security and comfort. It occurs only among familiar people. Sometimes, the Storge that exists between parents and children can permeate other relationships, such as the one between husband and wife. For example, in *Notes on Abstract Talks*, the disabled C is heavily moved by the Storge-like love from his lover X in their reunion. In this kind of love, C feels free, safe, and being accepted.

The above merits are sufficient to shed light on the understanding of Confucian ethics. As the mainstream thought of traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism is based on the deep affection that comes naturally from consanguinity. Confucian scholars believe that as long as people extend human goodness in terms of the natural affection among family members to a broader scale, decent humanity, right moral virtue, harmonious human relation, and ideal social order will arise.
However, though Storge has many virtues, it can cause people harm. At the bottom of Storge, we can find a hint of this gift-love’s need to give or need to be needed. When a person tries to affirm his or her value of being needed by constant “selfless” giving, this kind of love produces a disastrous tension or a potential hatred in a family. In this sense, it is wise to warn not to make Storge the absolute sovereign love in human life.

**Philia:** a love between friends, usually related to familiarity, virtue and equality.

According to Greek thought, Philia also includes fondness and desire for the good of another. Among various types of human love, friendship is the farthest from the basic needs of human life; as a result, there are a great number of people who never experience a real feeling of Philia during their lives, especially in modern society. We have to admit that ancient people thought more highly of friendship than we do.

C. S. Lewis gives a brief description of Philia in his well-known *The Four Loves*:

“This love, free from instinct, free from all duties but those which love has freely assumed, almost wholly free from jealousy, and free without qualification from the need to be needed, is eminently spiritual.”

In true Philia, people do not care about friends’ appearance, wealth, age, social status, or education level; instead, people are simply who they are and are treated equally by others based on their characters. Since there is no need for possession in Philia, there is no exclusiveness or jealousy. Rather than longing for one another, true friends have common goals, which draw their attention together simultaneously.

Moreover, appreciation is also an important feature of Philia. Free from all obligations, people could liberally choose their own friends through an appreciation-love;
later on, their side-by-side work may continually display more virtues of one another and thus further strengthen this appreciation-love between friends, as they further realize their similar personalities.

A good example of Philia is the love between Jonathan and David, which is depicted as the deepest and closest friendship in the Old Testament. At their first meeting, “Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.” (1 Samuel 18:1). When Jonathan later died in the battlefield, David lamented: “I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.” (2 Samuel 1:26). With Philia, a son of the King befriended a young shepherd. With Philia, they did not let anything separate them, even though Jonathan’s father, Saul, was determined to kill David. With Philia, Jonathan’s love could not be weakened even when it became clear that David was appointed successor to his father’s throne. And with Philia, Jonathan boldly saved David from his father’s malicious persecution. Most importantly, Jonathan and David based their friendship on commitment to God, which means they were concerned with common religious and moral goals, not just each other.

**Eros:** Usually, Eros refers to a love between lovers, driven by strong carnal desire. “In Greek thought, Eros connotes desire, longing, disequilibrium, and is generally sexual in nature.” According to this definition, we can reasonably draw the conclusion that the love between different lovers in *Notes on Abstract Talks* is indeed this kind of love. Before our brief description of Eros, I have to add a point that Eros is not merely sexual desire, though sexual desire is a crucial component of Eros.
Eros is often called “Platonic love”, since the ancient Greek philosopher Plato once elaborated on this issue, especially in his *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. According to the different objects of love, Plato divided Eros into two categories: Vulgar Eros, towards the world of the senses; and Divine Eros, towards the world of Ideas. Plato was more concerned with the latter. “In Plato, although Eros may start with a particular person as its object, it soon becomes transferred from the particular person to their beauty, and finally it gravitates towards immaterial objects such as the form of beauty itself.”

Therefore, Eros exists as a way of human beings towards the divine world and as a longing of human beings for a more beautiful and valuable existence. The human love towards God and His divine world belongs to this kind of love.

Although Shi Tiesheng is not as concerned about the form of beauty itself as Plato was, he is also interested in an ultimate world toward which Eros points. He believes that Eros has the capacity to erase loneliness and to lift human lives from suffering to a more promising state. In Shi Tiesheng’s thinking and writing, Eros also stands for a way for mankind to pursue a divine world. He writes in *Bing Xi Sui Bi* that:

Agape is an ideal, while Eros is part of this ideal that can be fulfilled. Therefore, Eros has more connotations beyond its original meaning. It is like tinder of Agape reserved by God and like a chance of listening to God’s oracle surrounded by overwhelming reality. By using this least dangerous way of one to one communication, God leads human beings to open their hearts, suggesting that people would only be
worthy of eternal punishment if even this method cannot enable them to unburden the armor of the heart.

博爱是理想，而爱情，是这个理想可以实现的部分。因此，爱情便有了超出其本身的义，它就像上帝为广博之爱保留的火种，像在现实的强大包围下一个谛听神喻的机会，上帝以此危险性最小的1对1在引导着心灵的敞开，暗示人们：如果这仍不能使你们卸去心灵的铠甲，你们就只配永恒的惩罚。(85)

From the above quotation, we can see that Shi Tiesheng identifies the nature of Eros with the nature of Agape and regards Eros as a practical version of Agape. Is Eros truly part of Agape? Is the sublimation of Eros the way to reach Agape? Let us look at some definitions and descriptions of Agape itself.

**Agape:** an unconditional and others-centered love of God, according to Christianity. It “suggests a less focused, universal benevolence that pays little or no regard to reciprocity.” 21 In Christianity, God is not only the source of Agape; God Himself is Agape. He thoroughly expresses His Agape towards the fallen and lost humans through the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. In essence, Agape is a love that gives itself away and pours itself out completely.

Generally, three Biblical verses are often quoted and analyzed in order to perceive the true connotation of Agape: 1) Apostle John’s explicit identification with God and Agape in I John 4:8, 16: “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is
love,” and “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” 2) Apostle John’s statement concerning the relationship between Agape and the Cross in John 3:16, which is also considered the “Bible of the Bible”: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” 3) Apostle Paul’s “Hymn of Agape” in I Corinthians 13:4-8: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

In summary, Agape has nothing to do with the strong desire or disordered longing based on human needs, but in a spontaneous love coming directly from the true character of God Himself. Subsequently, we will observe a few fundamental characteristics of Eros and Agape respectively and then point out why Shi Tiesheng is incorrect when he says that Eros is part of Agape and can accordingly function in salvation and deliverance.

Characteristics of Eros

Eros Comes from Need

When Shi Tiesheng says that “love is the proof of loneliness,” he is actually talking about the sense of need, which remains the essential constituent of Eros. Once people realize their inborn loneliness, they feel the need to be together and be loved; then they start to seek a safe, free communication between human hearts, with a hope that it would break down all kinds of obstacles that keep individuals from each other. C. S. Lewis has a very similar opinion when he analyzes this kind of need-love in The Four Loves:
But our Need-love, as Plato saw, is 'the son of Poverty'. It is the accurate reflection in consciousness of our actual nature. We are born helpless. As soon as we are fully conscious we discover loneliness. We need others physically, emotionally, intellectually; we need them if we are to know anything, even ourselves. (7)

The need grows from our limited human nature and, in Christian terms, is determined by our status as God's creations. In this sense, I could not agree more with Shi Tiesheng about his metaphor of physical deformity: human beings are born disabled, because of various limitations in our human nature.

The longing for being loved is reasonable by nature. In the Bible, even God Himself acknowledges the human need to be loved by one's spouse. The reason for God's creation of Eve for Adam is depicted in Genesis 2:18: "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable to him.'" The main point is that God thought that Adam needed a spouse, a suitable helper, to fulfill his life. When Apostle Paul puts forward his opinion on the issue of marriage, he also points out, "it is better to marry than to burn." (1 Corinthians, 7:8, 9). In this case, though unmarried himself, Paul admits the natural sexual needs of human beings.

In a word, Eros is primarily characterized by its nature of lack and need. Eros is a desire, a longing, and a striving to gain possession of what is regarded as valuable and needed. This kind of love always exists between having and not having. Many inquiries
in Shi Tiesheng's novel *Notes on Abstract Talks* can be better comprehended from this point of view.

**Eros Suggests Possession**

From many love stories in *Notes on Abstract Talks*, we have already obtained a general impression that during the process of pursuing Eros, lovers usually show a need and desire for complete possession. Poet L's lover cannot even tolerate L's imaginary interest in other women and she eventually leaves L due to potential dangers to her physical, mental, and spiritual possession of her lover.

In fact, possession is the result of need. One who feels his or her need desires integration with the object of love in order to eventually reach his or her self-fulfillment through possession. Therefore, this kind of pursuit is indeed egocentric. It is true that the pursuer may truly appreciate the beauty or other values in the object of love, but the real aim of Eros is to fulfill the subject's need through reaching out to and finally possessing the object of love.

Although in some cases, taking the story of Z's uncle and the Betrayer as an example, it seems that one is firmly ready to sacrifice everything, even her own life for her beloved, there is still a hidden anticipation of possession and unity at the bottom of her heart. That is why later on she is so disillusioned with the fact that he would never come back to marry a betrayer woman that she even tries to kill herself. If she could not possess the erotic love from Z's uncle, life would be meaningless and empty to her. "It should be specially noted that even where Eros seems to be a desire to give it is still in the last resort a 'Will-to-possess'." 22
It is also the possessive nature of Eros that determines the frustration if one tries to have more than one lover simultaneously and to love them equally. Jealousy is a natural instinctive reaction against the threat of the loss of what one desires to completely possess. In nature, Eros is a feeling that cannot be shared.

The brilliant modern Chinese poet Gu Cheng (顾城) once cherished a dream of watching his wife and girl friend harmoniously living together like intimate sisters. To realize this dream, he chose an isolated island in New Zealand to carry out his plain yet fairytale-like life with two beloved women. But eventually he fell into a predicament with various perplexities and troubles like those of Poet L in *Notes on Abstract Talks*. He ended up committing suicide after murdering his wife, leaving a little child behind. One of the real reasons for this tragedy is that he failed to realize or refused to acknowledge that the deep-rooted possessive nature of Eros can hardly be broken by his desire to have a manage-a-trois. 23

This inevitable possessive nature of Eros is also an answer to Poet L’s series of questions about devotion and exclusiveness in relationships. Because one needs a lover to be the comforter for his or her fated loneliness according to Shi Tiesheng, it is natural to demand the total integration with this person, which is normally expressed in terms of possession, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

**Eros Is for the Lovable Object**

Eros depends heavily on the conditions of the beloved objects, or how lovable and attractive the objects are. Plato is definitely right when he points out that Eros is love for the beautiful and the good. Human beings have an instinctive inclination towards lovable
items, not only people but also works of art, flowers, or just fragrances. This inclination is also based on a sense of appreciation apart from the possessive nature of Eros.

Comparing this feature of Eros with the characteristics of Agape, Swedish theologian Anders Nygren indicates in *Agape and Eros*:

Like all acquisitive love, Eros necessarily directs itself to an object with is regarded as valuable. Love and value belong together here; each suggests the other. Only that which is regarded as valuable can become an object of desire and love. From this it is plain that there can be no room in Plato for any spontaneous and unmotivated love: for acquisitive love is motivated by the value of its object. (176)

In the above quotation, by mentioning spontaneous and unmotivated love, Nygren refers to Agape as an unconditional love from God towards each human being no matter how unlovable he or she is.

Eros always goes together with appreciation. With Storge, parents can love their unlovely children, while with Eros, lovers could hardly truly love those who are regarded as not valuable. This point can explain why Teacher O leaves her ex-husband for the brilliant Artist Z. Even though Teacher O cannot reasonably understand that her ex-husband is a good person without evident moral or personal defects and that she should not hurt an innocent person like him, she just cannot help but become wholeheartedly attracted by the artistic talent and disposition of Artist Z. This kind of situation is by no
means rare in the world of pure Eros. Without the appreciation for values of objects, the spark of Eros is not easily kindled.

Although Eros is often involved with need and possession, in many cases it is also mixed with other feelings, since we human beings are creatures of great complexity. C. S. Lewis offers a vivid illustration on this point when he talks about the erotic combination with three types of love – Need-love, Gift-love, and Appreciative love:

Need-love cries to God from our poverty; Gift-love longs to serve, or even to suffer for, God; Appreciative love says: “We give thanks to thee for thy great glory.” Need-love says of a woman “I cannot live without her”; Gift-love longs to give her happiness, comfort, protection – if possible, wealth; Appreciative love gazes and holds its breath and is silent, rejoices that such a wonder should exist even if not for him, will not be wholly dejected by losing her, would rather have it so than never to have seen her at all. (21)

Eros Is Closely Related To Sexuality

With Eros, lovers desire fulfillment of a consummate relationship, bodily, mentally, and spiritually. Thus sexuality is chosen as an expression of this consummation. There is a premise for our discussion on Eros and sexuality that they do not necessarily suggest each other. Sexual activity can take place without Eros, while Eros includes other elements beyond mere sexuality. In other words, Eros and sexuality are like two
overlapping circles, sharing a common area, which constitutes useful material for our analysis here.

Shi Tiesheng believes that sexuality is supposed to be an expression, a symbol, and a ritual of Eros; it indicates total intimacy and also free communication between individual bodies and hearts. A sincere Eros requires frank sexuality; a devoted Eros requires loyal sexuality. Any abuse of sexuality, the expression of Eros, would humiliate Eros itself and eventually put pure Eros to death. C. S Lewis indicates the relationship between Eros and sexual desire like this: “Without Eros, sexual desire, like every other desire, is a fact about ourselves. Within Eros it is rather about the Beloved. It becomes almost a mode of perception, entirely a mode of expression (89).” It is Eros that endows sexuality with connotation behind the expressive form itself.

In Notes on Abstract Talks, Poet L has a period of casual sex experiences with various unfamiliar women as he looks for his former lover. He tries to enjoy the relaxed sense of “pure sex” without the painful burden of Eros and anxious concern for his lover. To his surprise, however, he cannot perceive any distinction among the many women or enjoy any novelty in his changing sexual experiences. Without Eros, sexuality becomes blank and meaningless, only a way to temporarily meet his physical desires.

**Eros Is Not Necessarily Consistent with Morality**

Unlike Storge and Philia, Eros always evokes an overwhelming and unsurpassed power. It drives people to total commitment, regardless of the cost. The feminine narrator in Song of Songs proclaims the intensity of this amorous love that: “for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty
flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.” (SS 8:6,7). In this statement, Eros is characterized as the most invincible and unyielding of human feelings. It is no wonder that many people consciously or unconsciously worship this kind of love as a god by making total commitment to it and allowing it to fully control their lives. Eros is a precious enjoyable gift when it occurs in the right way. However, we have to be aware that without a higher direction as guide, the unconditional obedience to Eros can easily lead to a disastrous, immoral end.

From the erotic point of view, it seems that people are permitted to do anything for the sake of “true love.” Eros becomes the sovereign ruler who proudly tramples on loyalty, responsibility, righteousness, compassion, and any other moral virtue. Total submission to the reign of Eros, “the pair can say to one another in an almost sacrificial spirit, ‘It is for love’s sake that I have neglected my parents – left my children – cheated my partner – failed my friend at his greatest need’. These reasons in love’s law have passed for good. The votaries may even come to feel a particular merit in such sacrifice; what costlier offering can be laid on love’s altar than one’s conscience?”

There are a few illustrations in Shi Tiesheng’s Notes on Abstract Talks. When Doctor F’s love toward his former lover Director N is evoked again in his emotionless marriage, he unhesitatingly leaves his wife and daughter to seek and “protect” his former lover, as if he obtained the right to abandon his family, since he had been so responsible for this family, whom he never truly loved, for so many years. From Eros’ viewpoint, staying in a marriage without love is worse than having an affair with “true love.”

Similarly, when Z’s uncle starts to search for his former lover for the third time, he has already determined to stay with her permanently. After forty years apart, they finally
find their lost lover and therefore do not want to depart again, even though Z’s uncle’s wife is still alive and living in another country. In the novel, readers could hardly find detailed psychological description of such abandoned people as Doctor F’s wife, Z’s uncle’s wife, or even Teacher O’s ex-husband, not because they have no problem accepting reality, but because the novel focuses on Eros and in the eyes of Eros their tragic fates are unimportant and can be ignored.

The values of Eros and the values of morality are not always consistent; on the contrary, they are more likely to conflict with one another when people view one of them as the sovereign. Morality respects the faithfulness of marriage. From this perspective, to love is to be faithful to one’s spouse and to accept him or her as they are regardless of their limitations. This is clearly described in Denis de Rougemont’s *Love in the Western World*:

> For to be faithful is to have decided to accept another being for his or her own sake, in his or her own limitations and reality, choosing this being not as an excuse for excited elevation or as an “object of contemplation,” but as having a matchless and independent life which requires active love. (286)

At the same time, Rougemont also draws an opposite picture, in which Eros, or passion, is lifted up above all concerns:
Passion is by no means the dream of adolescence, but a kind of naked and denuding intensity; a bitter destitution, the impoverishment of a mind being emptied of all diversity. There are no longer either neighbors or duties, or binding ties, or earth or sky, one is alone with all that one loves. (145)

For those Eros worshipers, such as Doctor F and Z’s uncle who have been mentioned above, the conflict between being loyal to their passionate love and being loyal to their marriage is similar to a battle between two religions, in which the more “earthly belongings” they are willing to sacrifice, the more they can show their loyalty to the “Queen of Eros.”

Eros Alone Never Lasts Forever

The temporality of Eros is determined by the fact that it comes from need. The temporality of human need produces the temporality of Eros. Whenever the need is fulfilled, changed, or eliminated, it is likely that Eros also loses its strong attraction at the same time and gradually fades away.

More importantly, the nature of Eros also determines its fate of destruction. In Love in the Western World, Denis de Rougemont traces the religious origin of erotic love back to Manichaean Sect, a religion that holds the dualism of Day and Light, or angelica soul and confining body. According to Rougemont, Manichaenism believes that death is required for the perfect fulfillment of Eros, by which souls are released from created forms and gain the ultimate union with the divine Light or Day. He further indicates that,
“The god of Eros is the slave of death because he wishes to elevate life above our finite and limited creature state (311).” Following Manichaenism’s logic, destruction is an indispensable step that leads erotic love to its ultimate goal.

In reality, however, it is unnecessary to drive situations to such an extreme as Teacher O does, that is, committing suicide for the sake of love. Actually, what we observe in our daily life is how people supplement Eros with other types of love and some moral values while maintaining the span of their passionate love. It is hard for ardent Eros to last long alone.

In many successful lasting marriages, we find that even though the initially strong passion gradually fades away in a relationship, the acquired Storge enables the couple to cultivate a warm, comfortable, and considerate affection, with which they treat each other like siblings. The acquired Philia leads them to the common directions with appreciative hearts for one another like dear friends. And acquired Agape helps them reach a state in which they are more willing to offer an unconditional love to their spouse rather than to themselves, like God’s love for us human beings. By combining Eros with other types of love, Eros does not focus as much on strong desires and get heavily influenced by human needs as it does alone.

Generally, Eros is a love that comes directly from human need. It often suggests the possession of valuable objects and has a close relationship with sexuality, which is regarded to be the physical expression of Eros. Because of its overwhelming power, Eros sometimes conflicts against certain moral values, and because of its basis in human need, Eros alone never lasts long. Fundamentally, Eros is typical of human love, carrying
mankind’s longings for a better and more beautiful world. However, in Christian terms, it has too many limitations to be a divine love that can fulfill ultimate salvation.

Characteristics of Agape in Christianity

Agape is Spontaneous: God’s Sovereign Will

In contrast to Eros, which is forced by human need and poverty, Christianity believes that Agape arises from God’s willing choice. Agape is a gift-love, based on God’s perfection and abundance, which means that the aim of Agape is not to fulfill any need but to share abundant blessings.

One of the essential Christian beliefs is that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. God Himself is perfect. In God, there is no craving that needs to be fulfilled. There is no need for God to perfect Himself by creating human beings and loving them; rather, the action of creation is an illustration of His perfect divine love so that human beings can be invited into a loving fellowship with God and then be loved and perfected. Very different from Eros that is forced by need and that seeks possession to fulfill itself, Agape has no external grounds, only shows an internal nature.

Agape is not merely a temporary emotion or feeling, which is subject to change and can fade away. As a willing choice, Agape indicates God’s spontaneous decision and action beyond sensibility itself, showing His commitment and faithfulness.

With the gift-love Agape, God initiates His fellowship with human beings by thoroughly giving Himself away as a priceless gift, known as grace. In the Holy Bible, both Disciple John and Apostle Paul indicate the self-sacrificial nature of Agape: “This is
love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10). “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:7,8). With Agape, God does not long to completely possess the objects of love or anxiously demand their love. Instead, He offers His love freely and waits for human beings’ voluntary response to his love. Something we should keep in mind is that God’s love precedes our human love: He loves people even before we come to realize His love. By this, an uncalculating and spontaneous gift-love is demonstrated.

Agape Is Unconditional: God’s Grace and Human Neighbor-Love

Agape is a love indifferent to all kinds of human values. It does not consider whether the objects are lovable or not but assumes that everyone is valuable and precious. In Eros one intends to love those who are regarded as beautiful, charming, brave, intelligent, and all in all valuable; while in Agape, God loves all people, male and female, young and old, rich and poor, smart and slow, and righteous and evil without discrimination, and even human merits cannot make any difference.

Agape is a love for the sake of others, which moves from a superior stage to an inferior stage. Very different from Eros, which is actually a human striving for a better divine world, Agape always descends from the perfect God to our limited human beings by grace. Only through the Christian concept of grace can we limited human beings fully comprehend the meaning of the descending unconditional love of Agape.
Grace is the unmerited divine favor of God toward man. It means to give someone something that he or her does not deserve. In reality, the logic of grace is always contradictory to worldly values. In the realm of grace, no single person is able to earn God's love by his or her good deeds or even firm faith. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

In God’s eyes, according to Christian teachings, one the one hand, we are all equally precious creatures, but on the other hand, we are all equally sinful human beings with an inborn nature inclining to sin. No value distinction of human beings can impress Him to love some of us more than others. “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:45). Nygren hits this point when he says: “Any thought of valuation whatsoever is out of place in connection with fellowship with God . . . It is only when all thought of the worthiness of the object is abandoned that we can understand what Agape is.”25 Jesus Christ turned the world’s values completely up-side-down by His unconditional love. Therefore we cannot grasp the connotation of Agape, especially its unconditional nature, without understanding grace.

In Matthew 20: 1-16, the New Testament, Jesus tells us the parable of workers in the vineyard: the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner, referring to God, who went out to hire men to work in his vineyard four times a day, respectively about the third hour (9:00), the sixth hour (12:00), the ninth hour (15:00), and the eleventh hour (17:00), but in the end he paid each worker the same amount despite the fact that some men worked more hours than others. By telling this parable, Jesus once again confirms the
membership rule of God’s kingdom that entrance is by the grace of God alone, though it seems somewhat “unreasonable” and “unfair” according to worldly values.

Jesus first proclaims the sinful nature of every human being, then forgives them, and offers them His Agape as a free yet priceless gift. As Nygren points out in his Agape and Eros: “Christian fellowship with God is distinguished from all other kinds by the fact that it depends exclusively on God’s Agape. We have therefore no longer any reason to ask about either the better or worse qualities of those who are the objects of Divine love.”

Christianity not only encourages people to treat each person equally before God, but also recommends them to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and to “love your neighbor as yourself”, which are regarded as the Greatest Commandment throughout the Old Testament. Therefore, people are instructed by Jesus to apply God’s unconditional Agape to their own love for God and neighbors. As Karl Barth writes in Church Dogmatics, this unconditional neighbor-love means “identification with his interests in utter independence of the question of his attractiveness, of what he has to offer, of the reciprocity of the relationship, or repayment in the form of a similar self-giving. In agape-love a man gives himself to another with no expectation of a return, in a pure venture, even at the risk of ingratitude, of his refusal to make a response of love.”

Agape endows human love with a divine ground so that an unconditional human neighbor-love can be achieved. This gracious Agape also motivates human beings to do away with their human judgment and discrimination towards others, which drive the disabled C, the exile WR, and the Betrayer in Notes on Abstract Talks.
into isolated suffering. Only before the almighty God and His amazing grace can human beings enjoy their true equality, which constitutes one of Shi Tiesheng’s ultimate ideals.

**Agape Is Expressed in Salvation: God’s Self-giving and Justice**

Agape has the capacity of creation and salvation. While Shi Tiesheng puts his hope of salvation on Eros, here God’s Agape is revealed in His salvation for all mankind, which is fully expressed by Jesus’ death on the cross. “Nowhere else is there to be found a revelation of Agape comparable to that in the death of Jesus on the cross.”

According to Christianity, Agape is thoroughly demonstrated by God the Father giving away His only Son Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”(John 3:16, 17). Moreover, from Jesus’ perspective, Agape is fully revealed by His willingly taking the two-fold responsibility of being High Priest and being the sacrificed simultaneously in order to atone for all human sins and to make the reconciliation between sinful mankind and Holy God. Jesus asserts his will to sacrifice himself for human beings: “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”(John 10:17, 18). Father and Son are one. Therefore They both participate in this loving action of salvation and taste the suffering of the cross. Agape is fully manifested in giving itself away, as Karl Barth indicates in *Church Dogmatics*:
For in Christian love the loving subject reaches back, as it were, behind itself to that which at the first it denies and from which it turns away, namely, itself: to give itself...away; to give up itself to the one to whom it turns for the sake of this object. To do this the loving man has given up control of himself to place himself under the control of the other, the object of his love. He is free to do this.  

According to Gene Outka, even Barth’s preference for the word “self-giving” rather than “self-sacrifice” has a special meaning: it implies that Agape is completely concerned for the other’s sake. “Perhaps...he [Barth] is preoccupied not so much with loss to the self as with gain for the other. At least references to self-giving seem always explicitly linked to other-regard; one gives by virtue of abandoning one’s own interests.”

Although salvation is an essential subject for many religions or even for those quasi-religious thoughts such as Shi Tiesheng’s, Christianity is different from others in the belief that all mankind are ultimately separated from the Holy God because of sin so that only through Jesus’ death and resurrection can human beings be saved and reconciled with their heavenly father.

The death of Jesus is necessary for Christian salvation in that the Christian God is a God of justice and love simultaneously. He cannot carry out His love at the cost of justice and morality; neither can He regard evil and righteousness as the same through unprincipled forgiveness for sinners. Above all, Agape is a love that is always consistent with justice and morality. Because there must be someone to take the responsibility of expiation and propitiation, Jesus’ death becomes the substitution for our own penalty and
His resurrection becomes our hope in life. "Holy love does not cancel the demands of the law but seeks the fulfillment of these demands. This is why the holy love of God made inevitable the vicarious atonement of Christ on the cross." Therefore, whenever we think about Agape, we should not forget that God’s love is always linked with His justice and holiness:

God is love, but his love exists in tension with his holiness, indeed it is informed by his holiness. There is both a kindness and a severity in God (Rom. 11:22), and neither must be emphasized to the detriment of the other . . . We see a basic distinction between the love and holiness of God but at the same time an interpenetration and indivisibility.

With regard to the application of God’s Agape to human experiences, in *Love, Power, and Justice*, Paul Tillich holds that love should not be achieved at the cost of justice. By saying this, he aims to emphasize the significance of the combination of love and justice:

One should never say that love’s work starts where the work of justice ends . . . It is a clever way of trying to escape the responsibility and the self-restriction demanded by justice. Often, the love which supposedly transcends justice is nothing more than an emotional outburst of self-surrender, alternating with emotional outbursts of hostility.
In addition, God's Agape, which is expressed in salvation, also ensures us that a new creation will take place in each believer’s life: “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Romans 6:3-5). Just as we mentioned before, God’s Agape is revealed not only in His salvation but also in His creation, and the latter includes both the first creation of heaven, earth, and all creatures on it and the progressive creation in individual Christian lives. Agape does not recognize values, or it would be indifferent to worldly values, but Agape does create values by motivating believers to extend God’s love to their neighbors and even to their enemies.

The Christian love for enemies is definitely based on God’s unconditional love for sinners. Through unifying the Christian’s life with Jesus’, God’s Agape is able to dwell in human life. In this sense, Agape is a creative love, since being loved is one of the strongest motivation in our lives.

A statement of Nygren clearly displays the relationship of salvation with God’s Agape for sinners: “God has demonstrated His Agape by the giving of His son... Here God’s love meets us, not merely as an idea of love, but as the mightiest of realities, as self-sacrificing love, the love that pour itself out even for the most deeply fallen and lost.” 35

God Is Agape: God’s Attributes

Most importantly, in Christianity, God is not only the subject of Agape; God Himself is Agape. 1 John 4:8, 16 says, “Whoever does not love does not know God,
because God is love.” and “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” God Himself is the source of all loves. And in God’s eyes, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (I Corinthians 13:4-8)

Furthermore, Agape is able to exalt and purify other human loves from their previously restricted states. By living in Christ, Christians’ love for neighbors, enemies, family members, friends, spouses, and even for God are not merely their own but an extension of God’s Agape and a loving response to His Agape. In *Love, Power, and Justice*, Paul Tillich insists on the influence of Agape on Eros when he talks about his anticipating holy community: “Agape cuts into the detached safety of a merely aesthetic Eros. It does not deny the longing toward the good and the true and its divine source, but it prevents it from becoming an aesthetic enjoyment without ultimate seriousness.”

To summarize, in Shi Tiesheng’s *Notes on Abstract Talks*, God is merely a fate-designer who has nothing to do with love, while Eros serves as the salvation for human beings. However, from a Christian perspective, God is of Agape, and actually He Himself is Agape. God’s salvation is a clear revelation of His Agape and His deep concern for human fates. Eros is by nature neither good nor evil, depending on how people treat it, whether people worship it as a sovereign ruler at all cost, or simply enjoy it on the right track. A chart cited from Anders Nygren’s *Agape and Eros* is helpful for us to get a holistic impression of the characteristics of Agape and Eros respectively:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eros</th>
<th>Agape</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eros is acquisitive desire and longing.</td>
<td>1) Agape is sacrificial giving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Eros is an upward movement.</td>
<td>2) Agape comes down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eros is man’s way to God.</td>
<td>3) Agape is God’s way to man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eros is man’s effort: it assumes that man’s salvation is his own work.</td>
<td>4) Agape is God’s grace: salvation is the work of Divine love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eros is egocentric love, a form of self-assertion of the highest, noblest, sublimest kind.</td>
<td>5) Agape is unselfish love, it “seeketh not its own”, it gives itself away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Eros seeks to gain its life, a life divine, immortalised.</td>
<td>6) Agape loves the life of God, therefore dares to “lose it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Eros is the will to get and possess which depends on want and need.</td>
<td>7) Agape is freedom in giving, which depends on wealth and plenty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Eros is primarily man’s love; God is the object of Eros. Even when it is attributed to man, Agape is patterned on Divine love.</td>
<td>8) Agape is primarily God’s love; God is Agape. Even when it is attributed to God, Eros is patterned on human love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Eros is determined by the quality, the beauty and worth, of its object; it is not spontaneous, but “evoked”, “motivated”.</td>
<td>9) Agape is sovereign in relation to its object, and is directed to both “the evil and the good”; it is spontaneous, “overflowing”, “unmotivated”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Eros recognizes value in its object – and loves it.</td>
<td>10) Agape loves – and creates value in its object.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion: Shi Tiesheng’s Eros, Christian Agape, And Salvation for Humans

I have analyzed in this thesis some aesthetic and philosophical values of Shi Tiesheng’s Notes on Abstract Talks, especially literary devices which include the characters’ symbolic names, the characters’ open and interchangeable fates, and the door as a metaphor, etc. I also think highly of his deep interest and exploration in the issue of human fate, suffering, and salvation and his valuable attempt to seek an ultimate love as a way of deliverance. Notably, Notes on Abstract Talks contains much religious spirit about human fate, morality, salvation, etc., during the process of pursuing love. Therefore, this work deserves to be considered a milestone on the contemporary Chinese literary scene which is filled with various literary works that pursue commercial and critical success.

Shi Tiesheng, however, gives too much ultimate responsibility to a limited love, and fails to understand that Eros cannot be thoroughly achieved by itself without an impetus from a higher type of love; as a result, he falls into a confused state with many perplexing questions concerning such issues as the devotion, equality, exclusiveness, and morality of love. By elevating the status of Eros, Shi Tiesheng actually proclaims that “love (Eros) is God,” while we Christians believe that “God is love (Agape).” Although Shi Tiesheng’s attempt is of great value in delivering people from their ultimate predicaments, unfortunately, his aim can hardly be fulfilled, since Eros itself has too many limitations to be the ultimate type of love.

Indeed, only Agape, God’s love, can carry out salvation. Actually, Agape itself is the real reason for God’s salvation for human beings. From a Christian point of view, God is not a fate-designer or play director as the one in Notes on Abstract Talks, but a
loving God who is not only omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, but who also cares deeply about each human life. In Christianity, God is love (Agape), and it is Agape that exists as the ultimate love.

From a Christian position, this thesis tries to answer some of Shi Tiesheng’s queries about love, which are mainly caused by the limitations of Eros. Meanwhile, my goal is by no means to despise any human love, but to suggest that we put everything where it is supposed to be: we should neither elevate a limited love to an ultimate position, nor lower a divine love to a vulgar state. Whenever I think of Jesus, who is wholly man and wholly God at the same time, on the cross, I assume that the world would be better if human love could be practiced in a way that allows Agape to be involved, and that all three types of human love, Storge, Philia, and Eros, can become more permanent and virtuous, and less selfish, through knowing an unconditional and ultimate love – Agape.
ENDNOTES


3 The stories of Notes on Abstract Talks occur in a unique period of modern Chinese history. By giving several indirect statements, Shi Tiesheng alludes to the turbulent summer of June 1989 when the Tiananmen Massacre took place in Beijing. See pp. 16, 17, and 281.


6 Jia Baoyu 贾宝玉, one of the most important characters in The Dream of Red Chamber 红楼梦, a great traditional Chinese novel. Jia Baoyu believes that girls are made of water and boys are made of mud so that when he is with girls he feels fresh and clean, but when he is with boys he feels stupid and nasty. See Cao, Xueqin 曹雪芹, Hong Lou Meng 红楼梦, Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju 中华书局, 1996.

7 English translation see Legge, James trans., The Confucian Analects, the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean, New York: Dover Publications, 1971.


10 Albert Einstein put forward that “God does not play dice with the universe” when he was debating with Niels Bohr on quantum mechanics in the 1920s and 1930s. See Jammer, Max, Einstein and Religion: Physics and Theology, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.


20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.


23 For more details about the sad story among Gu Cheng 顾城, his wife Xie Ye 谢烨 (Lei Mi 雷米), and his girlfriend Li Ying 李英 (Ying'er 英儿 or Mai Qi 麦琪), please see: Gu Cheng 顾城 and Lei Mi 雷米, *Hun Duan Jiliudao 魂断激流岛*, Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe 四川人民出版社, 1995; and Mai Qi 麦琪 (Li Ying 李英), *Ying'er 莹儿*, Beijing: Huayi Chubanshe 华艺出版社, 1993.


26 Ibid. p. 75.


30 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, p. 733


33 Ibid., pp. 32-33.


35 Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p. 120.

36 Tillich follows Plato by defining Eros as “the driving force in all cultural creativity and in all mysticism” so that Eros “has the greatness of a divine-human power”. As for sexual desire, he puts it under the classification of Libido. See Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*, pp. 117-118.

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