Individual Narrative and Literary Transgression in Me and Ditan

Yuzi Li *

School of Liberal Arts, Shandong University, Dongying 257300, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 3926966241@qq.com

Abstract. Current scholarship on Shi Tiesheng's Me and Ditan has largely focused on the intrinsic characteristics of the text itself. Relatively few studies approach the work through the author's notion that "literature is transgression," nor do they integrate individual narrative with the progressive process of "transgression" embedded in literary expression to interpret the text. This paper situates Me and Ditan within the theoretical horizon of literary transgression. Centering on two key elements—individual narrative and literary transgression—it illustrates three stages of transgressive progression in the text: from individual "incompleteness" to spiritual "wholeness," from personal suffering to metaphorical representation of the era, and from survival within a historical context to reflection on human existence. The internal logic of this progression takes the Ditan as the starting point of transgression, gradually constructing the relationship between individual narrative and literary transgression. In doing so, the paper offers a referential framework for contemporary literary creation that connects personal experience with historical conditions and human nature.

Keywords: Me and Ditan, Shi Tiesheng, individual narrative, literary transgression.

1. Introduction

Literature is a form of linguistic practice marked by the author's personal characteristics. Shi Tiesheng's individual narratives are grounded in personal experience, and thus possess distinct uniqueness and creativity. The "individual experience" referred to here not only points to Shi Tiesheng's real-life experiences, but also encompasses his experiential world. Disability brought him extraordinary traumatic experiences. In the despair and struggle caused by trauma, he entered the inner world of his own experience. Through philosophical reflection, he came to see himself, the universe, and all living beings. Me and Ditan presents his personal experiences, in which the narrative voice of the "author"—namely the "I"—is particularly vivid. The "I" continuously engages in dialogue with himself. From a methodological perspective, this dialogue is made possible because Shi Tiesheng constantly crosses boundaries.

Boundary-crossing constitutes the underlying tone of Shi Tiesheng's writing. In his essay Writing and Crossing Boundaries, Shi Tiesheng first proposes that "literature is boundary-crossing; the vitality of literature lies in unruly thought, or the primal desire to transgress boundaries. If everyone could live smoothly and contentedly within established boundaries, literature would never occur." He cites Dream of the Red Chamber as an example, arguing that at its core it deals with the human condition—that is, the eternal existential essence from which one can never escape. Therefore, "existence must be finite; otherwise, it would not be existence. The finite must inevitably stand in opposition to the infinite; otherwise neither could exist. And this opposition is destined to bring solitude to human life, destined to generate longing for others, and destined to compel one to constantly transcend various limitations."

It is precisely because, within finite existence, we cannot suppress our yearning for the Other and for others, that we create "literature" through repeated attempts to transcend boundaries. Yet the "construction" of others in literature is merely another form of being "constructed." As Shi Tiesheng states: "A writer may not necessarily be able to shape a real other (a so-called vivid and lifelike character of flesh and blood); a writer can only shape a real self—this has also been said by predecessors." Thus, the process of shaping others is ultimately a process of projecting one's own mind onto others. In other words, "boundary-crossing" is the prerequisite for the emergence of creative impulse, but creation inevitably returns to the authentic self. Therefore, Shi Tiesheng's writing is fundamentally author-centered.

Shi Tiesheng once mentioned in an interview that Me and Ditan is a prose work with autobiographical and confessional qualities. He places himself into the creative subject with a real identity and expresses himself candidly. As a result, the depiction of scenery, narration of events, and portrayal of people are saturated with emotion from beginning to end, all expressed as genuine feelings. At the same time, in the writing of Me and Ditan, we can also see how the author re-examines and reflects upon the self, thereby completing a transformation of identity from "imperfection" to "perfection." The distinctiveness of Me and Ditan lies in the fact that "Ditan" is the place where boundary-crossing first begins, and also where Shi Tiesheng's identity as a writer was initially established. The reason for using Me and Ditan as an example for textual analysis is that it elevates individual experience through boundary-crossing, allowing personal narratives of suffering to carry implicit metaphors of the era, and further expanding into paradoxes of human existence. Personal narrative originates from the impulse to transgress boundaries, and boundary-crossing enables personal narrative to exist within its historical context while also transcending it. Therefore, each act of boundary-crossing constitutes the establishment of a higher realm. Through the tension between limitation and the attempt to break through it, Shi Tiesheng repeatedly interrogates the fate and destiny of individuals and of humanity as a whole, allowing themes such as life and death, time and space, finitude and infinity, fate and meaning to be conveyed through literary works.

2. From Individual "Brokenness" to Spiritual "Wholeness": Self-Transcendence Through Traumatic Experience

Shi Tiesheng writes in Me and Ditan: "Living is not for the sake of writing; writing is for the sake of living." This sentence reveals the vital significance of "writing" as a spiritual pillar for Shi Tiesheng. His relationship with writing also emerged as a way of resolving his own existential struggle—giving himself a reason "not to commit suicide." The core of Shi Tiesheng's struggle lay in his disability: at the most brilliant and arrogant moment of his youth, he suddenly "lost the use of his legs." For a young man who had once been physically whole, this was an immense blow. Yet more terrifying than disability itself was the deadly nature of despair. In The Sickness Unto Death, Kierkegaard describes such a condition: "Once despair appears, it indicates that the person is in despair. Therefore, for a person who remains in despair and has not yet been saved, nothing decisive can ever be said at any moment; for whenever his despair is triggered, it immediately reveals that his entire life has always been in despair." If such despair is never cured, it becomes a "sickness unto death." At that time, Shi Tiesheng stood on the edge of this "illness," a state that can be clearly seen in Me and Ditan: after losing the use of his legs, his temperament became irritable and unpredictable—"Watching the geese flying north across the sky, I would suddenly smash the glass in front of me; listening to Li Guyi's sweet singing voice, I would abruptly fling whatever was at hand against the surrounding walls." In sorrow and anger, he questioned why fate treated him so cruelly, and in near despair, he struggled between living and dying.

It was precisely the limitations and inconvenience of his body that forced Shi Tiesheng to reduce his external activities and gradually enter a life of contemplation. It was also through this inward search that he encountered "writing" and discovered "art." Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his anthropological research, once drew the conclusion that art provides fulfillment for desires that cannot be satisfied in reality. For Shi Tiesheng, "writing" became an outlet for an imperfect subject. He transformed accumulated psychological trauma from an unconscious state into symbolic expression, and through this process, he released his suffering. Seeking psychological compensation in response to traumatic experience became the psychological mechanism of Shi Tiesheng's creation, and his meditative mode of writing served as a pathway through which this mechanism could be realized. Wang Anyi once imagined the possibility of "if Shi Tiesheng had not been disabled," arguing that his becoming a writer was not inevitable, but rather that disability shaped his unique way of observing the world. The delicate descriptions in Me and Ditan—of all living things in Ditan, the cycles of the four seasons, and the vitality of life—are all inseparable from his traumatic experience. He distanced

himself from grand narratives such as history and the era, devoting himself instead to excavating the inner world of human beings and exploring the vast yet ordinary path of natural life. Writing originates from an inner impulse to compensate for deficiency and attain wholeness; yet in the process of writing, Shi Tiesheng unconsciously completed a transformation of emotional identity—from a sufferer of hardship, to a disoriented wanderer, then to an observer, and finally to an active interpreter of fate. This transformation is embodied in the narrative of Me and Ditan:

In the desolation of Ditan, he empathizes with his own sorrow. “I often feel that there is a sense of destiny in all this: as if this ancient place existed in order to wait for me, having endured countless vicissitudes and waited there for more than four hundred years.” “Over those four hundred years, it gradually eroded the gaudy glazed tiles under the eaves of the old hall, faded the ostentatious vermilion on the walls, collapsed sections of high walls and scattered the carved stone balustrades. The old cypress trees around the altar grew ever more solemn and secluded, while wild grasses and tangled vines flourished freely and boldly everywhere.” Over four centuries, all youthful splendor had long since fallen away. Time stripped Ditan of its former magnificence, leaving it without the capital of dazzling brilliance. It could only stand quietly alone in the twilight, reminiscing in loneliness and melancholy—lamenting past prosperity and glory, and mourning today’s decay and desolation. In that moment, the aged Ditan and the young yet disabled “I” resonated with each other through the similarity of fate. Ditan became a companion in suffering, a mirror of the narrator’s inner world. Shi Tiesheng enters and leaves Ditan in his wheelchair, examining himself as if repeatedly searching for an exit for his soul.

In the vitality of the garden, he senses the pulse of life. “Bees hover like a small mist, steadily suspended in midair; ants shake their heads and stroke their antennae, suddenly as if understanding something, then turn and hurry away; ladybugs grow impatient, tired, pray once, and then spread their wings and, with a flutter, rise into the sky; on the tree trunk remains a cicada shell, lonely like an empty house; dewdrops roll along the blades of grass, gather, bend the grass, and then crash down, bursting into countless rays of golden light.” These tiny insects bring endless vitality to this ancient garden. As Shi Tiesheng says, “the garden is desolate but not decayed.” The continuous rustling sound is not only the sound of plants competing to grow, but also the sound of the author’s wounded and broken heart healing. Gradually, he becomes an observer—no longer merely immersed in his own sorrow, but watching the people who come and go in Ditan with doubt and reflection on life. The unpredictability of fate broadens his vision, allowing him to see that people in the world ultimately arrive at the same destination through different paths.

In the flow of people and things, he searches for the value of life. The grassland around the altar is filled with the tracks of “my” wheelchair. After years of contemplating death and questioning why people live, he finally understands: “Once a person is born, it is no longer a question that can be debated, but simply a fact handed to him by God; and when God hands us this fact, He has already guaranteed its outcome, so death is not something that requires urgent pursuit.” At the end, Shi Tiesheng writes: “Yet the sun, at every moment, is both the setting sun and the rising sun.” Through repeated reflection, Shi Tiesheng ultimately becomes an active interpreter of fate.

Through the textual voice of Me and Ditan, the author completes a transformation of identity, and every word of the text reflects the author’s shadow. Under the trauma of disability, Shi Tiesheng seeks psychological compensation; thus, he connects his own fate with that of Ditan. Through contemplation of nature, love, and life, he compensates for physical deficiency and reaches the other shore of existence through spiritual transcendence. Finally, through his personal interpretation within the text, he also confirms his identity as a writer and achieves a positive emotional transformation.

3. From Personal Suffering to an Allegory of the Times: The Expansion of Meaning in Illness Writing

Shi Tiesheng first turned to writing as a result of his disability. Disability therefore inevitably became a traumatic experience that he repeatedly wrote about, which can be regarded as a form of

personal trauma literature. Yet Shi Tiesheng was never an author detached from his time. Though he appears to exist outside the historical moment, he in fact continuously participated in it and sought to clarify it in his own way. As Shi Tiesheng himself stated: "The accusation of being 'detached from the spirit of the times' cannot be imposed upon any artistic school, because art begins precisely in moments of spiritual confusion. It begins to search when confronted with the unknown in reality, and no one can prescribe for it a 'spirit of the times' that must be obeyed. It searches, it creates—only then is it art. Whatever era it belongs to, it is part of that era's spirit of the times."

When we situate Shi Tiesheng's life and writing within the historical context in which they emerged, it is not difficult to see that his entire body of work serves as an annotation to his own understanding of the relationship between writing and the times. Born in Beijing in 1951, sent to the countryside in Yan'an in 1969, beginning his wheelchair life in 1972, and reaching the end of his life journey in 2010, Shi Tiesheng personally experienced the transformation from an era of political struggle to an era of consumerism. In Me and Ditan, his writing simultaneously contains his boundary-crossing at the personal level and his deconstruction of these two historical eras.

Shi Tiesheng grew up in an "era of struggle" characterized by tension and a lack of rationality. Overwhelming confidence and heroic passion were prominent traits of that time. Yet behind such confidence lay blindness, and behind such passion lay impulse. The thinking habits of this era were dogmatic and authoritarian, while its behavioral patterns were extreme and narrow. It treated blind obedience as virtue and hatred as strength. The discourse of struggle profoundly shaped people's lives, but its deepest impact was the destruction of the soul: humanity, humanism, human rights, dignity, and human value were publicly trampled upon, and through violent denunciation people gradually became accustomed to suffering and death. However, such indifferent—even ruthless—discourse caused Shi Tiesheng to tremble and reflect, pushing him toward a renewed focus on the human being as such. This concern reached its peak in his illness writing after becoming disabled.

In Me and Ditan, we do not see the violence and hostility of that era, nor do we sense any numbness toward life and death. On the contrary, the text attends to every life and every individual with rational and solemn language, thereby completing a deconstruction of the discourse of the times. It does not explicitly write about "struggle," yet everywhere it is permeated with reflection on the anti-human nature of the struggle era. The Ditan in the text is not a "battlefield" of political struggle; it is instead a desolate space far removed from the battlefield. Shi Tiesheng observes various fragmented forms of life within the garden. These "tiny lives," often ignored, constitute an implicit resistance to the historical condition in which humanity is trampled upon. The grand narrative of the struggle era dissolved the independent existence of the individual, yet in Me and Ditan Shi Tiesheng persistently attends to individual lived experience. He writes about himself "thinking with complete concentration for hours about death," about the confusion after losing the use of his legs—"unable to find work, unable to find a way forward, suddenly almost unable to find anything at all"—and about his mother, who "quietly went out to hide" and "secretly listened for any movement from me," bearing her concern with restraint and endurance. Such writing does not reproduce the violent narrative of the era; rather, it penetrates into individual suffering. In essence, it is a resistance to the struggle era's trampling of human dignity. When the era attempted to draw people into collective struggle, Shi Tiesheng instead rebuilt individual value in Ditan—value that had been erased by the times.

In adulthood, Shi Tiesheng experienced the "transitional era" of the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, "economic construction" became the central focus of life. People's interests and passions were increasingly drawn toward the desire for money and material existence, gradually forming a "new consciousness" and a "postmodern fashion." As Livingston has pointed out, its characteristics include: "first, a sense of pluralism and relativism, which is largely non-ideological and pragmatic; second, a rather romantic hedonism." Literature at the time was clearly shaped by these new social fashions. Many works fueled the trend, rationalizing "pragmatism" and romanticizing "hedonism." This mode of writing—one that objectified life and literature—deepened the spiritual and cultural crisis of the consumer era.

However, although Me and Ditan is a work of the 1990s, it reveals no trace of nihilism or hedonism. From the perspective of historical allegory, "Ditan" not only symbolizes the search for an individual spiritual world in the era of struggle, but also symbolizes an exploration of life's value, love, and beauty in the consumer era. In Me and Ditan, Shi Tiesheng affirms the value of ideals and love. He writes of his mother's "difficult fate, resilient will, and unassuming love." He writes of a couple walking in the garden, of a young man who persistently sings year after year, and of an imperfect girl with intellectual disability. These figures carry no utilitarian calculation; instead, they embody resilience and warmth, making concrete the "wish for love" that Shi Tiesheng continually upheld. Regarding the avant-garde cliché that "the only demand of life is to live," Shi Tiesheng reflected for a long time, yet he "could not agree." His persistent questioning of "how to live" in Me and Ditan precisely reveals his refusal to allow life to stop at mere survival. He could not accept an overly pragmatic attitude toward life—one that is satisfied only with eating, drinking, defecating, and sleeping, a form of animalistic existence. Thus, he repeatedly emphasizes the meaning of ideals and the value of love, and ultimately finds an answer through the people and things in Ditan and through his mother's love: the meaning of living lies in reverence for life and responsibility toward love. This constitutes a powerful refutation of nihilism and hedonism.

Missing Ditan serves as Shi Tiesheng's spiritual repositioning of this space after Me and Ditan. Yet it deepens reflection on the "starting point of writing" by incorporating the historical context, becoming Shi Tiesheng's response to the consumer culture prevalent in the 1990s. "Noise" was a defining feature of the consumer era. People emphasized market competition; everything seemed convertible into a commodity, and writing was no exception. In response to this phenomenon, Shi Tiesheng mentions Roland Barthes's Writing Degree Zero and offers his own understanding: "In my view, the zero degree of writing is the starting point of life. The place from which writing begins is the inherent difficulty of life; the ultimate search of writing is the soul's earliest gaze into the distance." Therefore, he strongly opposed the act of pushing writing onto an "arena," because in that moment writing had already become a form of "hegemony." His longing for Ditan lies precisely in the fact that it provided him with the purest starting point for writing and the quietest process of writing—an echo that corresponds closely with the creation of Me and Ditan. Under the power of consumerism, rankings made "love" noisy, "beauty" ostentatious, and "sincerity" gradually degenerate into a fashionable advertisement slogan. Thus, after the publication of Me and Ditan in 1991, the literary world's enthusiasm for the name Shi Tiesheng and for his writing reached an unprecedented level. As Han Shaogong remarked: "The publication of Me and Ditan meant that for the literary world of that year (1991), even if there had been no other works, it would still have been a year of abundance."

Shi Tiesheng was never outside the era of struggle or the era of consumerism. He consistently participated deeply in every surge of contemporary literary history through a mode of presence that was paradoxically "absent." What he demonstrated was a more complete attitude toward life and a clearer literary spirit. Thus, he continuously used individual writing to metaphorize the illnesses of the times and offered his own remedy, soothing the confused hearts of each era. His writing of disabled personal experience no longer belongs solely to himself, but instead appears between past, present, and future. Me and Ditan becomes an allegory of the times: in Ditan, he heard the call of the era reaching toward him.

4. From Historical Survival to Human Existence: The Elevation of Value Within Existential Questions

Shi Tiesheng's Me and Ditan has been read, received, interpreted, and empathized with by people across different historical periods. The reason lies in the ideas conveyed by his writing—ideas that transcend a particular era and resonate with the fate of humankind as a whole. In Me and Ditan, Shi Tiesheng takes his own suffering as narrative material, yet he moves beyond the narrowness of individual experience and the limits of a specific historical context, expressing a profound understanding of—and concern for—human destiny. He "asks without end amid suffering without

end," extending reflection from his own disability to the brokenness of humanity, and further to questions of human fate and the essence of existence. In the end, he constructs a life philosophy centered on inward searching and redemption through love.

In Shi Tiesheng's writing, disability is by no means an exclusive label of disabled individuals; rather, it becomes a universal predicament of human existence. Here disability signifies a kind of deficiency—those obstacles that stand between human beings and an ideal state—and carries the sorrow of incompleteness. Even Shi Tiesheng's friend Liu Sinian, though physically able-bodied, still bears his own pain and grief. The long-distance runner mocked by fate in Me and Ditan trains relentlessly, yet due to contingencies he can never realize his dream of having "his name posted in the news display window." In the end, a coach tells him: "If only I had discovered you ten years earlier." Through both his own experience and the experiences of others, Shi Tiesheng comes to recognize human finitude and a sense of powerlessness under destiny, and thus asks: if the ground tone of life is always accompanied by despair, then what is it that drives people to go on living?

Shi Tiesheng repeatedly emphasizes in Me and Ditan: "A human being's true name is: desire." "Desire" first became an object of systematic reflection on the human condition with Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer advances the view that the human being is desire, and that the aim of life is the satisfaction of desire—yet satisfaction, in fact, is impossible. "All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is truly always negative and never positive… Want, that is, deficiency, is the precondition of all pleasure." Life is therefore fundamentally a condition of lack, and human existence becomes a paradoxical struggle between desire and the impossibility of its fulfillment. If desire were fully realized, the human being would no longer exist.

A central myth in the writings of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan offers a similar structure. Lacan recounts the Greek myth of Actaeon, a hunter who follows his hounds to a spring in a cave and accidentally encounters the goddess Diana bathing. As punishment, Actaeon is transformed into a stag and torn apart by his own hounds. In Lacan's reading, Diana represents the ultimate end of life, while Actaeon represents the seeker of meaning; yet at the moment he draws infinitely close to truth, he is devoured by it. And yet humanity can never cease its pursuit of desire, because once it stops, the meaning of existence disappears with it. Existence and desire thus form a contradictory yet symbiotic pair.

This is why, throughout Shi Tiesheng's writing, we repeatedly encounter the paradoxes of existence. In Me and Ditan, although the "I" is disabled and near despair, "writing" sustains him and keeps him alive. The choice to write is a kind of psychological compensation after disability, but writing can only repair brokenness on the level of the spirit; it cannot truly change the physical conditions that make life painful and unsatisfactory. Thus, even if the "I" pursues writing endlessly, he can never fulfill the original desire. It is precisely this "unfulfillment" that prevents him from abandoning hope for life. The long-distance runner continues to compete because he wants to realize, even once, the dream of having his name publicly displayed. Dreams are not essentially different from desire—only subjectively elevated and endowed with greater value and meaning. Yet dreams cannot always be realized, and their unrealizability can sometimes be a matter of fate.

Similarly, the characters in Notes on the Imaginary (Wuxu Bij i) are all driven by some form of lack, continuously seeking completion and compensation. For example, the painter Zizi persistently paints a gigantic white feather because, in childhood, he was wounded by discrimination from a noble and cold family symbolized by that feather. He therefore tries to depict the "feather" as an object through which he can secretly express dissatisfaction and heal childhood trauma. The generative mechanism of artistic creation is inevitably shaped by the unconscious. The painter may not consciously recognize the deeper meaning behind his actions, yet his behavior nonetheless slides uncontrollably into an Actaeon-like paradox—and finds a plausible explanation within the existential structure of desire and being.

However, the profundity of Shi Tiesheng's thought does not lie merely in his recognition that human existence is a paradoxical predicament full of resistance and conflict. It lies even more in the fact that he sees the truth of life and yet continues to love life. Facing human limitation and the infinity

of desire, Shi Tiesheng does not remain trapped in existential melancholy; instead, he steps outside it in search of a path toward redemption. Fate is an irresistible force; before this "god-like" mysterious power, human subjectivity appears profoundly small. It is precisely this sense of abandonment that turns Shi Tiesheng's gaze inward. Ultimately, in inward searching, he finds a spiritual fulcrum that balances destiny and agency.

First, what is sought "inwardly" is a kind of openness and calm in the face of human change and the unpredictability of fate. In Me and Ditan, the author situates himself in nature and observes, as a spectator, the seasonal cycles, the repetition of time and space, the circulation of people. Gradually, he acquires a measure of detachment and serenity toward life's contingencies. Second, what is sought "inwardly" is human feeling itself. In Shi Tiesheng's life philosophy, love becomes the core force that repairs life's vulnerabilities. Most prominent is the power of maternal love. Confronted with her son's disability, the mother's inner suffering and anxiety are doubled. She tirelessly seeks medical help for him, and fearing that he might commit suicide, she secretly follows him to Ditan every day: "In this garden it is not only that everywhere there are the tracks of my wheels; wherever there are the tracks of my wheels, there are also my mother's footprints." Yet the young "I" remains immersed in his own sorrow and never once thinks from his mother's perspective; nor does the mother ever say, "Think of me." These calm, unrepeatable lines carry a dense and full emotional weight. When Me and Ditan narrates the small moments between "I" and the mother, it avoids dramatic expression. Shi Tiesheng suspends and conceals the grand meanings of this supreme human love, speaking instead in a restrained—almost repressed—tone about several seemingly ordinary incidents and the irreparable pain brought by his mother's early death.

While maternal love is expressed in an understated and plain manner, it nonetheless receives a full section in Me and Ditan. By contrast, the expression of romantic love in the text is deeply hidden, leaving almost no trace. Shi Tiesheng writes: "If there are things I did not say, Ditan, do not think I have forgotten. I have forgotten nothing. But some things are only fit to be stored away. They cannot be spoken, nor can they be thought, and yet they cannot be forgotten. They cannot become language; they cannot become language—once they become language, they are no longer what they were. They are a hazy warmth and loneliness, a mature hope and despair. Their territory is only in two places: the heart and the grave." This passage is extremely oblique, and for a long time it remained puzzling. Not until he wrote Ditan and the Past did Shi Tiesheng explicitly reveal that Me and Ditan contains a buried love story, recalling with greater clarity the former lover and their romance in Ditan. The beginning of that relationship brought hope and passion to Shi Tiesheng after his disability; its end dealt him a heavy blow, producing an inexpressible pain. Six years after the publication of Me and Ditan, Shi Tiesheng finally shared his anxiety in Notes on the Old House: he had love, but he was afraid to look into its future. This intertwined state of loving and fearing becomes a recurring theme in his work, and also a revelation of the human emotional structure: human beings are finite beings—capable of love, and also capable of fear—and love and fear often interweave. This mode of writing and understanding begins from personal experience yet transcends it, carrying universal significance. In Ditan and the Past, Shi Tiesheng's attitude toward love further changes: he becomes more open and courageous in facing the relationship, and comes to believe that the meaning of love lies in the process rather than the outcome.

While the writing of his contemporaries often remained at the level of social and historical reality, Shi Tiesheng, in Me and Ditan, accomplishes a "boundary-crossing" beyond the times and enters metaphysical reflection. From his own experience and that of others, he perceives the universality of human brokenness. Such "disability" seems to exist in everyone, because reality, reason, the body, war, fate, and many other forces expose human deficiency. And the redemption of this deficiency can only appeal to dreams, spirit, art, faith—namely, to transcend brokenness one must turn toward the spiritual dimension and seek redemption through love.

5. Conclusion

Shi Tiesheng once heard, in Ditan, the sound of the suona—"at times mournful, at times joyful; at times tender, at times desolate." He wrote: "I heard clearly and soberly that it resounded in the past, resounded in the present, resounded in the future, circling and drifting, never dispersing through eternity." That endlessly reverberating suona sound symbolizes the multiplicity and eternity of life itself. It blends the complex undertones of sorrow and joy, tenderness and bleakness, echoing Shi Tiesheng's understanding of life. At the same time, this sound transcends past, present, and future, symbolizing a shared resonance of human existence: each individual searches for meaning amid suffering and happiness. Life experience is not merely personal; it is also boundary-crossing, capable of surpassing the individual, crossing historical eras, and reaching toward eternity. In Me and Ditan, Shi Tiesheng, grounded in individual narrative and guided by the spiritual conviction that "literature is boundary-crossing," accomplishes an intellectual leap from personal spiritual predicament to a clarified vision of human existence. This leap exists within its era, metaphorizing the spiritual illness of the time, and yet also stands beyond the era, carrying reflections on the existential condition of humanity. "Ditan" embodies both geographical and spiritual dimensions and serves as the starting point of boundary-crossing. It not only witnesses the author's personal growth but also inspires him to transcend the self, to perceive the universal limitations of humankind under the overwhelming currents of history, and ultimately to achieve spiritual transcendence through inward searching and faith in love.

In today's fast-paced social context, we often fall into individual spiritual dilemmas. The meaning of life becomes difficult to grasp in an era where all values are disenchanted. Reality and material concerns saturate daily life, pushing people relentlessly forward. Gabriel García Márquez once wrote in One Hundred Years of Solitude: "We move along this eternal journey of life, running through hardships, reborn through setbacks, sorrow clinging to our bodies, pain scattered across the ground. We are exhausted, yet cannot stop; we suffer, yet cannot escape." Such a condition is the norm of human life. We cannot avoid the suffering of reality; we can only strive to seek redemption. The "transcendental questioning" in Me and Ditan strips away the utilitarian outer shell of reality and reaches directly into the essence of human existence. Generation after generation of readers, through his words, not only come to recognize their own limitations but also discover the spiritual strength to transcend them. His writing also offers a valuable inspiration for contemporary literary creation: only by rooting itself in the author's authentic lived experience and breaking through fixed narrative boundaries can literature remain connected to its time while reaching the shared spiritual homeland of humanity.

References

(I) Monographs

[1] Shi, Tiesheng. *Wo yu Ditan* (*Me and Ditan*). Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1st ed., 2024.

[2] Shi, Tiesheng. *Bingxi Suibi* (*Fragments from the Gaps of Illness*). Changsha: Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2017, p. 63.

[3] Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Sickness unto Death*. Beijing: China Artificial Publishing House, 1st ed., 1997, p. 12.

[4] Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. Translated by Wei Qichang. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, Oct. 2013, pp. 574 – 575.

(II) Journal Articles / Theses

[1] Shi, Tiesheng. "Xiezuo yu Yuejie" ("Writing and Crossing Boundaries"). *Jinri Jiaoyu* (*Today's Education*), 2017, Issue Z1, p. 26.

[2] Wang, Anyi. "Tangruo Shi Tiesheng Bu Canji" ("If Shi Tiesheng Had Not Been Disabled"). *Wenxuejie* (*Literary World*), 2011, No. 4.

[3] Zhang, Jun. “Shi Tiesheng yu Dangdai Wenxueshi Shuxie” (“Shi Tiesheng and the Writing of Contemporary Literary History”). *Journal of the School of Chinese Language and Literature, Nanjing Normal University*, 2009, No. 1.

[4] Sun, Ruosheng. “Shi Tiesheng zai Riben de Yijie yu Duzhe Pingjia—Geti Xushi yu Wenxue de Yuejie” (“The Translation and Reception of Shi Tiesheng in Japan: Individual Narratives and the Boundary-Crossing of Literature”). *Xiaoshuo Pinglun* (*Fiction Review*), 2022, No. 6, pp. 119 – 124.

[5] Jing, Yaping. “‘Bugui zhi Si’ yu Wenti Yuejie—Lun Shi Tiesheng Xiaoshuo de Shuangchong Shiyanxing ji Qi Dangxia Qishi” (“‘Unruly Thought’ and Stylistic Boundary-Crossing: On the Dual Experimental Nature of Shi Tiesheng’s Fiction and Its Contemporary Implications”). *Dangdai Went an* (*Contemporary Literary Forum*), 2021, No. 6, pp. 63 – 68.

[6] Chen, Fumin. “Chaoyue Shengsi Daxian zhi Wushang Huanyue—Chongdu Shi Tiesheng de ‘Wo yu Ditan’” (“Supreme Joy Beyond the Limits of Life and Death: Rereading Shi Tiesheng’s *Me and Ditan*”). *Dangdai Wentan* (*Contemporary Literary Forum*), 2009, No. 6, pp. 26 – 28.

[7] Li, Tao. *Canji yu Aiqing* (*Disability and Love*). Master’s thesis, Southwest University, 2011.

[8] Cheng, Guangwei. “Guanyu Jibing de Shidai Yin yu—Chongshi Shi Tiesheng” (“The Historical Metaphor of Illness: Re-understanding Shi Tiesheng”). *Xueshu Yuekan* (*Academic Monthly*), 2013, No. 7, pp. 113 – 121.

[9] Zhang, Wangfei, Lin Daoli, and Wu Zhouwen. “Jiedu Shi Tiesheng de ‘Lingdu’ Shenmei—Dianji ‘Xiangnian Ditan’” (“Interpreting Shi Tiesheng’s ‘Zero-Degree’ Aesthetics: A Reading of *Missing Ditan*”). *Dangdai Wentan* (*Contemporary Literary Forum*), 2011, No. 5, pp. 137 – 139.