

On the Warmth in Yu Hua's *Brothers*

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Abstract: *Brothers*, written by Yu Hua, is another monumental work following *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*. Since its publication, the novel has aroused extensive debate among scholars and readers alike. Previous studies have largely focused on its tragic nature, dramatic structure, and grotesque narrative style. However, this paper seeks to explore a different dimension embedded within the oppressive and absurd social environment of the novel—namely, the persistent presence of warmth and emotional tenderness. As a fundamental emotional force, warmth permeates the entire narrative and becomes a crucial driving force behind character development and plot progression. This paper analyzes the manifestations of warmth in *Brothers* from three perspectives: romantic love, familial affection, and human compassion, in order to reveal how emotional bonds continue to exist and exert influence even under extreme social conditions.

Keywords: Yu Hua; *Brothers*; love; family affection; human compassion

0. Introduction

Yu Hua, one of the most representative figures of contemporary Chinese avant-garde literature, has gained widespread recognition both at home and abroad for his distinctive narrative style and profound thematic concerns. His works have not only received numerous literary awards in China but have also been translated into multiple languages, exerting a lasting influence on world literature. *Brothers*, one of Yu Hua's most significant novels, has attracted sustained academic attention since its publication. Praised for its innovative narrative structure and deep ideological implications, the novel has been widely regarded as a classic of contemporary Chinese literature and has been published globally in various languages.

Emotion plays a central role throughout *Brothers*. It not only propels the development of characters and narrative conflicts but also serves as a key lens through which social transformation and human complexity are revealed. The novel's portrayal of love, kinship, and human compassion endows the text with profound artistic vitality while offering deep reflections on social reality and emotional dilemmas in modern China. Through an in-depth exploration of emotional consciousness in *Brothers*, readers can better understand the novel's artistic value and ideological depth, as well as the influence of historical and cultural contexts on human emotions. Such an exploration also provides new perspectives for contemporary literary criticism and contributes to the continued development of modern Chinese literature.

1. The Connotation and Scope of Emotional Consciousness

Emotional consciousness refers to an individual's perception, understanding, and evaluation of emotions, shaped by social background, life experience, and personal temperament. In literary creation, emotional consciousness plays a vital role in enriching thematic depth and narrative resonance. It functions as the inner driving force of literary meaning, guiding readers toward deeper reflection through delicate emotional representation.

In *Brothers*, emotional consciousness is vividly embodied and serves as a core structural element. Among various emotional forms, brotherhood stands out as the most fundamental. Under an extremely fractured social environment, brotherly affection demonstrates extraordinary resilience. Romantic love represents another crucial emotional dimension in the novel. Whether it is the

redemptive love between Li Lan and Song Fanping or the spiritually transcendent relationship between Song Gang and Lin Hong, love in the novel is repeatedly tested by social cruelty and human weakness, revealing its complexity and depth. Meanwhile, human compassion—often overlooked—also plays an indispensable role. Even in an era characterized by indifference, minor acts of kindness provide warmth and guidance for those lost in darkness.

Through its emotional narrative, *Brothers* enables readers to perceive not only the surface meaning of emotions but also their deeper implications, exposing the complexity of human nature and the cruelty of social reality while affirming the enduring value of humanistic care.

2. The Diversity and Depth of Love

2.1 The Redemptive Love Between Li Lan and Song Fanping

The love between Li Lan and Song Fanping remains deeply moving regardless of historical context.

Li Lan's early life is marked by humiliation and fear after her former husband's scandalous death. Living in shame, she avoids public spaces and even tries to shield her son from exposure to the outside world. As described in the novel, she dares to walk outside only at night, bathing in moonlight rather than sunlight. Her desire for dignity and normalcy is deeply suppressed.

Meeting Song Fanping becomes a turning point in her life. His open and fearless affection—publicly embracing her despite social condemnation—marks a radical contrast to her previous existence. Through his love, Li Lan regains dignity and self-worth. Song Fanping's actions, from publicly defending her honor to tenderly caring for her daily life, embody a rare form of emotional courage in a distorted society. His love grants her the confidence to face the world once more.

Even in the face of political persecution and brutal violence, Song Fanping remains steadfast. His repeated attempts to stand up after being beaten during public denunciations symbolize both physical endurance and emotional fidelity. His final moments, driven by the promise made to his wife, reveal an almost tragic nobility. After his death, Li Lan's silent grief and lifelong mourning testify to the depth of their bond. Her refusal to remarry or even wash her hair becomes a symbol of unwavering devotion.

Their love represents mutual salvation, emotional resilience, and moral integrity. It affirms that even in a dehumanized society, love can preserve dignity and meaning.

2.2 The Tragic and Transcendent Love of Song Gang and Lin Hong

Unlike the redemptive love of the previous generation, the relationship between Song Gang and Lin Hong embodies a tragic form of spiritual attachment.

Although deeply in love, their relationship is marked by suffering and sacrifice. Song Gang's willingness to endure humiliation and physical harm in order to provide for Lin Hong reveals a form of love rooted in self-effacement. His labor, illness, and eventual physical deterioration are all borne silently for her sake.

Their relationship transcends physical desire and becomes a form of spiritual dependence. Even when Lin Hong enters a physical relationship with Li Guangtou, her emotional allegiance remains with Song Gang. This separation of body and soul underscores the novel's critique of materialized love and affirms the primacy of emotional fidelity.

Song Gang's suicide represents both an escape and a final act of devotion. His concern for others even in death—fearing that his illness might infect those who handle his body—demonstrates ultimate moral purity. His farewell letter expresses gratitude, forgiveness, and hope, embodying a love that seeks not possession but liberation.

Their love, tragic yet sincere, forces readers to reflect on the true nature of devotion, sacrifice,

and emotional authenticity.

3. The Depth and Power of Familial Affection

3.1 Brotherhood as Emotional Backbone

Brotherhood constitutes the emotional core of *Brothers*. The relationship between Song Gang and Li Guangtou is defined by loyalty, sacrifice, and unconditional support. From childhood onward, they share hardship and survival, forging a bond that transcends conflict and misunderstanding.

Their mother's dying words encapsulate this bond, urging them to share food and clothing and protect one another for life. Despite later estrangement caused by love and ambition, their brotherhood endures. Even after betrayal and separation, mutual care persists—Song Gang secretly supports Li Guangtou during financial hardship, while Li Guangtou later spares no expense to help his brother.

This enduring bond culminates in Li Guangtou carrying Song Gang's ashes into space, a symbolic gesture representing eternal brotherhood beyond life and death.

3.2 Parental Love and Moral Legacy

Parental affection further deepens the emotional structure of the novel. Li Lan's maternal devotion is expressed through silent endurance and sacrifice. Her efforts to protect her children, even at the cost of her own dignity, exemplify maternal resilience.

Song Fanping represents the ideal father figure—optimistic, gentle, and selfless. He shields his children from harsh realities through humor and tenderness, teaching them resilience through example rather than instruction. His influence is evident in Song Gang's kindness and Li Guangtou's sense of loyalty.

Together, these parental figures provide emotional stability amid social chaos, demonstrating how familial love sustains moral values even under extreme circumstances.

4. The Warmth of Human Compassion

Against a backdrop of cruelty and indifference, small acts of kindness shine with particular significance. Song Fanping's rescue of Liu Shanfeng from a cesspool, despite social ridicule, exemplifies moral courage. Likewise, Su Ma's generosity toward starving children and her grief at Song Fanping's death illustrate the persistence of human compassion.

Environmental descriptions further reinforce this warmth. The recurring imagery of sunlight, dusk, and glowing landscapes contrasts sharply with human suffering, suggesting the persistence of beauty and hope. Even in moments of despair—such as Song Gang's final moments—the natural world remains luminous, symbolizing emotional transcendence.

These moments affirm that compassion, though fragile, continues to exist even in the darkest circumstances.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the theme of warmth in *Brothers* against the backdrop of social fragmentation and moral crisis. Through depictions of love, kinship, and human compassion, Yu Hua reveals the enduring strength of emotional bonds. These emotions not only provide individuals with meaning and dignity but also offer resistance against dehumanization.

Although the novel is filled with violence, absurdity, and suffering, it ultimately affirms the persistence of moral conscience and emotional integrity. Characters such as Li Lan, Song Fanping, Song Gang, and even Lin Hong embody different forms of emotional resilience, demonstrating

that warmth remains an indispensable force in human existence.

In a world governed by upheaval and contradiction, *Brothers* reminds us that history may distort human destiny, but it cannot erase humanity itself. It is this enduring emotional core that gives the novel its lasting power and universal significance.

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