

THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN A POST-ATOMIC BOMBING CITY IN JOHN HERSEY'S *HIROSHIMA*

Ferdinal Ferdinal^{1*}; Muhammad Iqbal²; Chintya Dewi³

^{1,2}English Literature Program, Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University
West Sumatra, Indonesia 25163

³English Literature Program, Faculty of Humanities, Bung Hatta University
West Sumatra 25133

¹ferdinal@hum.unand.ac.id; ²iqbal.student.sasingunand@gmail.com; ³chiadewi212@gmail.com

Received: 2nd January 2025/Revised: 21st July 2025/Accepted: 24th July 2025

How to Cite: Ferdinal, F., Iqbal, M., & Dewi, C. (2025). The struggle for survival in a post-atomic bombing city in John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. *Lingua Cultura*, 19(1), 85-92. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v19i1.12840>

ABSTRACT

Written in the form of literary journalism, Hersey's Hiroshima offers a vivid portrayal of urban life in Hiroshima, providing significant insights into the structure and themes of the book. This literary analysis examines how the novel portrays metropolitan environments and their significance in conveying the concepts of urban settings. Through the application of a sociological approach to literature, the research investigates the fundamental elements of the fiction, particularly its spatial settings, such as streets and buildings, to understand how these environments reflect and shape the social context, mood, and meaning of the narrative. The research findings indicate that the novel portrays urban life through its depiction of Hiroshima's urban landscape, where temporal and social conditions shape the novel's central themes. Hersey's novel Hiroshima exposes the important themes of physical destruction and the resilience of the victims of catastrophe. These main findings underscore the significant role of urban settings in literary journalism, suggesting how Hersey's depiction of Hiroshima's streets and structures enhances the reader's understanding of the catastrophic impact of the Allies' bombing on Japanese urban life.

Keywords: Fictional landscape, Hiroshima, metropolitan environment, post-disaster environment, urban life settings

INTRODUCTION

An urban area is widely understood as a large, dense, and permanent settlement marked by social and cultural diversity. In fiction, urban areas can be depicted through various forms, such as story settings, which consist of the setting of a specific place, time, and social context, as seen in American literature. Howard (2017) asserts that forms and history are crucial in American literature. One of the many American works of literature, whose forms are beautifully made of historical settings, is John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, which provides a portrayal of urban life. To make the work, Hersey conducted interviews with the bombing survivors in Hiroshima after the city was devastated by the bombing tragedy (Gerstle, 2012). By using fiction-writing techniques, *Hiroshima* serves as a

prime example of literary journalism. The book, which was published in 1946, offers a powerful account of the impact of the atomic bombing on the people of *Hiroshima* city, portrayed through the experiences of six survivors.

The New Yorker was the first to publish *Hiroshima*. It recounts the catastrophic events of August 6, 1945, and their aftermath by representing the destructive appearances they cause on the land of Hiroshima City and a psychological exploration of people's survival, resilience, and trauma. Its portrayal of the effects and costs of the bombing received international acclaim, prompting the book to be considered a significant work of 20th-century journalism (Rothman, 1987). Some critics argue that the novel not only narrates the devastation of Hiroshima's urban landscape but also scrutinizes the massive disruption the bombings

cause to Hiroshima's people's social life. Through the experiences of six survivors, Hersey vividly represents the city's transformation from a bustling urban hub to a disrupted, devastated, and unknown landscape.

Relied heavily on the war between the USA and Japan in 1945, causing mammoth devastation, Hersey makes the atomic bombing of Hiroshima stand out as one of the most consequential events in the world. Such a tragedy, coupled with his interviews with the bombing's survivors, inspired Hersey to complete their stories in *Hiroshima*. He describes the city as a fan-shaped urban area situated on six islands formed by seven estuarine rivers branching from the Ota River. Its central district, which housed three-quarters of the population, was reduced from a wartime peak of 380,000 to 245,000 due to evacuation programs (Hersey, 1946). On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the atomic bomb, resulting in approximately 78,150 deaths, 13,983 missing persons, and 37,425 injuries (Shimizutani & Yamada, 2021).

Hiroshima is one of many literary works that explore disasters and their impact on societies. Around the world, readers can access literature on both natural and human-made disasters. In Indonesia, readers may read *Saksi Mata* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma, some short stories by Putu Wijaya (Ferdinal, 2013, 2015), in France, they may read *The Flood* by Émile Zola (Ferdinal et al., 2024), and in Ireland, they may read *Normal People* by Sally Rooney (Ferdinal et al., 2025). To examine how Hersey portrays such disaster and its consequences in Hiroshima, this article proposes two questions: first, how Hersey represents the aftermath of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima, second, how Hersey depicts the victims' resilience and adaptation in the aftermath of the tragedy.

METHODS

This qualitative article employs a textual analysis of the novel *Hiroshima* by Hersey to investigate how urban life was depicted, as well as its associated social, economic, and cultural changes. The research employs historical and sociological approaches to contextualize the novel within its broader socio-historical framework. The primary source of this research is Hersey's *Hiroshima*, supplemented by additional literature on Hiroshima and urban life in Japan during the post-war period. These sources provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical and cultural context depicted in the novel.

This article applies thematic analysis to categorize and explore the transformations in social, economic, and cultural aspects within the text. By examining the form, structure, and literary devices, the research identifies patterns that reveal Hersey's portrayal of urban life and its relationship to the broader thematic concerns of the novel. To conduct this analysis, a sociological approach to literature is employed. This approach allows the research to examine the interaction with the broader social

context. The approach enables the research to consider both the text's internal structure and its engagement with social realities. The sociology of literature focuses on social institutions (Angenot, 1989; Hébert, 2022). This viewpoint is beneficial for examining how *Hiroshima* captures urban life in the environment and social milieu of the story. This article is divided into three main parts. The article first examines how Hersey utilizes urban life as the novel's setting by identifying and classifying particular urban settings mentioned in the book, and analyzing the symbolic and practical ways in which they influence the plot. Then, the chronological context is examined to investigate how Hersey depicts the changes in time that mirror the aftermath of the atomic bombing and its effects on urban life. Ultimately, the research examines the social context to reveal how Hersey portrays urban life, including the dynamics of community resilience and transformation in the face of devastation. By integrating analysis with a sociological approach to literature, this article demonstrates how Hersey's *Hiroshima* not only narrates the historical tragedy but also reflects the transformations of urban life within the socio-historical context of postwar Japan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The bombing occurred within the broader context of World War II. By 1945, the war in Europe had come to an end, but the Pacific stage of the war continued, marked by intense conflict between the United States and Japan (Rosen, 2023). The Allies' strategic bombing campaign had set Japan's industrial and military infrastructure as targets. However, Japan remained firm. Some scholars believed that the reasons behind the use of atomic bombs on Japan were still questionable. While some argued that the bombings could end the war and save more lives, others were more concerned about the massive civilian victims and the long-term impact of radiation exposure on the bombing survivors. Some sources suggest that Japan was expected to surrender to the Allies a few weeks before the tragedy, indicating that it would have been forced to accept an unconditional surrender (Walsh, 2019).

In *Hiroshima*, Hersey's detailed depiction of urban life before and after the bombing underscores the profound impact of nuclear disasters. His description of Hiroshima's vibrant commercial districts, residential neighborhoods, and daily routines contrasts sharply with the desolation caused by the atomic bomb. According to Hawkins et al. (2021), this juxtaposition highlights both the city's physical devastation and the disruption of its social and economic structures. The six survivors are representative of a variety of Hiroshima's population, which emphasizes how indiscriminate the catastrophe was. Through the victim's individual experiences, Hersey attempts to humanize the catastrophe, highlighting the resiliency and vulnerability of urban life during catastrophic

events. The novel depicts the upheaval of social networks, the loss of means of subsistence, and the long-lasting psychological trauma experienced by survivors in a shattered metropolitan environment.

McKeown (2004) identified two perspectives on urban life in literature. One approach views the city setting as essential for identifying a text as urban literature. He argues that a city's presence is fundamental to such works, though some settings may carry implied or metaphorical meanings. This research employs a sociological approach to literature by analyzing *Hiroshima* through its depiction of urban space and the social realities embedded within it, emphasizing how the city reflects and shapes the sociohistorical conditions of the narrative. In short, it examines how Hersey utilizes the city of Hiroshima as a backdrop to explore various traumatic themes, including resilience and survival. The research aims to explore the various types of urban settings portrayed in the story and investigate their roles in conveying the novel's themes.

In discovering the themes in the novel *Hiroshima*, several scholars have acknowledged the legacy of Hersey's work. Numerous critical analyses of the work have been published. In general, the studies examine the impact of the book on American readers at the time of its publication, particularly its contribution to shaping public opinion against the atomic bombings of Hiroshima. For example, Swanberg (2021) highlighted the morality and decency toward disaster victims and their influence in educational settings, which helped shape a generation's understanding of nuclear war. Similarly, *Artistry, Factuality, Hiroshima, and John Hersey* (Gerstle, 2012) examines Hersey's narrative craft, emphasizing his ability to balance artistry and factuality. In the story, Hersey selects characters, employs suspenseful storytelling, and uses meaningful space. He portrays the human experience during and after the bombing. Gerstle's *John Hersey and Hiroshima* (2012) examines another aspect of Hersey's journalistic approach. It was in Hersey's interviews with survivors and the way he centered his narrative structure on the six victims. The work paid attention to the cultural and literary impact Hersey's work has in the field of narrative journalism.

Sharp's article (2000) *From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland: John Hersey's 'Hiroshima'* offers a different perspective. Sharp explores how the atomic bombing of Hiroshima became a defining example of how technology can reshape history and challenge worldviews. He argues that Hersey's narrative resonated with many Americans, providing a powerful example of how narrative structures can make sense of new technologies. Drawing on the 'wasteland' imagery of literary modernism, Hersey (1946) encapsulated the horror of the atomic bomb in a framework familiar to his American audience. Sharp (2000) also discusses the global attention garnered by the use of atomic bombs, presenting Hersey's work as a critical lens through which to understand the Hiroshima tragedy and its narrative setting.

Christie (2010) delves into Hersey's reconstruction of eyewitness perspectives in *Hiroshima*. She examines Hersey's meticulous depiction of sounds, sensations, and individual perceptions. By naming individuals and recording their emotions and efforts to rebuild their lives, Hersey incorporates pre-bombing narratives of family, connection, and tradition into the broader story of survival. Christie's (2010) analysis underscores Hersey's attention to detail, which is invaluable for thoroughly understanding the context and impact of the narrative.

Hersey's *Hiroshima* notably contributed to the development of the world's literary journalism. Through the combination of war survivors' meticulous factual reporting with literary narrative techniques, Hersey gained insights from a new model of literary journalism. By emphasizing the experiences of ordinary people who were caught in extraordinary situations, his method humanized the atomic bombing in a way that standard news reporting was unable to do. Other reporters such as Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, and Joan Didion were literary journalists whom Hersey inspired. His ability to narrate and emotionally engage readers, while delivering difficult facts, has been a reason for them to follow. His style continues to influence people in the realm of literary journalism, inviting others to combine literary lenses with factual veracity (Aare, 2023).

One aspect of factual veracity is the emergence of fictional narratives that incorporate aspects of urban life. Scholars propose various concepts of 'urban' that encompass multiple perspectives. Demographically, many define urban areas by population size and density, and these definitions vary by country (Zhu et al., 2019). Sociologically, some scholars focus on the heterogeneity, anonymity, and segmented social relations of urban life, while emphasizing the impact of density on interactions and the formation of social groups. Ecologists look at urban areas as spaces dominated by 'gray spaces' (buildings) over 'green and blue spaces' (parks, waterways) (Wolfel et al., 2017). For a functional perspective, scholars conceptualize cities as places of economic activity, administration, and cultural exchange, while experiential ones zero in on the citizens' lived experiences and their diverse routines (Giorgi et al., 2020). The planetary urbanization concept develops these ideas universally by incorporating urban-rural interconnections.

McKeown (2004) examines urban literature, arguing that the city's presence is essential to defining the genre. He posits that 'urban' reflects not only the city's physicality but also the characters' attitudes and mental states. This perspective highlights the interplay between the city as a setting and the narrative's construction through characters' experiences. While Scheibach (2021) believes in the post-apocalyptic science fiction of the postwar era, Fields (2022) stresses that writers utilize the Postmodern Apocalypse to describe the horrific effects of nuclear weapons. Rey-Pérez and Roders (2020) explore urban landscapes in young adult literature, noting how iconic symbols

represent cities' geographic, cultural, and economic aspects. They emphasize the role of cities as cultural artifacts amid rapid urbanization and technological change, illustrating the connections between urban life and literature.

Urban spaces function as places for people's cultural exchange and understanding arena, which help foster creativity, diversity, and artistic expression. Concentrations of artists, musicians, and writers contribute to urban vibrancy, while institutions such as museums and theaters shape cultural identity (Borer, 2006). These dynamics, intricately linked to urban living, underscore the challenges of addressing urban issues while capitalizing on opportunities. Regarding this, writers created fictional cities with luxurious facilities to avoid the effects of atomic bombs, such as 'Atomville' (Molella & Kargon, 2023), and life in the bunkers of 'Atomic City' (Boyd & Linehan, 2018). The atomic bombing also reminds us of the dark history of Japan's urbanization before and after World War II.

Before World War II, Japan's cities, such as Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, and Hiroshima, underwent rapid modernization. They worked as hubs of government, commerce, and culture. They experienced rapid urbanization, which led to various problems alongside economic growth, infrastructure development, and the emergence of distinct urban cultures. However, the Japanese enjoyment over the development was then interrupted by the war, which brought devastation. The war then caused cities like Tokyo and Hiroshima to suffer from extensive damage from bombings. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima caused massive destruction. It reshaped the universe's perceptions of nuclear warfare (Hurley, 2024). The unexpected destruction Post-war involved not just physical recovery but also societal ones, which influenced Japanese urban and cultural life profoundly (Kırmızı, 2019). However, the representation of cities destroyed by atomic bombs is still doubtful (Miller & Atherton, 2020). The depiction of urban city life in Hiroshima echoes what happened to those in the Holocaust and Nagasaki (Latini, 2015). Balaa (2021) compared the case of Lebanon to that of Hiroshima. This remembrance is considered necessary for providing peace education through the research of memorable history (Toyosaki, 2020). The peace education of Hiroshima has attracted scholars, including a physicist (Cavagnini, 2022). Such concerns are related to those in other parts of the world, such as the Korean conflict (Löwensteinová, 2024; Matray, 2022), and Vietnam (Hurley, 2024).

In the novel *Hiroshima*, Hersey stresses how the issues of resilience and adaptation become important traits that the Hiroshima bombing victims embraced after the calamity. Although the city underwent massive physical destruction, its people's ability and capacity to survive deserve applause, and the acts of solidarity they displayed in their recovery are of great importance. Their resilience and collaboration become a particular strength, as they utilize social connections

among themselves to create a more effective and impactful effort to address the disaster. What happened to Hiroshima leaves people of the world with lessons of how terrible the disaster was for people and how the people dealt with such issues as serious and destructive threats to urban people and their urban world.

Urban life in Hiroshima serves as more than a setting. It is central to illustrating the devastating impact of war on modern society. This novel takes place in an urban area and society, mainly in Hiroshima. The setting in the novel is unique because the story talks about the urban life in an urban area that was destroyed by the atomic bomb, which is Hiroshima. Since the story mostly takes place in a devastated city, urban life in Hiroshima would have had to adjust to the circumstances at that time.

The urban life in *Hiroshima* is depicted through the setting, which serves as the context for the story. The setting includes the place, time, and social environment. Each component of the setting contributes to the mood, plot, and character development. This section elaborates on the different types of settings used in the novel.

The urbanism of Hiroshima is evident throughout the narrative in the setting of the place. Urban elements are portrayed through physical settings such as private hospitals, railways, telephone poles, and highways. However, what makes the setting in this novel unique is the destruction of most of the city's buildings after the bombing. Hersey indicates the urban nature of Hiroshima through the infrastructure that shaped the city, as well as through conversations between characters. Examples of urban elements include private hospitals, highways, plant offices, and modern tall buildings. As the primary setting, Hiroshima has a significant influence on the urban life of its society, both before and after the bombing. The regeneration and development of the city after the bombing serve as some of the strongest evidence of its urban nature.

Another setting that appears in the novel is the United States of America. This setting is closely related to Mr. Tanimoto, who is the only character to have visited America. Hersey represents the urbanism of America by mentioning a publishing firm, a national cemetery, and NBC Studios in Los Angeles.

Hersey uses specific terms to establish the time of events in *Hiroshima*. He often uses concrete, standard terms such as morning, 'afternoon,' 'night,' 'evening,' and 'midnight' to provide detailed information about the timing of the story's scenes. At times, he uses 'dawn' to indicate early morning events. For example, in Chapter Three, he writes, "on the first light of dawn, he looked across the river" (1946, p. 45).

The novel presents three dominant social settings: the religious society, the *Hibakusha* (survivors of the atomic bomb), and a supportive society. Christianity had spread widely during the development of Hiroshima, and Hersey illustrates the city's welcoming attitude toward the religion. He shows how Christianity influenced the urban society, with Miss Sasaki—initially skeptical of God and

religion—becoming a sister in 1957. She, who had felt abandoned during difficult times, went on to become the director of a home for seventy older people, called the Garden of St. Joseph, where she served for twenty years.

Hersey also highlights the term *hibakusha*, meaning ‘explosive-affected person,’ which is preferred over ‘survivor’ in Japan. The term survivor is considered to imply fear of death, which is seen as humiliating. Life for *Hibakusha*, especially for the poor Mrs. Nakamura, was tough. They suffered from a variety of issues, including social exclusion and government abandonment in Japan. The novel demonstrates that their ailments could not be entirely cured at the end of the story, although they were eventually alleviated.

The bombing left the city and its residents physically damaged and traumatized. The residents of Hiroshima showed their destructive lifestyles and mutual support among themselves in the aftermath (Pickett, 2024). People in this supportive community helped one another throughout difficult times, as depicted by Hersey. In the novel’s portrayal of Hiroshima’s urban life, people were incredibly loving and reliant on one another, especially their family members. The compassion and warmth of Hiroshima’s society in the wake of the bombing are reflected in Hersey’s depiction of these situations, as those who were undamaged volunteered to help the injured without hesitation.

However, the sense of compassion alone was insufficient to mitigate the profound impact of the bombing on urban life. The wartime bombing led to a fundamental transformation of Hiroshima’s physical and social landscape. The tragedy turned the city from a thriving metropolis to a devastated area.

Hersey depicts in his work that nearly every building in Hiroshima was destroyed, which caused physical devastation. The destruction of buildings, roads, hospitals, and residences is clearly described. It emphasizes Hersey’s pity of the city after the disaster. The protagonists’ experiences throughout the story reflect the devastation caused by the transformation of the urban area into a wasteland. Hersey stresses that in the days after the bombing, the city became a ghost town, full of debris and human corpses, not a center of thriving activity anymore.

For instance, when Hersey describes the Red Cross Hospital after the bombing, he writes: “Before long, patients lay and crouched on the floor of the wards, and the laboratories and all the other rooms, and in the corridors, and on the stairs, and on the stone front steps, and in the driveway and courtyard, and for blocks each way in the streets outside” (Hershey, 1946, pp. 23–24). In addition to describing the incredible physical devastation, this narrative also communicates the confusion and despair that characterized the metropolis. Once a resource that supported life, the river turned into a symbol of devastation, bringing pollutants that poisoned the survivors and increased the loss of life. This also triggered an increase in the

social and psychological impact on the community.

The psychological effects of the bombing on the people of Hiroshima were terrible. Often called *Hibakusha*, the survivors battled both visible and invisible scars. Their capacity to comprehend the incident and start over was hampered by the severe emotional and psychological scars caused by the bomb’s devastation.

In the aftermath, Hersey uses the characters’ experiences to represent the broader social impact. Mr. Tanimoto’s desperate search for his family amidst the ruins illustrates the personal chaos and disillusionment many felt. Hersey describes how survivors, though physically hurt, tried to maintain a semblance of stoicism: “From every second or third house came the voices of people buried and abandoned, who invariably screamed, with formal politeness, ‘*Tasukete kure!* Help, if you please!’” (Hershey, 1946, p. 26). This stoicism stems from a profound respect for culture and humility. It demonstrates the people’s emotional resilience in the face of adversity.

Other than the traumatic grief, the survivors had to deal with long-term psychological struggles. Miss Sasaki, for example, endured both physical and emotional suffering. It is said that she was abandoned in a factory yard with a severely injured leg. Hearing the tragic news of her family’s death caused her to face trauma. Then, she had to face the postponed medical care. All added to her stress and doubled up her suffering, indicating how the bombing changed the survivors’ mental states. In addition to the deep grief, the bombing had a major impact on society and culture.

The solidarity of the survivors was one of the most important aspects of the healing process. Despite the destruction, Hiroshima’s citizens showed exceptional fortitude by supporting one another. Hersey captures the profound sense of community that emerged in the wake of the bombing, portraying the city’s residents as bound together by their shared trauma and the collective effort to rebuild their lives.

Hersey also explores the cultural shift, particularly through the lens of religion. Before the bombing, Christianity was a minority influence in Hiroshima, but then, according to the story, it attracted more followers. For example, before the bombing, Miss Sasaki had been skeptical about religion. She later converted and became a nun. Her transition from survivor to head of an assisted living facility becomes a significant example of how the bombing made Japanese people deal with new social roles and cultural identities because they needed to adjust to the disrupted environment.

By prioritizing community and solidarity in the city’s recovery, the people of Hiroshima rebuilt its physical infrastructure, which was only one aspect of the city’s recovery. The city also needs to recover its social condition. So, physical, psychological, and social recovery in the city was greatly influenced by the survivors’ togetherness (Li & Neill, 2018). In the novel, the survivors’ willingness to help each other—

whether it was carrying the injured across the river or sharing food and resources—demonstrates the strength of communal bonds. The supportive society in *Hiroshima*, depicted in Hersey's narrative, shows that even in the darkest times, humanity's capacity for kindness and cooperation prevailed.

The city's recovery in the years after the bombing served as evidence of the inhabitants' tenacity and fortitude (Hecht, 2022). Hersey's testimony, as expressed in the novel, offers an emotional and psychological perspective on how the community adjusted and united in the face of unimaginable devastation. Their testimonies offer a glimpse into the reality of urban life in a post-disaster environment.

The author's writing style, marked by detailed descriptions and personal testimonies, conveys the post-disaster reality with stark clarity. Hersey does not simply recount events but provides a vivid portrayal of the human cost of the bombing. Through the use of human narratives, he offers readers a thorough insight into Hiroshima's urban life and the significant changes that followed the atomic bombing (Taskiran & Kara, 2021). Through the eyes of the characters, Hersey brought his readers to see not only the physical destruction of Hiroshima but also the psychological and social changes that reshaped the city. Hersey's emphasis on human endurance and community spirit invites his readers to realize how people in a devastated urban center can recover physically and emotionally after the bombing disaster.

CONCLUSIONS

Hersey's *Hiroshima* provides a compelling depiction of how disasters affect urban life. Through the experiences of six central figures, the narrative captures how physical devastation, social fragmentation, and psychological trauma reshape both the city's landscape and its residents' lives. This research shows that physical and social settings are integral to conveying themes such as stoicism, suffering, and survival in post-bomb Hiroshima. By examining the city's destruction as a narrative device, the novel provides insight into the resilience of urban communities in the face of catastrophe.

Hersey's *Hiroshima* is also relevant to contemporary urban studies and disaster mitigation policies. The destruction of Hiroshima after the bombing symbolizes the city's fragility to war and disaster. It teaches us how crucial it is for communities to meet the social and psychological needs of their residents, both during the disaster recovery process and the rebuilding of infrastructure. Even under the terrible conditions, the people of Hiroshima demonstrated incredible stoicism and compassion, which may serve as an inspiration for contemporary disaster mitigation initiatives that aim to strengthen social cohesion and support networks.

This research yields several key findings. First, the use of a devastated urban area, as depicted in

the story, is crucial to understanding the characters' experiences within it. Hospitals, rivers, riverbanks, and evacuation zones are examples of places that represent the terrible reality that survivors must endure both literally and symbolically. The novel's principal themes are conveyed through the relationships between the six main characters and various locations, and the physical destruction of the city has a profound impact on their lives. Second, readers can follow the disaster's development. Hersey's clear timeline of events and careful description of the time and social context can be important details to learn. The social context used emphasizes human resilience in the face of adversity. Most of the characters exhibit their compassion and stoicism. However, the novel also reveals the challenges faced by *Hibakusha*, especially the poor and marginalized, who were abandoned by the government and ostracized by society. They only found better lives after struggling to seek help.

The novel's themes are effectively conveyed through its various settings. Hersey's depiction of post-bomb Hiroshima—ranging from the chaotic and critical atmosphere at the Red Cross Hospital to the grimness by the river—intensifies the tragic nature of the disaster. For example, the use of the river metaphorically symbolizes disease, death, and destruction. The city of Hiroshima is a symbol of an arena of killing fields and a location where the bombing victims struggle for survival among the devastation caused by the disaster. This research contributes to discussions in the sociology of literature by showing how Hersey's *Hiroshima* uses urban settings to construct narrative meaning and represent the interplay between literature and postwar Japanese social realities.

However, this research has certain limitations. First, it focuses solely on Hersey's *Hiroshima*, without comparing it to other literary works that depict urban disasters. Second, while the research provides insights into urban resilience, it does not include firsthand survivor accounts or historical documents beyond the novel itself. Future studies could incorporate a comparative analysis of different literary narratives on urban destruction or integrate historical records to enhance the discussion.

The findings of this research have broader implications for literary studies, urban sociology, and disaster management. By analyzing how urban life is depicted in *Hiroshima*, this research contributes to discussions on the role of literature in shaping public memory and historical consciousness regarding war and disasters. Furthermore, the novel's depiction of resilience and social adaptation offers valuable lessons for contemporary urban planning and disaster mitigation policies, highlighting the importance of robust social networks in post-disaster recovery.

This research opens the doors for future investigations. Some possible studies can be mentioned here. Firstly, researchers can focus on the impact of other disastrous events on other urban areas. By comparing different urban lives and

disasters, researchers can obtain a broader picture of the disaster's impacts on human psychological and physical decay that arise post-catastrophe. Then, the application of new approaches can reveal the long-term effects of disasters on urban populations. Depictions of how people, especially victims, face recovery against the tragic and traumatic experiences should be able to provide universal understanding about the lasting impacts on mental health, social structures, and urban development. These possible studies will propose more effective disaster mitigation strategies and responses in the future.

Author Contributions: Conceived and designed the analysis, M. I., and F. F.; Collected the data, M. I.; Contributed data or analysis tools, M. I., F. F., and C. D.; Performed the analysis, M. I., F. F., and C. D.; Wrote the paper, M. I., and F. F.

Data Availability Statement: Data available on request from the authors. The data that support the findings of the research are available from the corresponding author, F. F., upon reasonable request. Explain the reason why the readers must request the data.

REFERENCES

- Aare, C. (2023). The case of literary journalism: Rethinking fictionality, narrativity, and imagination. *Style*, 57(4), 440-458. Scholarly Publishing Collective. <https://doi.org/10.5325/style.57.4.0440>
- Angenot, M. (1989). *1889: Un état du discours social*. Longueuil, Québec: Le Préambule.
- Balaa, L. (2021). Who are you? *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(5), 478-479.
- Borer, M. I. (2006). The location of culture: The urban culturalist perspective. *City & Community*, 5(2), 173-197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2006.00168.x>
- Boyd, G. A., & Linehan, D. (2018). Becoming atomic: The bunker, modernity, and the city. *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 22(3), 241-255. Cambridge Core. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1359135518000581>
- Cavagnini, G. (2022). La scienza in giallo Sciascia, i fisici italiani e il caso Majorana nelle carte di Gian Carlo Wick (1975-1989). *Contemporanea*, 25(1), 55-76. <https://doi.org/10.1409/101703>
- Christie, S. (2010). The sounds an atomic bomb makes: John Hersey's Hiroshima and the birth of 'Asian' modernity. *Comparative Literature: East & West*, 13(1), 9-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25723618.2010.12015565>
- Ferdinal, F. (2013). Censorship, resistance and transformation in modern Indonesian literature. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(1), 269.
- Ferdinal, F. (2015). Responses to human rights issues in Indonesian new order fiction. *Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(12), 54-58.
- Ferdinal, F., Oktavianus, O., & Djusmalinar. (2024). Scrutinizing the representations of flood disaster imagery in Emile Zola's work. *The 4th International Conference on Disaster Management (The 4th ICDM 2024)*, 604. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202560402003>
- Ferdinal, F., Sudarmoko, S., Dewi, C., & Oktavianus, O. (2025). Dismembering the issues of capitalism, human rights, and mental health of Irish people in the novel *Normal People* by Sally Rooney. *OKARA: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 18(2), 266-284. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ojbs.v18i2.15659>
- Fields, A. (2022). Visualizing faith and futility in the nuclear apocalypse. *Religions*, 13(2), 142. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020142>
- Gerstle, D. (2012). John Hersey and Hiroshima. *Dissent*, 59(2), 90-94.
- Giorgi, E., Bugatti, A., & Bosio, A. (2020). Social and spatial experiences in the cities of tomorrow. *Societies*, 10(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc10010009>
- Hawkins, T., & Kim, A. (2021). Legitimate authority. In T. Hawkins & A. Kim (Eds.), *Just War Theory and Literary Studies: An Invitation to Dialogue* (pp. 33-54). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79863-5_3
- Hébert, L. (2022). *Introduction to literary analysis: A complete methodology*. Routledge.
- Hecht, D. K. (2022). Embracing mystery: Radiation risks and popular science writing in the early cold war. In J. Hamblin & L. M. Richards (Eds.), *Connecting to the Living History of Radiation Exposure* (pp. 127-141). Springer Nature Switzerland; Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-18758-2_7
- Hersey, J. (1946). *Hiroshima*. Vintage.
- Howard, J. (2017). *Form and history in American literary naturalism*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Hurley, B. (2024). Reading Hiroshima in the age of Vietnam: John Hersey at the White House festival of the arts. *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 22(3), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466024029036>
- Kırmızı, M. (2019). Japanese gentrification from a local community perspective. *City & Community*, 18(2), 618-637. Sage Journals. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12391>
- Latini, M. (2015). The vision of the end: Anders on the TV series holocaust. *Cinéma & Cie: International Film Studies Journal: XV*, 25, 2015, XV(25), 115-124.
- Li, M., & Neill, D. R. (2018). Activities and roles played by architects in the reconstruction of Hiroshima after its atomic bombing. *International Review for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development*, 6(1), 53-78. https://doi.org/10.14246/irspsd.6A.1_53
- Löwensteinová, M. (2024). Korean war narratives in 1950s Czechoslovakia. *Asian & African Studies* (13351257), 33(1). <https://doi.org/10.31577/aassav.2024.33.1.02>
- Matray, J. I. (2022). US Entry into the Korean War: Origins, impact, and lessons. *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, 5(sup1), 167-184. Taylor & Francis Online. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2022.2053407>
- McKeown, P. D. (2004). *The image of the city and urban*

- literature: A comparative study between James Joyce's *Dubliners*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and Irvine Welsh's *Glue* (Doctoral dissertation). <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/12122/1/fulltext.pdf>
- Miller, A., & Atherton, C. (2020). 'The Chernobyl hibakusha': Dark poetry, the ineffable and abject realities. *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, 25(1), 1-19.
- Molella, A., & Kargon, R. (2023). Atomville: Architects, planners, and how to survive the bomb. *Technology and Culture*, 64(3), 823-844. Project Muse. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2023.a903974>
- Pickett, G. L. (2024). "So beautiful that mortal... eyes can't take it": How postmodernism shows us the function of the beautiful in the landscape of the traumatic. *Humanities*, 13(5), 132. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13050132>
- Rey-Pérez, J., & Roders, A. P. (2020). Historic urban landscape: A systematic review, eight years after the adoption of the HUL approach. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 10(3), 233-258. Emerald Insight. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-05-2018-0036>
- Rosen, T. L. (2023). *The Atomic City: A Firsthand Account by a Son of Los Alamos*. Eakin Press.
- Rothman, S. (1987, January 8). Hiroshima. *The Publication of "Hiroshima" in The New Yorker*. <https://www.herseyhiroshima.com/>
- Scheibach, M. (2021). Faith, fallout, and the future: Post-apocalyptic science fiction in the early postwar era. *Religions*, 12(7), 520. MDPI. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070520>
- Sharp, P. B. (2000). From yellow peril to Japanese wasteland: John Hersey's "Hiroshima". *Twentieth Century Literature*, 46(4), 434-452.
- Shimizutani, S., & Yamada, H. (2021). Long-term consequences of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima. *Journal of the Japanese and International Economies*, 59, 101119. Science Direct. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jjie.2020.101119>
- Swanberg, S. E. (2021). Under the influence: The impact of Johannes A. Siemes, SJ's eyewitness report on John Hersey's "Hiroshima". *Literary Journalism Studies*, 13(1 and 2), 131-161.
- Taskiran, M. N., & Kara, M. (2021). The true-based narrative: An analysis on John Hersey's Hiroshima. In *Handbook of Research on Narrative Interactions* (pp. 29-42). IGI Global. <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-true-based-narrative/270559>
- Toyosaki, S. (2020). Performative remembering of Hiroshima's and my father's silence. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 49(5), 458-471. Taylor & Francis Online. <https://doi.org/10.1080/017475759.2020.1811752>
- Walsh, B. P. (2019). "Japanese foreign ministry's document destruction order of 7 August 1945." *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 26(1), 85-94. Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18765610-02601005>
- Wolfel, R. L., Richmond, A., & Grazaitis, P. (2017). Seeing the forest through the trees: Sociocultural factors of dense urban spaces. *Urban Science*, 1(4), 40. <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci1040040>
- Zhu, Z., Zhou, Y., Seto, K. C., Stokes, E. C., Deng, C., Pickett, S. T. A., & Taubenböck, H. (2019). Understanding an urbanizing planet: Strategic directions for remote sensing. *Remote Sensing of Environment*, 228, 164-182. Science Direct. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rse.2019.04.020>