The Theme of Survival in John Hersey's *Hiroshima* and Ibuse Masuji's *Black Rain*

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In the fifth year of the atomic age, William Faulkner stated in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech his belief that man would not merely survive – he would prevail. The background to Faulkner's affirmation is the very negative experiences of World War II, in particular the experiments in mass killing which culminated in the development of nuclear weapons. If it is still possible to speak in affirmative terms about the survival of man, it is in part because a number of writers have braved two very intimidating questions posed by these mass killings. First, can we write about events of such magnitude? Second, do we deserve to write literature after such events? Writing itself is an affirmation in an age when man's destructive capacity not only matches his worst imaginations but also threatens to exterminate the creature who imagines.

And yet there have been a number of writers who have taken on such intimidating subjects as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Japan, for example, there is a large body of works called *gembaku bungaku* (literally: atomic bomb literature), mainly in the form of poems, diaries and memoirs which record the events of those two days in August 1945. In Europe and America, there have also been a number of novels, plays and poems about the atomic bomb, but in general, they tend to be more theoretical and/or imaginative works. That is, on the one hand, they use a philosophical, political or historical framework, or, on the other hand, they are concerned with what might have happened or with what may happen.

In this paper, I would like to compare John Hersey's *Hiroshima* (1946) with Ibuse Masuji's *Black Rain* (1966), focusing on the theme of survival. Hersey's work is a nonfiction account of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima which is based on interviews with a number of survivors which he conducted within one year of the bombing. Ibuse's novel is also based in part on interviews with survivors, but in this case, they were conducted almost twenty

years afterwards. In addition, Ibuse made use of a number of diaries of the time, and his novel, in fact, is largely in the form of a diary. Both of these works depict the struggle of a handful of people to survive the destruction of nearly everything for which they lived: family, friends, home, work, and social and cultural institutions. In short, the city of Hiroshima ceased to exist in less than a second, and the survivors faced the hellish atmosphere of the rubble with their very limited physical and spiritual resources. At the end of both works, the survivors reach a state of tentative survival, the representative state of man in this thirty-eighth year of the atomic age.

Hersey's *Hiroshima*[1] is an expository narrative written by an American for an American audience – it informs, explains and describes as it tells the story of the destruction of Hiroshima from the point of view of six people who managed to survive. There had of course been numerous public statements in America about the bombing of Hiroshima as well as news reports and even photographs. The wonderful power of the new weapon was described enthusiastically in terms of tens of thousands of tons of TNT, tens of thousands of injured, and tens of thousands of dead. So the American public was or could easily become acquainted with what, in a very limited sense, had happened in Hiroshima. But in the context of war crimes trials concerned with mass killings, such facts and figures could obviously be interpreted in another way. Beyond the question of whether or not the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was a war crime, there was a growing awareness that man had both the desire and the capability to destroy much if not all of the world. It is in this sense that Hersey addressed himself to the question of what had happened in Hiroshima, and he concentrated on the struggle of six people to survive, thus emphasizing the active and life-affirming qualities in man.

David Sanders, in his study on John Hersey, points out this emphasis on survival in *Hiroshima:*

> *Survivors. Why they lived. Act of survival.* These words are basic to *Hiroshima,* even more basic than death and suffering. The book is a memorial to the dead and a warning to the living, but it is, above all, an examination of those who survived by a writer clearly more interested in the acts of survival than in anything else he saw at the scene of a hundred thousand deaths.[2]

In opposition to the manifest power of the atomic bomb, Hersey places the weak and confused but persistent efforts of a few people to help themselves

and to help others. This focus on survival is clearly not intended as a guide for people in future nuclear wars; rather, it is a simple but impressive affirmation of man's will to live.

I say simple affirmation because *Hiroshima* is not a tale of heroes in the traditional sense of the word, for although it depicts some exemplary and even heroic actions, it is chiefly concerned with suffering and endurance in the face of the monstrous, destructive emissary of an absent antagonist. Hersey interrelates the stories of six survivors: two doctors, two clergymen, a housewife and an office worker. The starting point of their stories is that fact that they survived the initial blast of the bomb by chance. "A hundred thousand people were killed by the atomic bomb," Hersey writes, "and these six were among the survivors. They still wonder why they lived when so many others died" (p. 2). But that is just the beginning, because survival requires a continuing effort not to succumb to the omnipresent physical hazards and not to succumb to despair. Hersey then depicts the actions of the six survivors from the moment of the blast until the surrender on August 15. The last chapter of the book traces their lives up to approximately one year after the bombing. The behavior of the survivors, which is the real subject of *Hiroshima,* ranges from the struggle for personal survival to active involvement in rescuing and treating others.

For some, the struggle to survive is primarily a physical struggle for life in the ruined city. The office worker, Miss Sasaki, for example, is buried beneath bookcases in her office, and her leg is crushed. When she regains consciousness, she struggles to escape, but she finds that she cannot move. She waits to be rescued, and after a number of attempts, she is drawn out of the rubble from above. Her ordeal continues as she is left for two days in a primitive shelter with two other wounded victims. Then she is carried from place to place for medical treatment in the chaotic situation which prevailed. Hersey notes that "Of a hundred and fifty doctors in the city, sixty-five were already dead and most of the rest were wounded. Of 1,780 nurses, 1,654 were dead or too badly hurt to work" (p 32). Dr. Fujii, another survivor, was one of the severely wounded doctors who had to struggle in order to save themselves before they could begin to help others. Just after the explosion, Dr. Fujii finds himself trapped between two wooden beams and suspended in the river. But when he realizes that he is in danger of drowning, he struggles with all his strength. Hersey writes that the thought of drowning "inspired him to fearful activity; he wriggled and turned and exerted what strength he could (though his left arm, because of the pain in his shoulder, was useless),

and before long he had freed himself" (p. 30). This elemental struggle for life is described a number of times in *Hiroshima,* for many people were trapped or buried like Dr. Fujii and Miss Sasaki, and we may see in this struggle an image of rebirth, for the survivors emerge from beneath the ruins to begin their lives again.

But not everyone had the will to be reborn into a world which had been instantaneously transformed into a landscape of hell, and even those who had survived for a while began to lose their desire to continue living. First of all, there were a number of people who were bewildered by the apocalyptic destruction – they did not know what had happened, and they were unable to think or to act. A combination of weariness and despair left others immobile, and those who hesitated or rested were often smothered, crushed, drowned or burned to death. Still others were moved by despair to reject life. The most striking example of this is the story of Mr. Fukai, a secretary in the Catholic mission in Hiroshima, who deliberately chose not to survive. He not only refused to be rescued from a burning building, but he also struggled against his rescuers, escaped, and apparently ran back into the flames. "Japan is dying," he had told others. "If there is a real air raid here in Hiroshima, I want to die with our country" (p. 72). This story is a sharp contrast to the other stories of survival, but even Miss Sasaki, the office worker, later loses her will to live because of her physical deformity and her memories of death and destruction. "Her depressions were deep," Hersey writes. "She would always be a cripple. Her fiancé never came to see her. There was nothing for her to do except read and look out, from her house on a hillside in Koi, across the ruins of the city where her parents and brother died" (p. 110). This combination of physical deformity and horrible memories weakened the will to live among many survivors in Hiroshima and thereby further endangered their lives. For survival involves not merely chance and physical endurance but also a determination to live, even in a ruined city in a defeated land.

Beyond the survival of the individual, however, is the survival of the group. The most natural group of course is the family, and here again Hersey points to an altogether natural response which seems extraordinary in this wasteland of leveled houses and burned bodies. Mrs. Nakamura, the widowed mother of three children, first digs herself out of the rubble of her collapsed house and then immediately sets out to rescue her children. The mother, Hersey writes, "seeing Myeko, the youngest of her three children, buried breast-deep and unable to move, crawled across the debris, hauled at timbers,

and flung tiles aside, in a hurried effort to free the child" (p. 25). In a similar frenzy of actions, she frees the two other children who had been completely buried in a pile of debris. Hersey indicates Mrs. Nakamura's frantic state of mind by describing her overdressing the children in order to protect them from the cold, although it is quite hot outside. Again, still dazed yet active, she tries to save her sewing machine, with which she hopes to make her living, by dropping it into a well. When it becomes clear that the neighborhood will be destroyed by fire, she takes the children to Asano Park, where other refugees have already gathered. Hersey thus shows a survivor in action, frantically trying to rescue the members of her family. There is much confusion and worry, but the little group has survived the first stage of the disaster.

Father Kleinsorge, a Jesuit priest, belongs to a larger group, the Jesuit mission in Hiroshima. He is so shocked at first by the flash and the explosion, however, that he is unable even to help himself. He wanders about dazed and bleeding. But when he comes to his senses, he immediately asks, "Where are the rest?" (p. 28), and he sets about trying to rescue the other members of his community, running about, digging some out of collapsed buildings, and carrying others out of buildings in peril of collapse or fire. He soon becomes troubled, however, by the realization that in order to concentrate on rescuing the members of his own community, he must ignore the pleas for help from surrounding houses. Hersey notes that "in general, survivors that day assisted only their relatives or immediate neighbors, for they could not comprehend or tolerate a wider circle of misery" (p. 39). Father Kleinsorge realizes that for every life he tries to save, he must allow a number of others to burn to death, trapped in their houses. This realization must have been particularly bitter in his frustrated efforts to save the suicidal Mr. Fukai mentioned above. Nevertheless, Father Kleinsorge does not allow these painful experiences to prevent him from continuing and enlarging his work, for he too goes to Asano Park where he meets Mrs. Nakamura and her three children, and where he tries to comfort and treat the injured and dying refugees.

The injured and dying formed the largest and most diversified group on that day in Hiroshima. Hersey estimates that "nearly a hundred thousand people had been killed or doomed at one blow; a hundred thousand more were hurt" (p. 34). Dr. Sasaki, a surgeon at the Red Cross Hospital, technically did not belong to this group because he was uninjured, but he undertook full membership by devoting himself to saving as many lives as he could under the most adverse and dispiriting circumstances. His first actions

were devoted to the doctors, nurses and patients of the hospital who had been injured in the blast, and he worked with such simple supplies as bandages and mercurochrome because he was unaware of the extent of the destruction. But soon he came across the first of a long stream of injured people from outside the hospital who suffered from hideous burns, lacerations and fractures. Naked, dazed, disfigured and bleeding, they continued to enter the hospital – as many as ten thousand injured in a hospital with only six hundred beds (p. 34).

With just a few doctors and nurses and an extremely limited amount of medical equipment and supplies, Dr. Sasaki tried to apply himself to the most serious cases, but he was overwhelmed by the number of injured and by the diversity and seriousness of their injuries. "Tugged here and there in his stockinged feet, bewildered by the numbers," Hersey writes, "Dr. Sasaki lost all sense of profession and stopped working as a skillful surgeon and a sympathetic man; he became an automation, mechanically wiping, daubing, winding, wiping, daubing, winding" (p. 34). This understated and deprecatory description doubtless reflects the words of Dr. Sasaki himself. The fact remains that despite such hopeless circumstances, Dr. Sasaki continued working for three days, virtually without rest. We may assume that his "automatic" behavior does not represent his dehumanization. To the contrary, it represents an extraordinary devotion to his humane calling, the doctor's profession of saving lives being exemplary in Hersey's narrative of human survival.

Reverend Tanimoto, who later translated *Hiroshima* into Japanese,[3] had fortunately been travelling away from the city when the bomb exploded. One of the first things he does in his initial bewilderment is to guide a woman and child to an emergency center for treatment. "By this solicitous behavior," Hersey writes, "Mr. Tanimoto at once got rid of his terror" (p. 23). As he makes his way across the ruins of Hiroshima, he witnesses the torments of the inhabitants of a city which has been transformed into a smoking and burning wasteland where the five senses are assaulted and where the mind approaches despair. Like Father Kleinsorge, Reverend Tanimoto is deeply troubled by the fact that he must ignore so many desperate pleas for help in order to reach those whom he wishes most to help. Nevertheless, he stops a number of times during his difficult and hazardous journey, moved by compassion for the horribly injured victims, and then he moves on, ashamed of his inability to help them and ashamed of the fact that he is uninjured in this land of the afflicted. The goal of his journey is Asano Park, where he

hopes to encounter some of his neighbors and parishioners, but when he arrives there, he encounters even more concentrated scenes of misery among the injured refugees gathered there. Moved once again by compassion, he sets about doing whatever he can as the need arises. He gives water to some people, tries to obtain food, looks for a doctor, helps to fight a fire, and ferries people across the river to safety.

Despite this hectic activity, however, Reverend Tanimoto cannot help but notice that so many of the people are beyond hope – his actions seem in vain. He reaches his hand out to help someone, for example, but that person's skin peels off into his hand. He rescues one group of injured people, but they apparently drown overnight because they are too weak to move from the place where he had put them. He saves two children from drowning, but one dies soon afterwards. Finally, he repeatedly encounters a woman who clutches a dead baby in her arms, waiting for her husband who has probably been killed in the explosion. Is this scene an image of the futility of Reverend Tanimoto's actions? Although he is often disheartened by his experiences, he does not succumb to such invitations to despair partly because as a Christian he finds solace in the Bible and as a Japanese he is uplifted by hearing the Emperor's voice on the radio, but Hersey also suggests that Reverend Tanimoto is strengthened and renewed by his compassionate acts of assistance.

The announcement of the surrender by the Emperor on August 15, 1945 marks the end of the first stage of survival for these six people. In the last chapter of *Hiroshima,* Hersey tells us briefly what happens to each of the six survivors in the following year. His summary of the state of the survivors at the end of one year is a mixture of disappointment and hope. On the one hand, he records their losses and disappointments:

> Miss Sasaki was a cripple; Mrs. Nakamura was destitute; Father Kleinsorge was back in the hospital; Dr. Sasaki was not capable of the work he once could do; Dr. Fujii had lost the thirty-room hospital it took him many years to acquire, and had no prospects of rebuilding it; Mr. Tanimoto's church had been ruined and he no longer had his exceptional vitality. (p. 111)

But on the other hand, he observes that they seem to share "a curious kind of elated community spirit ... a pride in the way they and their fellow-survivors had stood up to a dreadful ordeal" (p. 111). Thus Hersey emphasizes the survivors' modest spiritual victory, although he records their physical and

emotional losses.

But the title of the last chapter, "Panic Grass and Feverfew," refers to a more serious threat to survival, the effects of the radiation released by the atomic bomb. First, Hersey notes that there is a surprising growth of plants in the ruined city, especially near the hypocenter of the explosion. But the plants grow in such wild profusion that there seems to be something abnormal and even sinister in this sign of life which might otherwise serve as an image of recovery and renewal. Second, up to this point in the work, it seems that the survivors are on their way to a gradual but satisfactory recovery, but in this last chapter, Hersey describes other abnormalities which are clearly sinister. Most of the survivors develop symptoms of radiation sickness: loss of hair, sudden fatigue, high fever, spot hemorrhages, and wounds which do not heal. Hersey describes Dr. Sasaki's research on this new sickness and his attempts to discover a treatment for it. But perhaps because *Hiroshima* was written so short a time after the events, however, Hersey does not seem to be fully aware of how deadly radiation sickness is. Thus the second stage of the survival of these six people, a stage which includes the rest of their lives, is overshadowed by more than their losses and horrible memories – the harmful effects of their exposure to a high level of radiation in the bombing may yet threaten their survival.

In a sense, Ibuse's *Black Rain*[4] begins where Hersey's *Hiroshima* leaves off. The novel opens on a scene which takes place nearly five years after the war in a village which is located at a safe distance from Hiroshima. The main character, Shizuma Shigematsu, is confronted by a normal problem which has an abnormal complication. He is trying to arrange a suitable marriage for his niece, Yasuko, but there is a persistent rumor that she was in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb was dropped and that she consequently suffers from radiation sickness. The exact peril of her alleged exposure to the bomb's radiation is not specified; it may involve physical weakness, serious illness, or even genetic damage, but the rumor effectively prevents anyone from marrying the young woman. Shigematsu is frustrated and angry because he believes that he, his wife, and his niece have succeeded in surviving the atomic bombing and that they have put the past behind them at a safe distance of nearly five years. He is therefore determined to struggle against the rumor by copying out his niece's diary of the time in order to prove that his niece was at a safe distance from Hiroshima when the atomic bomb exploded. Unfortunately, almost from the outset, his is a losing struggle, not merely because of the considerable power of gossip in such a community, but

because the rumor proves to be substantially if not literally true. Yasuko suddenly falls ill, and a number of her painful ailments are symptoms of radiation sickness.

Thus the effects of exposure to radiation which seem a possible threat in Hersey's *Hiroshima* become a threatening reality in *Black Rain* where the destruction of Hiroshima figures as a continuing process rather than as a past event and where the past invades and even overwhelms the present. And yet *Black Rain* is not ultimately a pessimistic work, although, like Hersey's *Hiroshima,* it depicts at length and in detail the destruction, suffering and death which prevailed in Hiroshima. In fact, in one study of the novel, Anthony Liman maintains that "the real motive of the novel is to give us a wonderfully direct insight into the nature of staying alive!"[5] For Ibuse, like Hersey, concentrates on the struggle of a few people to survive, and in their thoughts, feelings and actions, we find a strongly affirmative response to the nihilistic message of the bomb.

Although the action in *Black Rain* begins a number of years after the last events in Hersey's *Hiroshima,* Shigematsu returns to the same period of time which is depicted in the latter work, the period between August 6 and August 15, 1945. Shigematsu begins his defense of his niece by copying out a portion of her diary. This effort, however, plunges him into the world of the past, perhaps for the first prolonged visit in a number of years. He breaks off at some point in the entry for August 9, however, the latter part of which includes Yasuko's innocent description of an abnormal phenomenon, black rain:

> I suddenly remembered a shower of black rain .... It must have been about 10 a.m. Thundery black clouds had borne down on us from the direction of the city, and the rain from them had fallen in streaks the thickness of a fountain pen. (p. 34)

It may be merely a coincidence that Shigematsu breaks off copying the diary just before reaching this passage, but we note that his wife, Shigeko, realizes at once that it would be futile to copy out this passage as a defense of their niece, because of the implications of the black rain.

The black rain is a symbol which, by interrelating a number of somber images, represents an insidious threat to the survival of the survivors. First of all, it suggests the unnatural effects of the bomb. As Anthony Liman suggests in his study of the novel, "The lethal blackness of rain may have frightened

Ibuse as an ugly break in the natural cycle: how can something as right, as life-giving as rain return to earth bringing black death?"[6] And Arthur Kimball reads the symbol as "an unspoken judgment" because "a life-giving source is perverted into darkness."[7] The symbol thus suggests that nature has been tampered with or even injured, and since man is a part of nature, his survival seems more questionable in an altered environment. Second, the black rain suggests defilement and contamination. In the same entry of Yasuko's diary, the young girl innocently describes how she was splashed and stained by the black rain:

> my skin looked as though it had been splashed with mud. My white short-sleeved blouse was soiled in the same way, and the fabric was damaged at the soiled spots. When I looked in the mirror, I found that I was spotted all over with the same color. (p. 34)

Yasuko feels marked by the rain, for she is unable to cleanse or purify herself with water, and this image of a sign or stigma calls to mind the stain of the persistent local rumor. In fact, Shigematsu's wife realizes that this candid diary will probably frustrate their efforts to arrange a marriage for their niece because it will seem to confirm the rumor:

> At the time she wrote it [the diary] you could still talk to people about the black rain without their getting funny ideas, as nobody knew there was anything poisonous in it. But now everybody knows. (p. 33)

The question has been asked, whether or not the black rain which fell in Hiroshima was actually radioactive and harmful, but I do not think that the latest scientific answer to this question will help us to understand or to evaluate the novel.[8] The black rain in this novel represents the mysterious effects of the bomb, its power through radiation to disturb nature, to contaminate people and stigmatize them, setting them off from society and marking them for death.

Confronted by the mention of the black rain in Yasuko's diary, Shigematsu decides to copy out his own diary of the time. Although he still maintains that he is acting to defend his niece, and although he adds that he will donate the recopied diary to a library, his real motivation seems to be a desire to face the past. Obviously, the roots of his present problems lie in the past, so he undertakes a contemplative journey into that strange and

awful world of Hiroshima destroyed, not with the intention of finding specific answers and solutions, but with that of observing and reflecting on this past which intrudes so forcibly on the present. But the focus of his journey into the past is on how to live in the present, as Anthony Liman points out, "If Shigematsu has any morality, it is the morality of *present action.* His past memories and experiences and his relationships all gravitate to one center, the present."[9] So it is not merely a matter of trying to explain what happened in Hiroshima but actually a larger concern with finding a way of life in face of imminent death. Thus Ibuse, like Hersey, takes a retrospective glance at what happened in Hiroshima, but neither in the sense of the statistics of destruction nor in that of political or historical causality. The two authors are not writing about the bomb but about people, specifically about how people faced and survived the devastation of a city, as an affirmation of life in the face of the great negation represented by this new weapon which gives man the ability to destroy all life on earth if he should so choose.

Let us turn to the reactions of the survivors. Here as in Hersey's work, people survived the initial blast by chance, but in general, Ibuse's depiction of the survivors' reactions is more varied and lifelike, and consequently less idealistic than that of Hersey. Just after the bomb exploded, for example, Shigematsu is caught in a mass of bodies in the railroad station. The struggle for survival appears to be a confused and crude free-for-all:

> With cries and groans rising all about me, I shook myself free of those lying on me and struggled to my feet. I pushed out with all my strength, thrusting others out of the way, until eventually I found myself being buffeted from behind .... Here, the cries of pain outnumbered those of alarm and anger. (pp. 37-38)

As Shigematsu then walks through the ruined city, he encounters all sorts of reactions: people are baffled, cowardly, helpless, helpful, weird, kind, selfish, and even comical. One of the first people Shigematsu sees outside the railroad station is a woman half buried in the rubble, screaming unintelligibly and throwing pieces of tile at anyone who approaches her. In one semi-comical scene, a man distributes postcards to the victims, cheerfully telling them to write to their families and friends, but it turns out that his noisy solicitude is a form of delirium. A more painful scene is that in which a young boy reluctantly reveals that his father abandoned him in a burning building in order to save his own life. One man is beaten and crushed in a

crowd, while others support each other and shared food and water. Some people sit down in despair and die, while others rush to the river and drown. It would not be easy to make a meaningful generalization about this rich variety of human behavior, and of course Ibuse does not try to do so. These incidents are unified, however, in that they form part of Shigematsu's broad, human experience and in that they are viewed with a kind detachment which seldom accuses or excuses. Pathos, irony and humor coexist in Ibuse's narrative point of view which seems broader and deeper than that of Hersey's serious and decent work.

The main characters in *Black Rain* are also a great deal more complex than their counterparts in Hersey's *Hiroshima,* which is not surprising when we consider the difference in genre and in the length of treatment as well as the fact that Ibuse is obviously a lot more at home dealing with the Japanese mind. And yet there is an important similarity in that both works emphasize the extraordinary value of ordinary qualities in extraordinary times. Yasuko, Shigeko, and Shigematsu are ordinary people in a very positive sense, for they undergo a trial of such severity that heroism would be beside the point. In their quiet concern for and devotion to each other as well as in their careful and patient attention to their responsibilities to others, the three of them exemplify a way of life which defies the destructive power of the bomb, even though the latter may threaten and claim their individual lives.

The novel begins with Shigematsu's concern for his niece, Yasuko, who is technically not a direct victim of the bomb, for, as her uncle is so eager to prove, she was at a safe distance in a suburb when the bomb exploded. Her diary shows that she is an innocent but perceptive, candid and even humorous observer of human events, qualities which she may have inherited from her uncle who taught her how to keep a diary. She writes, for example, that when she saw the monstrous explosion in Hiroshima, she did not feel very much like returning to the city. But of course she does return to look for her uncle and aunt, and on the way, she is caught in the black rain. After she finds them, she obediently follows her uncle through the hellish landscape toward their company plant, an arduous and dangerous journey, filled with horrible sights and sensations: fires, collapsed buildings, hideously burned victims, screams for help, and mutilated and decaying corpses. Although she is weak, tired and frightened, however, she endures the hardships of the journey which, Shigematsu later fears, may have exposed her to radiation. When she arrives at the company, she quietly busies herself with her responsibilities there and in the Shizuma household until she is given

permission to evacuate with her aunt.

The patience and endurance of this indirect victim of the bombing are put to a severe test, however, five years later when she suddenly falls seriously ill. At first, painful abscesses appear on her body; then her hair and teeth begin to fall out, she runs a high fever and steadily weakens until she is near death. All the while, she tries to make as little trouble as possible for her uncle and aunt, but her attempts at concealment and self-sacrifice not only fail to achieve this aim but also endanger her life. As a last resort, Shigematsu brings her the memoirs of Dr. Iwatake who was so severely wounded in the bombing that his case appeared even more hopeless than that of Yasuko. Dr. Iwatake continued to fight for his life in spite of the fact that as a doctor he was fully aware of how close he was to death. At one point, in fact, it seemed that he had died, but through a near miracle, he slowly began to recover. Shigematsu hopes that this story will encourage his niece to continue her struggle to survive, but he realizes that in her case as well, a near miracle is necessary.

Shigeko is cast in the unspectacular role of a dutiful wife who devotes herself to the care of her husband and niece. But in the destruction of Hiroshima, her self-sacrifice and subservience appear as positive strengths which help her and her family to survive. Immediately after the bombing, Shigeko gathers some useful and valuable objects and proceeds to a pre-arranged place of safety. As John Bester points out, when Shigematsu finds her sitting there with a knapsack on her back and with a rice-cooking pot and a pan by her side, he has good reason to be reassured about the possibility of surviving as a family.[10] Like Yasuko, Shigeko obediently follows Shiematsu on that long and dangerous walk to the company plant and sets to work in an unobtrusive manner. And when her niece falls ill five years later, she patiently takes care of her until she falls ill herself with fatigue. But we see another dimension to Shigeko's character in the two written documents which she contributes to the novel: a memoir of the food they ate at the end of the war and a daily record of the progress of Yasuko's illness. Both documents show her careful attention to detail, her intelligence, and her sincerity. Moreover, in her conversations with her husband and her niece, she reveals her sensitivity, her concern and love for them.

Shigematsu, in copying out his diary, undertakes a contemplative journey into the past, allegedly in order to defend his niece, but the journey becomes an end in itself. Like the hero of a Western epic, Shigematsu finds himself in an impasse in the present. He is unable to move forward, so he undertakes a journey into a dark world of ruins, fires, smoke and suffering shades. The

underworld is in many ways an image of the present world, a distorted image to be sure, but the alteration in perspective gives the hero (and the reader) new eyes for the present world. Shigematsu returns from his journey to find that it has not been merely a vision or a dream – his niece is dying before his eyes. But he comes back with a renewed sense of life and with a purpose to continue the struggle to survive. Simply speaking, Shigematsu sees what we see, that even in the extraordinary and bewildering circumstance of an atomic attack, he behaves very much as he does at present in the little country village of Kobatake. In many ways, his way of life is as circumscribed and unspectacular as that of his wife, except that as a man he is allowed to bluster, to scheme out loud and to take affirmative action which unfortunately does not always succeed. He follows the local customs and observes the traditional festivals, goes fishing, tries to arrange the marriage of his niece and raises carp.

After the atomic bomb explodes, Shigematsu struggles to get up, and after the initial shock wears off, he begins walking into the city, observing and reacting much as he would at present. Anthony Liman notes Shigematsu's "reluctance, almost inability to recognize death, even when surrounded by its overpowering presence."[11] He helps a woman to find her valuables, discovers that his face has been burned, and slowly and carefully makes his way home. After he brings his wife and niece to the company plant, he begins to function as a member of that group, following orders, even when he disagrees with them. He goes twice in vain to beg the military authorities for coal, and he even recites the Buddhist scriptures at funeral services in the company at the request of his boss. Each of these experiences, however, broadens and deepens his character. Shigematsu thus witnesses his own behavior as well as that of his wife and niece in recopying his diary, and he finds good reason to be reassured about his way of life. "In the midst of these random experiences," J. Thomas Rimer writes, Shigematsu "gradually comes to realize that the ordinary citizens of Hiroshima have the ability to live on. In the simplicity of their modest concerns, he finds not only comfort but hope."[12] His own survival may be due to a mixture of chance and cautious action, but the value of living, of life itself in all its variety remains untouched by the destruction of Hiroshima, even as it continues in threatening the life of Yasuko.

Hersey and Ibuse then emphasize the simple affirmation of the value of life which is reflected in the behavior of a number of people who struggled to survive the destruction of Hiroshima. This simple value, however, has often

been set aside in the interest of prosperity, of victory, or of freedom, so these authors remind us what such a decision entailed in Hiroshima. David Sanders claims that the theme of survival is pervasive in the works of Hersey[13], and we need only think of his next work, *The Wall,* a novel which concerns the struggle of a small group of people to survive the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto. Ibuse has more generally concerned himself with endurance, resignation and quiet humor in the face of adversity and with the richness and value of the traditional Japanese lifestyle, which has not prevented him from noting with irony the vanity and limitations of his many characters who live in places like the Kobatake of this novel. Both writers are thus affirmative, but they also seem to be worried by the events which they describe, with good reason. Jonathan Schell notes in his *The Fate of the Earth:*

> The Hiroshima people's experience, accordingly, is of much more than historical interest. It is a picture of what our whole world is poised to become – a backdrop of scarcely imaginable horror lying just behind the surface of our normal life, and capable of breaking through into that normal life at any second.[14]

The uncertain state of the survivors at the end of these two works is most likely a reminder that in a sense, we are all tentative survivors of Hiroshima.

Notes:

1. John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Bantam Books, 1948). All references are to this text.
2. David Sanders, *John Hersey* (Boston: Twayne, 1967), pp. 42-43.
3. John Hersey, *Hiroshima,* trans. Ishikawa Kin'ichi and Tanimoto Kiyoshi (Tokyo: Hosei Univ. Press, 1949).
4. Ibuse Masuji, *Black Rain,* trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1969). All references are to this text. The original: *Kuroi Ame* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1966).
5. Anthony V. Liman, "Ibuse's *Black Rain*," in Kinya Tsuruta and Thomas E. Swann, eds., *Approaches to the Modern Japanese Novel* (Tokyo: Sophia Univ. Press, 1976), p. 52
6. Liman, p. 53.
7. Arthur Kimball, *Crisis in Identity and Contemporary Japanese Novels* (Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo: Tuttle, 1973), p. 48.
8. Jonathan Schell in *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 37, states clearly, by the way, that "a 'black rain' generated by the bomb ... fell on the western portions of the city, carrying radioactive fallout from the blast to the ground."

9. Liman, p. 57.
10. John Bester, "Translator's Preface" to *Black Rain,* p. 7.
11. Liman, pp. 51-52.
12. J. Thomas Rimer, *Modern Japanese Literature and Its Traditions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), p. 250.
13. Sanders, p. 2.
14. Schell, p. 46.