

After reading John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, I was thinking about the criticism it might have received. The publisher's note of its Penguin Books printing from November 1946 describes the prior discussion around the atomic bombs used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, at least in the Anglosphere, as detached from the "feelings and reactions of the people from Hiroshima". While some people already condemned the bombs' deployment, others had defended and attempted to justify it. Hersey's article opposes claims held by this latter group, such as General Leslie Groves' claim of radiation poisoning being "a very pleasant way to die", so surely it would draw criticism from people who weren't convinced by it. However, I'm more interested in the criticism Hersey's article might have received from the former group who condemned the attacks. The question I'm interested in researching is: What criticisms did Hersey's *Hiroshima* receive from an anti-war perspective? Are there later texts about the attacks that reflect this criticism?

Some of the criticisms of *Hiroshima* from this perspective relate to the way Hersey presents the events he is describing. One claim is that the survivors whose stories Hersey told weren't sufficiently representative of that group. The article *John Hersey and the American Conscience* describes many of them as having "higher income, or more education than the average Hiroshima resident" (Yavenditti 34), in part because these traits would help reduce the language barrier. *Atomic idioms* states that "four of them were drawn from the minority pool of the uninjured" (May 8) and as such don't represent the extent of devastation. This latter article also notes that Hersey described these survivors as "among the luckiest" (115) of victims, but does not seem to consider that a sufficient justification against the criticism. Another claim about Hersey's presentation is that the survivor's own words are rarely presented directly, and instead

their stories are filtered and spoken through Hersey. *Atomic idioms* claims that there are “few instances when we hear the survivors’ voices” (May 8), and that when they are heard it is to “reinforce existing stereotypes” (May 9). In an indirect way this seems to have been addressed by later texts’ more direct representation of survivors’ own accounts. A 2015 article where three Hiroshima survivors “recount their memories of that day and their health experiences since” (McCurry) still includes the author’s own words, but a greater proportion of the text directly presents the survivors’ own words. *The view from under the mushroom cloud*, written by a journalist of daily Hiroshima newspaper *Chugoku Shimbun*, describes some of its employees’ experiences having survived the attack, including photos taken by its photographer on that day, and their ongoing efforts “to create a world free of nuclear arms” (Miyazaki).

Another recurring criticism is that Hersey did not do enough to criticize the United States’ role in perpetrating the attack. Both Yavenditti and May mention the writings of Mary McCarthy and Dwight Macdonald, which criticized Hersey for his emphasis on the continuation of life making the attacks seem “safe and familiar” (Yavenditti 41). May states that Hersey did not confront the morality of the bomb directly, with few direct examples of moral confrontation including the “Japanese Army doctors who [gave] priority to the ‘slightly wounded’ over the ‘heavily wounded’” (May 7) instead of those who decided to use the bomb.

#### Works Cited

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