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The Danger of the Sublime Conception of Destiny in the Post-Bellum American South and Japan: Martin Luther King, Jr., Gail Hightower, and Yasuda Yojuro

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Donald Trump's administration has been criticized by many throughout the world for its harsh immigration policies and lack of humanitarianism. These harsh denouncements vary in their specifics, but it is clear to many that Trump has abetted nationalistic chauvinism, blaming foreigners for the troubles of the country he was elected to run. While his political act of declaring his enemy to be very dangerous could give rise to lethal conflict, Trump's attitude and statements are, nevertheless, and whether for good or for ill, easily understandable. He is often considered an amateur politician who blunders into difficulties both within and outside the U.S., but this non-professionalism has led many to pay closer attention to his outrageous politics.

I here discuss the Trump administration not to express support for him by any means but instead to draw a contrast between his political stance, which has been condemned, and that of Japan during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War. As is well known, the government of Japan at that time imparted a kind of military indoctrination to the Japanese people, painting the U.S. and the UK as demonic entities due to their colonization of other Asian countries. The military propaganda certainly helped support the warlike spirit of the Japanese, but there is another cultural aspect in Japan from that time that should not be missed. By contrast with the military government's methods, some Japanese literary intellectuals attempted to inculcate what they considered to be a "proper" Japanese spirit to persevere through the difficulties of war. These intellectuals put forward what they considered to be an "inherited Japanese spirit," present in the country since ancient times and, they believed, embedded in the Japanese disposition to persevere in harsh circumstances. These intellectuals encouraged people to follow their ideas of traditional aesthetics to continue the war to its ultimate conclusion, and their works were widely read by young Japanese, who were affected by the aesthetic view of these intellectuals. Consequently, they resolved to endure the war, and did so until their land was destroyed by the heavy

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bombings by the U.S. military. It is worth noting, however, that Japanese aesthetics were theorized by these intellectuals without reference to the propaganda of the Imperial Japanese Army and without any intention of provoking animosity against Japan's enemies. The intellectuals aimed to establish a sublime aesthetics of Japan that was not tied to imperial colonization by absorbing themselves in their own world and averting their eyes from contemporary politics.

A review of Japan in the Second Sino-Japanese War and Pacific War indicates how perilous this aesthetics was, especially when people did not completely comprehend what they were fighting for and who they were fighting with. However, the Empire of Japan was not unique in this regard: the South that William Faulkner described in his novels gives a parallel to the Japan of this time. This essay will review the risks entailed by individual devotion to the aesthetics and fate that prevents the development of productive discussion with one's opponent to build a better future. For this, we examine some analogous aspects regarding the destiny of defeat as embraced by Gail Hightower, one of the main characters in William Faulkner's *Light in August*, and Yasuda Yojuro, a representative Japanese intellectual during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War. This paper will indicate how these individuals became so utterly caught up in what they considered their sublime fate that they lost the objectivity needed to reflect upon themselves.

Before that, however, an American leader who takes quite a different stance will be examined. In a way that is quite at odds with Trump's reckless provocation, Martin Luther King, Jr., recognized his adversaries, pointed out the faults in their positions with logic, and persuaded them to change their erroneous stance in the hopes of creating a racially integrated society. Meanwhile, he did occasionally betray his aversion from political opponents. In his "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," for example, King did not hide his frustration with the white clergymen who were urging him not to perform the "extreme" acts that he did in Birmingham. Toward the middle of the letter, his tone of anger becomes so elevated that he calls the stumbling block to the black activist not "the White Citizen's Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."[1] King's letter castigates this group, whom he accuses of not following the road of justice informed by the Christian discipline but abided in an inner, smug space within the church, where they could shield their eyes from the turbulence of the outside world by restricting themselves to preaching on heavenly subjects. The diatribe that King unleashes in his letter about the white moderate is quite sharp, and he

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in *A Testament of Hope*: *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr*., ed. James Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 295.

even refers to this group as worse than the white supremacists. The demands of the white moderate on the black activist is always to wait until the time is ripe to achieve their shared goal of racial equality. However, for King, such an exhortation means nothing short of "never" to the black people. He decided that this supposedly decent advice, to maintain peace and order, simply results in a waste of time, which he characterizes as follows: "Actually time is neutral. It can be used either destructively or constructively."[2]

The use of the term "constructive" implies that King was not necessarily disappointed with his white allies. He stood between two opposing groups, struggling to find a way of mediating them—one group, satisfied with the status quo of the South, who had lapsed into "the 'do-nothingism' of the complacent," and the other, who had "lost faith in America" and were on the point of exploding against the white regime.[3] The Birmingham letter includes a certain threat against white "pacifists," insinuating that black people, inundated with anger, would run riot unless the radical nonviolent movement for their civil rights provided an exit for them from the cul-de-sac they found themselves in. This document also testifies to King's determination to direct the two opposing forces into unity and achieve a constructive movement. He fully acknowledged his fate as a minister who was called upon to perform a challenging task, even though doom might await him.

Some remarkable traits emerge from the Birmingham letter that are relevant to the topic of this essay. First, although King was sustained by Christian discipline, in which the criticized white clergymen also believed, King never blinked in the face of the brutal reality of racial discrimination in the South. Second, whereas King referred to the feats of great figures of history, his eyes were trained on constructing a new future, without clinging to the past. Time itself is neutral, but the important thing is how one takes advantage of the present to strive after one's goal. King displayed enmity to his opponents, but his vision remained focused on a constructive future, in contrast to Trump, who exaggerates the sense of crisis in his people. Thus, King could not accept the neutrality of time, as he devoted his life to realizing his dream. Finally, and most significantly, for King, the enemy became not only an opponent to refute and overcome but also an indicator that allowed him to highlight his goals more starkly. Generally, having an enemy is integral to winning a victory, as no triumph can be complete without a loser. In his sermons, King sought a channel to persuade his enemy to come to his side, although the enemy, in a different respect, played the role of setting him off down his glorious road.

By comparison with King's moral and political stance and his preservation of a positive attitude toward the construction of an ideal U.S., some of the actions of

2. Ibid., 296.
3. Ibid., 296–97.

Faulkner's characters lead in a different direction from King or even Trump. Here, we focus on the defrocked Presbyterian minister Gail Hightower, from *Light in August*, on the grounds that his attitude toward fate forms a remarkable contrast to King's. Hightower is totally taken up with the past, which takes the form of Jefferson, the county seat of Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, in which Hightower's grandfather, a Confederate cavalryman, was shot to death while trying to steal chickens from a henhouse during the Civil War.[4] Interestingly, Hightower does not shy away from the comical aspects of the death of his grandfather, who might have been killed not by a Union soldier but by a Southern lady; if this is true, the death is a mere farce that degrades the grandfather's masculinity. Although no lucid explanation is given for why Hightower pursues the shadow of his dead grandfather in such an extraordinary manner, he is certainly far from building the constructive future that King craved.

Like Faulkner's other characters, Hightower, dubbed the "Done Damned,"[5] believes himself to have a predestination in Jefferson, which is encrusted with defeat, despair, and fury that mirror the dark aspects of the South. The quote below indicates how Hightower is striving to square his life with that of the grandfather, whose death as a Confederate soldier was probably absurd:

> "So it's no wonder," he thinks, "that I skipped a generation. It's no wonder that *I had no father* and that I had already died one night twenty years before I saw light. And that *my only salvation* must be to return to the place to die where my life had already ceased before it began."[6]

If Hightower's insistence that he himself was born dead is right, this means that his physical being is lifeless, and its substance is nothing but spirit. The aim of this spirit is surely not to cry out against racial injustice and other painful matters of the South rooted in slavery. While he does not blame the South for its role in many cruelties and tragedies of its history, his attitude toward it is, after all, very equivocal. This ambiguous attitude may find an echo in his attitude toward his father. Hightower remarks that he "had no father," although his real father was an

4. One of the distinct qualities of Hightower is that he is unable to keep a proper distance from the past where his grandfather and father haunt and govern his mind; this idiosyncrasy is especially salient in chapter 20. It is worth noting that he had maintained an objective position to the events involving other characters, such as Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, Lena Grove, and Byron Bunch, before chapter 19. However, chapter 19 shows the atrocious murder of Joe Christmas by Percy Grimm carried out in Hightower's kitchen, and the scene definitely revived a dismal sense of the South and made Hightower more unsettled.

5. William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 61.

6. Ibid., 477−78; italics mine.

abolitionist and was for some reason labeled his "enemy."[7] Further discussion of Hightower's father will be found below, but here it is possible to note why Hightower negates his father and is drawn to where his grandfather met his absurd death. That is, Hightower must believe it to be his fate as a Southerner to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, a Confederate cavalryman. Hightower's extraordinary performance in the church in Jefferson seems to be a kind of parody but also exhibits suicidal tendencies. With the suicidal behavior, he imagines that he can achieve the redemption of the sins the South had committed; for Hightower, doom and salvation appear to be two sides of the same coin, and his self-destructive behavior even suggests a kind of vicarious self-punishment for the existence of his father, who expressed disloyalty to the traditional South.

Hightower's self-punishment is an expression of the sense of punishment that all Southerners felt after the loss of the Civil War. Hightower accepted, or could not help attaching himself to, the cursed past of the South, which allowed him to establish his fated punishment. To endure this, he has to accept a Southern helplessness and incapability, caused by the loss of the war. In this way, he speaks to himself: "And after all, I have paid. I have bought my ghost, even though I did pay for it with my life. And who can forbid me doing that? *It is any man's privilege to destroy himself, so long as he does not injure anyone else, so long as he lives to and of himself*."[8] Because Hightower took it upon himself to become the ghost of the South to destroy himself, he did not heed the warning from the residents of the town to leave after his wife died in Memphis in scandalous circumstances; nor did he leave Jefferson after suffering heinous violence from the local Klan. Hightower's sin is being born as a Southerner, and his resolute continuance in Jefferson shows how he imposes on himself the ordeal of persevering through adversity like a martyr. Be that as it may, Hightower's life does not advance beyond the time of his grandfather, and thus there is no such thing as constructive time for him but neutral and wavering time that never advances. After discovering this about him, his wife, a daughter of a minister who taught at the seminary where Hightower studied, left the church in Jefferson every weekend and fell into love affairs with other men in a hotel in Memphis and ultimately took her own life. Thus, in contrast with King, Hightower does not abide in the present time that is given by God but burrows into the past of the South, against God's will.

Hightower thus deems the church not as a sacred space for his "damned" spirit to find salvation but as a thorny sphere where he can live up to his cursed fate. He dubs it a "shelter,"[9] but it does not shield him from the past of the South; rather, this shelter allows him to persist in his fate, shutting off any future that would

7. Ibid., 475.
8. Ibid., 490; italics mine.
9. Ibid., 478.

allow expiation or rebirth. Hightower does not appreciate hearing the story by Byron Bunch of his love for Lena Grove that makes no demands, because this type of love is responsive to God's grace and contains redemptive power. Unlike Bunch and his passion for love and life, Hightower is "neither cold nor warm,"[10] lacking human emotions, and virtually ineligible to "marry folks."[11] Here, a memory of a thought that Hightower's father had is worth noting: "As if he came suddenly to believe that Christ had meant that him whose spirit alone required healing, was not worth the having, the saving."[12] Christianity, in Hightower's eyes, does not necessarily generate healing; it is the apparatus that allows a sinner like him to receive a sense of punishment. Harvey Gable, for his part, considers Hightower's outlandish religious behavior to be somewhat constructive, saying that "in his frenzied preaching, Hightower expresses his unconscious desire to smash the very walls [. . .] to break them open and experience the genuine power of the Life-force directly."[13] Because "his frenzied preaching" is "full of galloping cavalry and defeat and glory"[14] of Southerners like his grandfather, however, it is unclear how the church and Christianity can nurture Hightower's energy to survive distressing circumstances. Unlike Joe Christmas, who mumbles repetitively "*God loves me too*,"[15] Hightower is most afraid of God's love and longs for His curse.

Even after being expelled from the church, Hightower remains in "the brown, unpainted and unobtrusive bungalow"[16] that is his home in Jefferson, which comes to serve as his substitute for the church. He clings to it not because he wishes to blink the real, heinous world of the town in a way similar to the white clergymen whom King denounced, but because Hightower believes he can truly face his destiny within this church. His church, his home, enables him to "live to and of himself"[17] and face the fate he wishes. His home, which is now his church, is isolated from others' spaces and hidden by bushes, but importantly, this confined space is an image of his state of mind. Like his home, he avoids the gaze of the world by remaining indoors. Chapter 20 of *Light in August* exhibits a visionary scene, in which Hightower is surrounded by the faces of other Southerners and himself.

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10. Ibid., 82.
11. Ibid., 88.
12. Ibid., 474−75.
13. Harvey L. Gable, "Hightower's Apotheosis in *Light in August*," *Mississippi Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1996): 432.
14. Faulkner, *Light in August*, 63.
15. Ibid., 105; italics in original.
16. Ibid., 57.
17. Ibid., 490.

> He seems to watch himself among faces, always among, *enclosed and surrounded by*, faces, as though he watched himself in his own pulpit, from the rear of the church, or as though he were a fish in a bowl. And more than that: the faces seem to be mirrors in which he watches himself. He knows them all; he can read his doings in them. He seems to see reflected in them a figure antic as a showman, a little wild [. . .]
>
> He sees the faces which surround him mirror astonishment, puzzlement, then outrage, then fear, as if they looked beyond his wild antics and saw behind him and looking down upon him, in his turn unaware, the final and supreme Face Itself, cold, terrible because of Its omniscient detachment.[18]

The faces in this vision seem to represent the dark and twisted aspects of the South, but it should be noted that Hightower feels as if he were inseparable from them. Because he has close ties with these other faces, "he can read his doings in them." The faces of the South ultimately give way to "the final and supreme Face," which belongs to the damned God of the South, who is administering to Hightower the punishment of staying in an enclosure of time and space, embodied in his "prison" home. Because this prison is like the church for Hightower, he appears to see his accursed figure "in his own pulpit." This delusion hints at his inability not only to maintain distance from other Southerners but also to reflect on himself.[19]

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18. Ibid., 488−89; italics mine.

19. Harvey Gable describes a positive aspect of Hightower's character, noting that Hightower breaks an old urn and thereby gains "a new awareness of his true self," so as to be "able to accept the descending spirit" of his grandfather. The spirit carries, according to Gable's interpretation, "a fresh wave of power" that allows Hightower to have "an absolute experience of the Spirit's fullness that was not possible before, when the vessel [of Hightower] was already filled with stale fluid" (Gable, "Hightower's Apotheosis in *Light in August*," 439). In the same manner, with respect to the scene where Hightower is surrounded by mirrored faces that converge in one final and supreme Face, or the cursed God, Gable states that "viewing his self now from a higher and more objective point Hightower can see that the God whose judgement he had feared was only an image constructed to account for what he saw mirrored in the faces around him" (ibid., 437). However, it is clear that this hallucinated scene does not show that he establishes an objective point, nor depict the release from the cursed faces and God of the South. In contrast to Gable's view, André Bleikasten draws an analogy between Hightower and Percy Grimm, despite the fact that their way of life does not match at all. In Bleikasten's opinion, Hightower and Grimm are obsessed with their own ideas of aesthetics, to the extent that they cannot go outside of "a sanctuary, a refuge of purity, an antilife institution" (André Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy*: *Faulkner's Novels from* The Sound and the Fury *to* Light in August [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990], 313). Another shared trait is that the two do not show "individual emotion" (ibid., 312) because their actions, whether atrocious or weak, arise not from a specific animosity or vengeance against an enemy but from dedication to their lofty beliefs. In fact, when Grimm pursues Christmas

This scene also highlights another significant point: unlike King, Hightower cannot point out an enemy in a way that could enable him to consider his life goals afresh and exit the prison. If he believed his enemy were the North, he would be a Southerner who fanatically devotes himself to guarding the tradition of the South, like Percy Grimm; if the enemy were the South, he could leave the cursed place and find himself a new future in a different town. His sense of the heaviness of his fate is rooted in the fact that he has no "external enemies to turn upon" himself.[20]

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running toward Hightower's home, Grimm's expression shows "nothing vengeful, [. . .] no fury, no outrage" (Faulkner, *Light in August*, 461) against Christmas. Grimm has a series of the brutal acts because he is moved by the will of "Juggernaut or Fate" or "the Player" with his "lean, swift, blind obedience" (ibid., 462). In the denouement scene where Grimm is chasing Christmas, it is evident that Grimm is as entirely caught up in his fate and aesthetics as Hightower is.

20. Franklin G. Burroughs, "God the Father and Motherless Children: *Light in August*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 19, no. 3 (1973): 196. It is not only Hightower who is walled up in a house; Joanna Burden, the descendant of an abolitionist family, also feels that she cannot free herself from the destiny of the white race, as her father prophesied before the tombs of her grandfather and half-brother, both of whom were killed by Colonel Sartoris in a controversy over black people's voting rights. Her father told her that they were not killed by Colonel Sartoris but by the curse eternally attached to white people, the curse from which the children of the white race cannot be exempted. Hearing her father's obsessive story, the little Joanna was very frightened, thinking of the black race as follows:

> I seemed to see ["Negroes"] for the first time not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people [. . .]. And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross. And it seemed like the white babies were struggling, even before they drew breath, to escape from the shadow that was not only upon them but beneath them too, flung out like their arms were flung out, as if they were nailed to the cross. I saw all the little babies that would ever be in the world, the ones not yet even born—a long line of them with their arms spread, on the black crosses. (Faulkner, *Light in August*, 253)

Arguably, Joanna and Hightower are mirror-image twins (Burroughs, "God the Father and Motherless Children," 190). Along with Hightower, when Joanna accepted the cursed fate as a white related by her father, she is destined to lead a solitary life without being connected to the white residents in Jefferson. In fact, "[Joanna] did not want to be saved" (Faulkner, *Light in August*, 264) and the curse itself becomes a religion to give her a hellish world. Another point common to Joanna and Hightower is that because they do not find the enemy against whom they have such enmity, they cannot escape their enclosed house to face it. In as much as she fully takes in the destiny of the white race, it is no use trying to achieve revenge against the white person who killed her half-brother and grandfather. Therefore, Colonel Sartoris is not the object of her hatred, and she submits herself to the destiny of the whites, who are already nailed on the "black crosses."

As I have noted, the narrator of the novel implies that Hightower does have a specific enemy: "[His father] was more than a stranger: he was an enemy."[21] While Hightower's grandfather was a dyed-in-the-wool Southerner and owned slaves, his father "would neither eat food grown and cooked by, nor sleep in a bed prepared by, a negro slave"[22] and was an abolitionist. Hightower's father did march against the North during the Civil War, but he did not carry a musket to fire at a Union soldier, nor did he wear a Confederate uniform. Instead, he was clothed in "the somber frock coat [. . .] which he had used to preach"[23] as a Presbyterian minister, and Hightower himself followed him in that denomination. Chapter 20 of *Light in August* brings us indicative anecdotes on Hightower's father; in particular, Hightower's childhood memory of opening a trunk of his father's things in the attic, out of which a musty smell rushed, conveys a strong impression:

> The garment was almost unrecognizable with patches. Patches of leather, mansewn and crude, patches of Confederate gray weathered leafbrown now, and one that stopped his very heart: it was blue, dark blue; the blue of the United States. Looking at this patch, at the mute and anonymous cloth, the boy, the child born into the autumn of his mother's and father's lives, whose organs already required the unflagging care of a Swiss watch, would experience a kind of hushed and triumphant terror which left him a little sick.[24]

This enigmatic moment, where Hightower encounters his father's garments, with a blue patch from the United States Army, allows the reader different possible interpretations. Later, Hightower imagined, with an appalling sense of victory, upon his later opening the trunk again, that the blue patches were evidence that his father might have killed a Union soldier and taken the patch from him. If so, Hightower, as a Southern child, could naturally feel a sense of victory in his observation. However, the memory also bears another interpretation, if the clothes signify a unity between the Union and Confederacy. It is impossible to escape the prospect that his father, amid the battle, prayed and saved an enemy's life, at that time when he "had practiced and learned [surgery and pharmacy] on the bodies of friend and foe alike while helping the doctors at the front,"[25] later becoming a doctor thanks in part to these experiences.

These contradictory analyses of the memory of the coat of Hightower's father indicate Hightower's ambivalent feeling, "that horrified triumph and sick joy,"

21. Ibid., 475.
22. Ibid., 467.
23. Ibid., 468.
24. Ibid., 469.
25. Ibid., 473.

provoked by the coat, and he wondered, "with still more horror yet at the depth and strength of his desire and dread to know," if "his father killed the man from whose coat the patch came."[26] If the father is really Hightower's enemy, then it is clear why Hightower is pursuing the trail of his grandfather, who was inimical to Hightower's father in terms of the ownership of slaves. However, Hightower must hate and love the enemy together because he was filled with awe by the coat the father put on during the war, and this feeling appears to imply that Hightower adored his father.[27] Although he may have been an apostate to the Confederacy, he did the right thing as a human being for Union soldiers if he saved their lives. The problem is, above all else, that Hightower cannot objectify his father, either as his enemy, to hate, or as his own, to love. Hightower's emotions are divided, and thus he "desires and dreads to know" about him, and this contradiction prevents him not only from leading a constructive life, but also from exiting his enclosed environment. The reason he is forced to remain there is that Hightower cannot draw meaning from his father's life or maintain a distance from him, his enemy, and his beloved father. The emotions of love and hate coalesce in the figure of his father, and Hightower cannot draw a clear boundary between the two.[28]

Hightower, feeling somewhat like a Confederate cavalry soldier at the front, has the illusion of the chivalrous sounds of "wild bugles and the clashing sabers and the dying thunder of hooves,"[29] in a way similar to what is written in the Book of Revelation. However, Hightower, the Southern son born too late, has no enemy that drives him to feel wrath and hate to allow him to reconsider his life of inactivity in Jefferson. While his father fought the Union against his principles, he nevertheless lived in the contradiction, without being "defeated and discouraged"[30] either during or after the war. The fact that his father saw no paradox in fighting in the war suggests that he could bear to live with two sides within himself:

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26. Ibid., 470.

27. In a different context to my essay, Alfred López elaborates on Hightower's homosexual, incestuous desire for his father. See Alfred J. López, "Queering Whiteness, Queering Faulkner: Hightower's 'Wild Bulges,'" *The Faulkner Journal* 22, no. 1−2 (2006−2007): 74−89.

28. André Bleikasten refers to a feature of the relationship between Joe Christmas and the female characters, with the exception of Lena Grove, such as Joanna Burden, Mrs. McEachern, Bobbie Allen, and the dietitian of his orphanage: "Christmas never stops seeking and fleeing the woman-mother who would finally appease that hunger beyond hunger which he has felt since childhood and which keeps harassing him throughout his life until the final moment of peace" (Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy*, 292). In a way, Christmas is to those women-mothers what Gail Hightower is to his father, and therefore it can be concluded that Hightower is always "seeking and fleeing" his father, with whom he wants to be identical at bottom but next to whom Hightower knows he is not strong enough.

29. Faulkner, *Light in August*, 493.

30. Ibid., 474.

> The very fact that *he could and did see no paradox* in the fact that he took an active part in a partisan war and on the very side whose principles opposed his own, was proof enough that *he was two separate and complete people*, one of whom dwelled by serene rules in a world where reality did not exist.
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> But the other part of him, which lived in the actual world, did as well as any and better than most. He lived by his principles in peace, and when war came he carried them into war and lived by them there.[31]

His father is a strong, ideal figure of a man, and Hightower may have wanted to become a Presbyterian minister in part to pursue his father's way of life in Jefferson, as well as to pursue his grandfather's. Even though his father was "a soldier without an enemy,"[32] he never avowed himself to be vulnerable to the charge of disloyalty to the South. He never embraced belief in the doom of the South, nor was he confined to that sphere of illusion where the faces of Southern ghosts were mirrored. It does not contradict the father's way of living that while working as a doctor in the South, he did not take in the traditional habit of the place. In opposition, Hightower is not as strong as his father and cannot create the distance between himself and the South, love and hate, or himself and his father. Consequently, he cannot escape from the confined place where various cursed, Southern faces surround him, the place that marks his fate, his weakness, and his tragedy. In Joe Christmas's death, Faulkner writes that "the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath [. . .] like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket" and its mode would be kept in the towner's "memories forever and ever."[33] The pent-up, cursed "black" blood of Christmas is finally released from his body, and his "serene and triumphant"[34] death becomes "a public monument"[35] that is inherited by subsequent generations. By contrast, Hightower's enclosed vision of the South remains "private and incommunicable,"[36] without expansion to and intersection with others' minds.

In the remainder of this essay, I will indicate the similarities between Hightower's poetics of defeat and the thought of Yasuda Yojuro, the influential Japanese critic during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War. His essays were extensively read by many young people who fought and perished in Pacific and Asian countries during the war. However, Yasuda's aim was not to elevate the warlike spirit of the Japanese but rather to do something entirely

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31. Ibid., 473−74; italics mine.
32. Ibid., 474.
33. Ibid., 465.
34. Ibid., 465.
35. Warwick Wadlington, *Reading Faulknerian Tragedy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 162.
36. Ibid., 162.

different. He kept up a steady stream of criticism of Japan's military tactics and its infamous language, including such phrases as the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (*Daitouwa Kyoueiken*) and Universal Brotherhood (*Hakkouichiu*), which, to the Japanese, were bound up with the cause of war. Yasuda described this use of language as negative heritage, taken partially from Western colonialism, and he urged the Japanese people to seek the traditional spirit inherent in themselves without taking on the taint of Japanese militarism.

His opposition to domestic military policy seems parallel to that of Hightower's father, who rebelled against the rules of the Confederacy, yet a salient difference remains between them. The father kept within his own discipline, as shown in his later life, which he lived unaffected by the loss of the Civil War. Unlike other Southerners, who kept their eyes from the results of the war yet still retained the traditional manners of the South, Hightower's father "looked forward and made what he could of defeat by making practical use of that which he had learned in it."[37] He cast his eye toward the future, unrestrained by the memory of the Old South.

Yasuda foresaw that Japan would surely experience defeat and devastation, and he believed that this was the predestined course that Japan should follow. His aesthetics already showed forth a fatal ruin for the nation in the future. The wild noise of the war and the sound of bugles like that heard in Revelation surges up within Hightower in the final part of chapter 20 in *Light in August*; likewise, Yasuda's thought bore a heavy load of eschatology.[38] Yasuda was inebriated from what he considered to be the traditional spirit of Japan, which led him to develop his notorious theory of "Japan as Irony," which accepts the present state, even if that state does become the loser in the war; and which "harbors the passion toward ruin."[39] For instance, "The Reconstruction of *Kokugaku* [National Learning] as a View of the World," an essay written in July 1941, about five months before the outbreak of the Pacific War, gave Yasuda's view of the gloom that was covering Japan. In that piece, he praised the pensive calm of the Japanese people in the face of war, and he became convinced that the traditionally inherited spirit of Japan, which helps people deal with the sadness of life, was restored.[40] Yasuda frequently praised the Retired Emperor Go-Toba and the samurai landowner Kusunoki Masashige, whom he considered to embody the Japanese aesthetics of defeat and to be distant from the colonial mindset that is focused on invasion and

37. Faulkner, *Light in August*, 474.

38. Takeuchi Yoshimi, "Overcoming Modernity," in *What Is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*, ed. and trans. Richard Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 145.

39. Yasuda Yojuro, "On the End of the Logic of Civilization and Enlightenment," in *Position of the Literature* (in Japanese) (Kyoto: Shingakusha, 1999), 7.

40. Yasuda Yojuro, "The Reconstruction of *Kokugaku* as a View of the World," in *The End of Modernity* (in Japanese) (Kyoto: Shingakusha, 2002), 198.

ruling other countries. Yasuda deemed those who were afraid of possible defeat to be disqualified from being Japanese and to be cowards.[41]

A key trait in Yasuda's thought as expressed in "Japan as Irony" is that he blurred the binary structure of good versus evil or justice versus infidelity and urged his readers to refrain from objectifying or analyzing and instead to accept the world as it is. As Hashikawa Bunsō, an intellectual active after the war, who had been deeply influenced by Yasuda's thought, wrote, the idea of "Japan as Irony" was very dangerous, to the extent that the Japanese people were enslaved by his aesthetics and did not respond to the national crisis.[42] For Yasuda, according to Hashikawa's view, the war was not a political but an aesthetic matter,[43] and thus it was not a legitimate object of scrutiny or discussion. The tragedy of the Japanese people lies in the fact that they faced the irrevocable state of war, not from a political perspective that would support devising measures against it, but through an aesthetics that they could not help but accept as irony. This aesthetics seems to echo Hightower's conception of human nature: "Man performs, engenders, so much more than he can or should have to bear. That's how he finds that he can bear anything. That's it. That's what is so terrible."[44] This thought is prompted by Bunch's benevolent behavior toward Lena Grove for her residence, but the context in wartime Japan suggests that forbearance beyond the ability of human beings caused the great tragedy.

Because Yasuda's romantic irony tended to lead to doom, his readers were unknowingly caught in psychic confinement without an exit, just as Hightower is; there, they could not objectify their enemy against whom they were to fight or with whom they were to negotiate. Similar aesthetics were also seen in the criticism written by a representative intellectual of the war years, Kamei Katsuichirō, who was another important member of the Japan Romantic School, to which Yasuda belonged. Kamei expressed his disgust for contemporary trends as below:

> [A] brilliantly constructed picture-card show spreads throughout the minds of the public in which the hero "Japanese spirit" and villain "foreign thought" battle it out with stock phrases until finally the hero is cheered when the villain falls over like a puppet. Shall we call this scene a rosy delusion brought about by our military victories? Such delusion, which is bound up with the particular egoism of those who seek salvation, hinders any accurate understanding of contemporary spirit. *We are*

41. Yasuda, "On the End of the Logic of Civilization and Enlightenment," 14.

42. Hashikawa Bunsō, *Introductory Criticisms of the Japan Romantic School* (in Japanese) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1998), 68.

43. Ibid., 109.

44. Faulkner, *Light in August*, 299.

thus overrun by an infirm spirit masquerading as bravery.[45]

Kamei's idea here is echoed by Yasuda; both denounced the propaganda of the Japanese military, which they believed was simply stock phrases borrowed from imperialist powers and only abetted by "a rosy delusion" of victories. The existence of the binary between hero and villain, Kamei insisted, was at root the same, and the pure Japanese words in Japanese classics and the imperial rescript were not identical to that banal imperial propaganda. To Kamei, those who wished to be heroes were "overrun by an infirm spirit masquerading as bravery" and were simply pursuing "egoistic salvation." He advocated his contemporaries to read the Japanese classics because they "exist for the purpose of continuous struggle, not for the purpose of reassuring us."[46] With Yasuda, but more intensively, Kamei elicited the will to fight and to ruin from the sacred Japanese classics that show that "we are condemned to eternal hell" and that "peace is even more frightening than war."[47] Both intellectuals believed that the path to ruin constituted the expression of the proper spirit for the Japanese.

Kamei's contention that citizens should not pursue salvation and peace but eternal hell and the continuation of war propelled them toward further inwardness. Again, Kamei and Yasuda advocated having a sense of decadence rather than of animosity against the enemy, as clearly seen in one of Yasuda's essays written after the war:

> Didn't we really understand the being of *our enemy* because we were good people? Didn't we have a sense of *what the enemy was*? What came to mind was that we *didn't apprehend* the substance of the enemy at that time. The substance we didn't feel in our minds didn't exist, did it? While we labeled the U.S. and the UK as the devil in word, we truly didn't understand their substance because we were good people. It was a great event after the war for us to understand just a little of the substance of the enemy *in our minds*. We entered a new stage of *war* just when we were able to make out the enemy.[48]

Leaving aside the question of whether the Japanese were good people, this retrospective view shows how some Japanese, if not all, lived in an enclosed

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45. Kamei Katsuichirō, "A Note on Contemporary Spirit," in *Overcoming Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan*, ed. and trans. Richard Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 42−43; italics mine.

46. Ibid., 49−50.

47. Ibid., 50.

48. Yasuda Yojuro, *The Fair Argument on Homeland II* (in Japanese) (Kyoto: Shingakusha, 2002), 305; italics in original.

spiritual sphere, in contrast to the magnificently described propaganda of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. As Hashikawa remarked, because people did not fully recognize the enemy, they lived in a distorted world of self-contradiction.[49]

Let us examine the comparison of Yasuda to Hightower once again. Hightower believes in nothing but the "defeat and glory"[50] of the South, which seems parallel to Yasuda's thought, so reading *Light in August* allows deliberation on the kernel of the fatal idea shared by Japanese intellectuals. Faulkner was widely read in Japan after the war, which indicates that the Japanese believed their defeat to be relevant to the defeat some of Faulkner's characters experienced. Another point that Hightower and Yasuda have in common is that both negated subjective power; in other words, they considered the vanishing of subjectivity to be an aesthetically sublime thing. In comparison with the poetics of Kobayashi Hideo, another important literary critic during the war, Hashikawa observed that Yasuda saw the reality of war only in the ironic view, while Kobayashi tied the outbreak of the war together with his concept of individual determination.[51] Hashikawa says that a characteristic of Yasuda's poetics is that it lacks the sense of individuality and determination and thus Hashikawa denounced his irony as weak-hearted.[52]

However, there is an important difference between Hightower and Yasuda. The former brought forth his romantic irony from past events and anecdotes on his father and grandfather, Yasuda's "Japan as Irony," although it was based on traditional aesthetics, and was oriented toward the future. Put another way, Hightower's aesthetics of irony remained in the past, but Yasuda intended to direct this traditional aesthetics of defeat toward the future. Karatani Kōjin concluded

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49. Hashikawa, *Introductory Criticisms of the Japan Romantic School*, 68.

50. Faulkner, *Light in August*, 63.

51. Hashikawa, *Introductory Criticisms of the Japan Romantic School*, 103−4.

52. Ibid., 68. Another non-negligible postwar intellectual, Takeuchi Yoshimi, developed a perspective similar to that of Hashikawa. Takeuchi wrote that a sense of individuality eluded Yasuda's thought, for the following reason:

> Yasuda advocated the complete rejection of "civilization and enlightenment." For him, "civilization and enlightenment" both was and was not a trend of thought, a fashion, and a logic; that is to say, it was the entirety of modern Japan. Hence it naturally contained the self. For Yasuda, the self could not easily be thetically posited, for through this positing it became relativized, was brought into relation with the other. *His method was to reduce the self to zero by means of its infinite expansion*, and here he went beyond Kobayashi Hideo. (Takeuchi, "Overcoming Modernity," 143; italics mine.)

As Takeuchi ingeniously remarked, Yasuda's irony negated the notion of self that brings about relativism; virtually, however, the substance of his self is nothing but solipsism. The truth of the matter is that while being devoid of individuality, his thought is enclosed without intersecting with other thoughts and, as a result, "since [Yasuda's] position avoided oppositional notions, its content expanded indefinitely and so became contentless" (ibid., 143).

that "Yasuda's 'Japan as Irony' did not include defeat, because the irony was initially premised on defeat. His irony won a sense of victory by taking in an absolute helplessness. It is as if he advocated the immortality of 'pathetic Japan.'"[53] Politics may assume the role of dealing with present and future challenges, but Yasuda's "Japan as Irony" completely excluded this mission; in this respect, Yasuda's aesthetics is more dangerous than Hightower's and is the polar opposite to the politics of Martin Luther King, Jr. Yasuda's romantic irony deprived the Japanese of future political opportunities to discuss and devise measures against the worst state Japan ever experienced.

The reason that Faulkner was able to develop the exceptional Hightower may stem from the fact that Faulkner fully understood the dangers submerged in a person devoted to the sublime aesthetics of loss or the Lost Cause. The following statement by André Bleikasten indicates how perilous Hightower and the Japanese literary intellectuals were, as they could not maintain the proper distance from their beliefs: "The logic of idealism is always the same, and the purer the idealism, the more devastation it leaves in its wake."[54]

53. Karatani Kōjin, *Criticisms of Modern Japan I* (in Japanese) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1997), 167.

54. Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy*, 313.