The war was over. What that meant was that I was completely at loose ends. Up until that day, ever since I had been a young boy the thing that had supported my daily emotions was the war. So when I heard the Emperor’s broadcast, I was not prepared to believe it. The words, pronounced in that odd, wavering voice, were just so strange, and only served to give me the uneasy feeling that some new disaster was about to take place. Contrary to the facts, I took it that after the broadcast the world would be plunged even farther into war, so the next day I went to take refuge at Mt. Minobu, to which my mother had fled earlier—a place that had no food at all, but where on the other hand there was no fear of the enemy invading. Mt. Minobu was the headquarters of the Nichiren sect, but I didn’t hear the slightest sound from the hand drums. The people there, like me, evidently couldn’t take in the idea that the war had gone. As far as those people were concerned, there was every reason to think that the beat of the drums might announce their presence to the enemy and provoke an air raid, or the enemy might well come to bomb this mountain that was the heart of Japanese religion.

What finally convinced me that the war was over was an American cigarette.

Yasuoka Shōtarō
“Kunshō” (The medal)

In this chapter I focus on four short novels by Yasuoka Shōtarō (b. 1920), with briefer reference to stories by Kojima Nobuo (b. 1915) and Ishikawa Jun (1899–1987). Yasuoka and Kojima were among the “Third Wave of New Writers” (Daisan no shinjin) group identified by critics in 1953, which also included other young male writers such as Shimao Toshio, Yoshiyuki Junnosuke, Agawa Hiroyuki, Shōno Junzō, and Abe Kōbō.¹ Though all these writers went on to successful

¹ The Daisan no Shinjin group was first described and named by Yamamoto Kenkichi in the January 1953 edition of Bungakkai (Yamamoto, “Daisan no shinjin”). For more on the group and Yasuoka’s role within it, see Torii, “Yasuoka Shōtarō,” 144–145; Senuma, Sengo bungaku no dokō, 209–216; and Gessel, The Sting of Life, 41–74. Famous critic Hirano Ken records his lack of enthusiasm for the group in his Bungei jihyō 1: 106.
careers in literature, Yasuoka is of particular interest. He ostensibly wrote *shishôsetsu* ("personal novels" or "I novels") based on his own life experiences, yet he brought to this staid genre a leavening of dark humor and irony that made it suitable to express the complex epistemic circumstances of occupied Japan.

Yasuoka was born May 30, 1920, in Kôchi on the island of Shikoku, but by 1938, when he graduated from Tokyo City Daichî Chûgakkô (the prewar equivalent of today’s high school), his family had moved more than thirteen times, including a four-year stint in Seoul, Korea. Through later reminiscences Yasuoka provides an amusing narrative picture of his teenaged and young adult years.

After graduation, he writes that he spent three years trying unsuccessfully to enter college. The accelerating rhetoric of nationalism during this period did not appeal to him. When the "2,600th anniversary" of the founding of the Japanese imperial line was celebrated in 1940 and the cigarette brand previously known as "Cherry" suddenly and patriotically changed its name to "Sakura," Yasuoka abruptly switched to the rival brand "Camellia."²

In 1941 Yasuoka finally managed to enter Keiô University. His previous three years had been spent hanging out in coffee shops and wandering the streets with idle friends; after entering the university he continued this leisurely life, making it to class just ten days of his first semester, he says. Later that year, Japan declared war on the United States and Britain. In 1942, Yasuoka was called to the Information Office to explain the editorial policy of a small private literary magazine he had started with friends. This first encounter with the censorship of wartime made him immediately resolve to become a black marketeer, he later wrote.³ Instead, however, he was called up for active duty in March 1944, and was sent straight to Manchuria. After only five months of military service he was hospitalized with a chest ailment, and was later returned to a military hospital in Japan in March 1945. (In the meantime his former unit was trans-

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² The information on Yasuoka’s life comes primarily from: Yasuoka, “Nenpyô” (an autobiographical chronology of his life and work); Hisamatsu et al., eds., *Gendai nihon bungaku daijiten*; and Yasuoka’s memoirs of the period in his *Chichi no sake* and *Tochiri no mushi*. For more objective information on his life, see Torii, “Yasuoka Shôtarô no hito to sakuhin,” 9–24; or Torii, “Yasuoka Shôtarô.” For a sympathetic and insightful discussion of the Occupation-period stories “Shukudai” (Homework) and “Kenbu” (Sword dance), as well as several of Yasuoka’s later works, see Gessel, *The Sting of Life*, 77–124.

³ Yasuoka, “Nenpyô,” 437.