Scripting Suicide in Japan

Kirsten Cather

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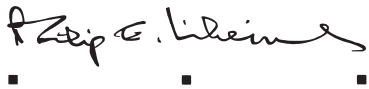

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Scripting Suicide in Japan

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Scripting Suicide in Japan

Kirsten Cather

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To my family. All of you, for it all.

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NOTE ON NAMES, ROMANIZATION, AND TRANSLATION

Japanese names appear according to Japanese conventions, with family name first and given name second, and by family name for subsequent mentions except when authors go by a penname. Japanese words have been romanized using the modified Hepburn system and in line with their contemporary pronunciation. I include romanization and/or Japanese characters only when especially germane to my point or when useful to clarify the original for Japanese-language readers.

Translations of Japanese into English are mine unless otherwise noted. In the hopes of making this study accessible to as wide an audience as possible without compromising the specificity of the language and medium of the original texts, I generally use the following system for titles. On first mention, the titles of Japanese-language texts are referred to by their romanized Japanese title followed by the English translation in parentheses. When a generally well-known English-language translation is available, I use that title verbatim (except in special cases where noted). Otherwise, when there is no published translation widely available, I provide my own title translation and signal this by using sentence-style capitalization. In the body of the manuscript, all subsequent title mentions appear in English and follow the appropriate formatting for that medium to signal the type of publication.

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Introduction

It's as if, to gain clarity, you are pushing open a very heavy wooden door that is creaking on its hinges and resisting your pressure. You apply all your strength, step across the threshold, and, after standing in a twilight gray, expect the light. Instead you are surrounded by a thoroughly impenetrable darkness. Distraught and fearful, you feel your way, touching objects here and there without being able to identify them. Eventually, your eyes very slowly grow accustomed to the dark. Uncertain contours appear; even your probing hands become more assured. Now you know that you're in that space … call[ed] "the closed world of self-murder."

—JEAN AMÉRY, *ON SUICIDE*, 1976

Jean Améry composed these words in the aftermath of his first suicide attempt and two years prior to his suicide in October 1978. They are the opening to an essay that he delivered in radio installments for the German public three decades after surviving torture and imprisonment in the concentration camps and emigrating to Belgium where he emerged as a successful writer under this penname. His words offer an entry point into this enclosed world, an apt beginning for this book that seeks to understand works written and read in the face and wake of suicide.

Step by step, Améry's resistant door yields access. The journey is fraught for both listener and speaker. For the outsider, he warns against the temptation "to smile ironically or offer a learned word. This I do not tolerate. … Only those who have entered into the darkness can have a say in this matter." But even insiders will have difficulty recapturing that experience once outside it, for they will "unearth nothing that appears useful in the light outside. What they have brought from the depths will run like fine sand through their fingers by day." Améry's own authority to speak is equally tenuous. He knows all too well the inadequacy of language, which offers the "only instrument of communication" and yet also "only the torture of insufficiency."[1]

Améry invites his audience into this space beside him, nonetheless. With this opening, he attempts to situate both speaker and listener at a moment that is

"before the leap," to borrow the title of his first radio installment. By bringing his audience into temporal and physical proximity to the suicidal act, he also seeks to collapse the distance between self and other. By entering into the darkness together, he says, we are ready (or as ready we can be) because "we are already on our way, *not away* from persons annihilating themselves, but *toward* them."[2]

Given that Améry has safely exited that closed world and writes in retrospect, we might be tempted to escape alongside him, to see him and his text from some transcendent position that escapes that circle into which he invites us from his first lines. Alternatively, given that he will soon reenter, we might regard him as entrapped by these very writings that foretell his own inexorable end. But I ask that we stay with him, and with the other individuals I consider below, in their moment of writing. This is not because we get an unmediated account that collapses all distance—between the living and the dead, a self and another, now and then—but rather because it is a highly mediated one. Whether in the form of a scratchy radio address that at the time reached across the airwaves or as its transcription into a prose essay that we read now, a half century later, it is *in* and *through* this text that we, and they too, glimpse "the closed world of self-murder." This counterintuitive move—to bring us into the darkness to see—is one that Améry himself undertook through his own act of writing *On Suicide*.

This book is my attempt to enter an orbit of suicidal writers, readers, texts, and acts in modern and contemporary Japan. In my case, this project is motivated by the sense that all too often, discussions of suicide—especially in Japan, a nation saddled with centuries of accumulated stereotypes and loaded assumptions—are too distant from their subject. There are too many outside pronouncements made about those who have died by their own hand and too little careful attention paid to the words of the dead themselves.

These words reach out to us in and from the darkness to initiate a dialogue with the dead. Crucially, these traces that remain are not just meant for an outside reader (much less the critic or diagnostician) in retrospect but also served their writers prospectively. They, too, were dialoguing with the dead, albeit in the form of an imagined future self that was to be no more. And in reading, we, too, are forced to navigate our own distance and proximity to acts of suicide and to acts of writing in the face of self-death.

In this book, I seek out the many textual traces of suicide that remain in modern and contemporary Japan. Some were composed at the moment just "before the leap," such as the young student Fujimura Misao's philosophical poem "Thoughts on the Precipice" carved into an oak tree at the head of Kegon waterfall in 1903 or the three-line note left behind by the eminent literary critic Etō Jun on the eve of his suicide in the summer of 1999. Other examples were scripted months or even years beforehand. Most famous among these is Mishima Yukio's 1961 short story "Yūkoku," about a lieutenant who commits seppuku, or ritual disembowelment by sword in samurai fashion, after a failed coup d'état, that Mishima adapted into a

film in which he himself played the lieutenant, eerily foretelling his own attempted coup and seppuku a decade later. More recent examples include the young indie manga artist Yamada Hanako, who prefigured her 1992 leap from an eleven-story building in a comics panel two years beforehand.

Most of my examples were scripted by literary professionals whose posthumous fame became inextricably entangled with their suicides and with their many suicidal writings, although some were virgin works by complete amateurs. One case study involves both these types: two hauntingly simple suicide notes left behind in 1968 by the young Olympic marathoner and soldier Tsuburaya Kōkichi, the first to his family and another to his coaches and superiors. His notes, in turn, prompted writings filled with praise by two writers whose own subsequent suicides and choices about writing (or not) in the face of their own suicides make for a study in contrasts—Mishima in 1970 and Nobel laureate Kawabata Yasunari, whose suicide in 1972 was so traceless as to fuel rumors that it was not, in fact, a self-willed death. Both of Tsuburaya's notes are on display at his hometown memorial museum, the one to his family marked with a drop of his blood and its edges stained with tears that fell from his elder brother's eyes upon reading it.

These are not easy texts to read, and nor, I expect, were they easy ones to write.

Some were penned by those who died, while others were by those left behind. Many are sympathetic attempts to speak to and for those who died by suicide through the mediums of poetry, literature, eulogies, obituaries, and memorial essays, or what in Japanese are fittingly called *tsuitōbun* (追悼文), "writings that pursue in grief." But not all who wrote were close to those who had chosen to die, and not all were highbrow literary traces. More literal markings exist in the form of newspaper and tabloid accounts, how-to suicide manuals, maps, graves and memorials, and even tourist markers at famed suicide sites. If some imagine the dead resting easily in a memorial site of great natural beauty, others suspend them at the moment and site of their self-destruction. Some are euphemistic or poetic, mournful or forgiving, others grisly and visceral, angry and judging. Some are flat and factual, others fictional and even fanciful. Many, like the self-writings produced in the face of self-death, straddle these poles. In their sheer variety, they counter any stereotypical notion of "the Japanese" as especially predisposed to glorifying suicide in their culture and in their cultural productions.

Most importantly, the range of examples are designed to help us think through the importance of acts of writing and reading before and after suicide, or, as in some cases, the act of *not* writing. The question of whether, what, and how to write about self-willed death is a pressing one that many of these individuals themselves engaged openly, if often ambivalently, in their texts. It is one that subsequent readers face as well, including those like me, who turn to write in response.

At the most basic level is the question of what word we use to refer to the act itself: *suicide*, a term whose own meaning of self-killing is somewhat buried in its

Latin roots, or anything from *voluntary death* (*la mort voluntaire*) to *self-murder* (*Selbstmord*). In Japanese, the common term *jisatsu* most closely resembles *suicide* (*sui-*, oneself and *-cidium*, a killing) with its slightly opaque use of the Chinese readings for its two characters that also translate as "self-killing" (自殺), but as we will see below, many other possible terms signal value judgments as well as a tendency to parse suicide into numerous types: *jiketsu* (自決, self-determination), *jigai* (自害, self-harm), *shinjū* (心中, a term that literally means "hearts inside" used to refer to love suicides), or one of its many variants, such as parent-child suicide (*oyako shinjū*), a love suicide following another in grief (*ato-ōi shinjū*), and murder-suicide or forced double suicide (*muri shinjū*).[3]

How to write and read, rewrite or unwrite, stories of suicide mattered to these individuals and to those they left behind then, and they matter today. It is a question of enduring relevance in Japan, where regulations against representing the act of suicide stretch back from the eighteenth-century double suicide plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon to contemporary prefectural prohibitions against filming in the infamous "suicide forest" of Aokigahara. It is relevant to policymakers and mental health professionals intent on preventing suicide, whether they study the effects of expressive writing on trauma and suicide-attempt survivors (Pennebaker and Chung 2012) or on suicidal poets (Stirman and Pennebaker 2001), design word-association video game software to detect and correct suicidal ideation (Nock et al. 2010), devise self-censorship media guidelines for reporting suicides (WHO 2008), or develop algorithms to detect suicide risk based on user's web searches and social media posts using information and communication technology (ICT) software.[4] Alongside the ongoing quest to identify physiological and/or genetic biomarkers, researchers seek linguistic markers of suicidality, as well as linguistic interventions that might reduce suicidal ideation by reshaping the ways that individuals conceptualize their relationship to death.[5]

Unlike these researchers and policymakers, my task here is not to prevent or predict suicide. There will be no attempt to neatly divide and catalogue suicides along the lines of long-standing Durkheimian or Freudian paradigms—whether Durkheim's typology of egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic suicides or Freudian ones that conceive of suicide as a displaced homicidal urge that can be parsed into the wish to die, the wish to be killed, and the wish to kill. Nor do I attempt to retrospectively assign a motive based on a selective reading of these complex final texts. As a scholar working primarily in the disciplines of literary and film studies, my goal is not to diagnose these individuals, much less society as a whole.

Yet like much work done in this vein, I also seek to understand the act of suicide through the many traces left behind. I believe that these traces can reveal fundamental beliefs about suicide (and death more generally) and, just as crucially, about acts of writing. They reveal what it means and why it matters to write into and from the void. That this fraught act of writing was undertaken by so many, both individuals who sought to die by suicide and the loved ones they

left behind, as well as countless commentators who were compelled to weigh in afterward—moralists and government officials, intellectuals and artists, journalists, policymakers, educators, religious leaders, and mental health professionals—suggests the extraordinary investment in producing and policing the representation of suicide in Japanese society. There is weighty cultural and psychic work involved when writing and reading about suicide or in the immense gap that opens up in the wake of any death.

My approach is rooted in close readings that first tackle the question of how individuals achieved the formidable rhetorical feat of depicting their own death, or what Virginia Woolf once called "the one experience I shall never describe."[6] Jean Améry claimed representing suicide to be "doubly unthinkable," indescribable, a "syntactical impossibility" as a "not-being."[7] We should note that both these writers were figuring their own deaths in words here, even when claiming it to be unspeakable. At the same time, it is crucial not to conflate their acts of writing with their subsequent acts of suicide. Capturing the precarious circumstances of these compositions and their composers requires careful attention to the text, the timing of composition, its mode of address, the materiality of the inscription, and crucially, their medium of choice.

It is this fraught act of figuring self-death that I seek to better understand throughout this book. How to mark in words, images, sounds, and objects a person's self-willed absence? What to do with these traces left behind by those who leave us behind? And after their death, how to produce our own texts in response that avoid the ethical violation of what Proust once called "posthumous infidelity"?[8] And what Wordsworth noted was nothing more than a "tender fiction," a "shadowy interposition [that] harmoniously unites the two worlds of the living and the dead."[9] Or as Joan Didion, writing after her husband's death, worried might read as a fictional dialogue that was only "my edit … obscene, a violation."[10]

If narrating in the wake of death from natural causes is precarious, then it is all the more so in the case of suicide. It has been described by one suicide survivor, the brother of writer Klaus Mann, as "the act that no words describe, that breaks all bonds."[11] And yet, such claims of wordlessness attest to the compulsion *to* speak, *to* describe, *to* narrate suicide, and, I would argue, to reassert via language the bonds that were willfully severed by the dead. If death invites storytelling, suicide demands it.

In the wake of a suicide, a host of narratives inevitably rush to fill the silence. We are left to seek and sift through any traces that remain in an attempt to construct a narrative that might render the act explicable, manageable, and perhaps even acceptable. At the fore is the pressing and natural question of why that person chose to end their life. But the answer is not always clear. Nor, as we will see in many cases, was it necessarily one that preoccupied those who chose to die.

The American poet Anne Sexton offered this by way of explanation in a poem titled "Wanting to Die" that she sent to a friend in 1964 after multiple attempts on

her own life and a year after the suicide of Sylvia Plath, after whom she was said to have patterned her own a decade later:

> I have nothing against life.
> I know well the grass blades you mention,
> the furniture you have placed under the sun.
> But suicides have a special language.
>
> Like carpenters they want to know *which tools*.
> They never ask *why build*.[12]

Sexton suggests here that understanding suicidal logic or "wanting to die" demands paying less attention to "why" than how. Its "special language" entails also a literary, imagined relationship with self-death, or what she calls an "almost unnameable lust [that] returns" over and over again to "wait[] for me, year after year, / to so delicately undo an old wound, / to empty my breath from its bad prison." The poem's metaphorical language and imagery resist any easy explanations of cause or motive, notwithstanding the utilitarian promise of its title. Its final lines end by gesturing to the tendency to mis- or overinterpret the traces that do remain: "leaving the bread they mistook for a kiss, / leaving the page of the book carelessly open, / something unsaid, the phone off the hook / and the love whatever it was, an infection." Those left behind are warned against the tendency to read into these traces only in the service of answering the natural but often unanswerable question of "why."

How, then, might we better read these difficult texts and traces that remain in the wake of suicide, and to what end? I propose that we strive to stay closer to these writers in their moment of writing—whenever possible, and to the extent that *is* possible—to emplace ourselves in the moment "before the leap" when these acts of writing were undertaken. In reading, we are invited to occupy a precarious position poised between life and death, just like the writers themselves. This is true even in the case of a simple one-line suicide note like one that declared only "I die in here" (*Kono naka ni te jisatsu su*) left on a notice board beside a lake in early 1930s Japan.[13] For this writer, death could be figured only in an imagined future tense. And the fact that "death can only be an *idea*, not something known by us as we know our bodily sensations" is also what "recommends it to the use of poets, whose trade it is to deal exclusively in symbols."[14]

Imagining death is always a speculative act, even, or perhaps especially, when it is anticipated and self-willed. Out of necessity, there is a futurity and even a fictionality embedded in these imaginings. As the poet Terayama Shūji points out, "Whenever we start to talk about the suicide of another person—whether fictional or factual—it ends up being storified [*sutōrī-ka shite shimau*]. As they say, 'one cannot experience one's own suicide' [*Onozura, sono jisatsu o taiken dekinai*]."[15]

It is for this reason that listening to these stories is all the more crucial. Considering how others figured their own self-death in the moments (or sometimes years) beforehand can help us emplace ourselves, at least temporarily, in that unimaginable space. This is both perhaps unimaginable in one sense of the word and also *only* imaginable. It is by reading and writing in response that we, too, imagine (self-)death.

ORGANIZATION AND CRITERIA FOR CASE SELECTIONS

In what follows, I divide my discussion into three parts to focus on three different sites of writing. Each offers a place where the dead are simultaneously put to rest and kept alive forevermore. Part 1, "Mapping Suicide," begins with the most literal geographical sites of suicide in modern and contemporary Japan. It focuses on the famed poetic places of suicide (*jisatsu meisho*, 自殺名所) where acts of self-death and acts of (self-)writing converge in a way that indelibly mark these locales. The next two sections turn to consider mediums and genres of suicide writings that straddle the literary and the literal in often uncomfortable ways. Part 2, "Noting Suicide," centers on self-designated suicide notes (*nōtō* or *isho*, 遺書) by famous writers and amateurs alike that became widely published and publicized after their deaths, while part 3, "Mourning in Multimedia," turns to consider more overtly fictionalized scriptings in which artists foretell and preemptively mourn their own deaths in a variety of media that include poems, stories, films, and photography. Taken together, my hope is to demonstrate the many ways that suicide is mapped, noted, scripted, pictured, and mourned in Japan.

As we will see, there is considerable overlap among the materials included across these three sections. The poetic places of suicide (*jisatsu meisho*) are, as the term suggests, places where suicide collides with poetry, and also sometimes with tabloid journalism, genre fiction, and even tourism. Suicide notes could also include poems, and poems could serve as suicide notes. Fiction and fact intermix. In fact, the first chapter on the young Fujimura's poem at Kegon Falls offers an example that straddles all three sites of writing. It was simultaneously Japan's "first" modern suicide site where a classical poem inscribed onto a tree was left behind as a suicide note, and it in turn spurred many creative responses of both the fictional and factual variety. As such, this in-depth case study provides a convenient frame for all three parts of this study and, as we will see, also served as something of a touchstone for scripting suicide in modern Japan.

After this introductory case study, the book is divided broadly into three parts that are each organized chronologically. This is useful for a few reasons. First, it helps us understand how each constituted a site of writing and dying with its own conventions, forms, and codes. As we will see, these were not static or unchanging since time immemorial but were instead highly malleable based on the

particular individuals, their circumstances and contexts. At the same time, for those choosing to die and to self-write their own death—whether in a location marked as a famed suicide site, in a conventional or literary suicide note, or in a semi-fictionalized work of art—there often *was* a self-conscious awareness of inserting oneself into an existing tradition of self-writing and self-death. Importantly, though, these individuals could choose to tap, tweak, or upend that preexisting script entirely.

Second, even when there was no discernible design on the writer's part, subsequent readers tend to interpret them as constituting a genealogy of sorts, speaking backward and forward in time to one another. By progressing chronologically, moving in each section from the early twentieth-century case studies to the more recent ones ourselves, we can trace how these twinned acts of writing and dying were received, understood, and judged—not always flatteringly—by their contemporaries. This enables us to consider also our own standards for interpreting these acts. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the overall arc of this book attempts to bring this book's readers into proximity to these sites of self-death and self-writing gradually in the hopes of easing our way through these difficult materials.

Part 1, "Mapping Suicide," offers an above-the-trees approach that moves from historically distant public sites like Kegon Falls and Mount Mihara in the early twentieth century to more contemporary ones where people go seeking to die today, ending with the notorious "suicide forest" of Aokigahara. For each site, I consider how competing acts of writing, rewriting, and unwriting were crucial to both their making and their unmaking.

Part 2, "Noting Suicide," tackles the more visceral first-person narratives offered in suicide notes that were often simultaneously both more *and* less private. Even when designated for a circumscribed initial readership, some anticipated their subsequent widespread distribution, while others inadvertently entered the literary canon. My case studies in this section stretch from the most famous example of a suicide note in Japanese literary history by writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke in 1927 to the terse, three-line note left behind by literary critic Etō Jun in 1999. At the very end of part 2, we move back in time in order to inch toward the trickiest of materials with the example of a young female manga artist named Yamada Hanako, whose private diary and published comic strips anticipating her own suicidal leap were widely publicized and probed after her suicide in 1992.

Part 3, "Mourning Suicide in Multimedia," moves into these most difficult materials of all: self-representations of suicide in fictional and semifictional works of art. While these texts might at first seem at a safe remove given their fictionality, in retrospect they can be read only vis-à-vis the act of suicide. As such, they cannot help but implicate the reader of fiction in the act of self-death and also in the writer's act of self-writing that self-death. This is especially true of ones that anticipate with uncanny precision the suicidal method later used by its writer. These texts may be highly mediated, but they preclude any illusion of a safe distance between

two-dimensional textual bodies and three-dimensional real ones. In reading, we are also put in the precarious position of navigating the leap between a literal and literary suicide.

In this study, considering less strictly "literary" examples alongside more well-known highbrow canonical ones is especially crucial to its aims of capturing the diverse ways that suicide has been, and continues to be, scripted in modern and contemporary Japan. Too often, this story has been told based on an all-too-familiar lineup of the most famous, and conspicuously male, suicides with a focus on how highbrow literary works by men anticipated (or responded to) the deaths of these elite male literati. The typical Japanese lineup of twentieth-century male literati suicides is a long one: Kitamura Tōkoku, Kawakami Bizan, Arishima Takeo, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Makino Shin'ichi, Dazai Osamu, Tanaka Hidemitsu, Hara Tamiki, Hino Ashihei, Mishima Yukio, and Kawabata Yasunari, plus a few others who vary depending on the list.[16] English-language studies focused on suicide in Japan offer a streamlined version of this lineup, typically featuring the standard holy trinity of Akutagawa, Dazai, and Mishima, sometimes including Kawabata as well.

Even in literary studies not focused on suicide per se, there may appear to be a disproportionately high number of male suicidal authors represented therein. Half the case studies in Makoto Ueda's *Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature* (1976) feature this famous foursome of authors who died by suicide. Three of the six writers in Masao Miyoshi's *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel* (1974) took their own lives: Kawabata appears in a chapter titled "The Margins of Life," Dazai in "Till Death Do Us Part," and finally, in "Mute's Rage," there is Mishima, who, as Miyoshi puts it, "marks a very special climax in recent Japanese literature."[17] Even when it requires some creative chronological skewering, Mishima tends to serve as the grand finale, a definitive punctuation mark at the end of a long line.

In part, this is a reflection of the archive, one that skews toward privileging male-authored highbrow canonized literature. In the wake of a famous writer's suicide come a flurry of commemorative publications and republications in Japan and beyond. The traces that are sought and preserved are themselves a reflection of their perceived value, and their production, publication, and distribution depend also on a sense of their commercial viability. After Mishima's shockingly anachronistic seppuku on November 25 in 1970, Harold Strauss at Alfred A. Knopf, the foremost publisher of translated Japanese fiction in the postwar period, pushed his Mishima translator to finish as rapidly as possible, noting with unadulterated joy and just a tinge of chagrin, "One of the less charming aspects of this situation is that both you and we are likely to make a great deal of money out of Mishima's death."[18] As this statement suggests, the self-silencing act of suicide often paradoxically results in more posthumous airtime. But it is also true that certain kinds of individuals, texts, and suicides invite disproportionate attention, whereas others go unnoticed.

Writing back in 1979 in the preface to *Six Lives, Six Deaths*, Robert Jay Lifton self-consciously notes, for example, "the absence of women in our study" to be "a major limitation" that nonetheless was justified by "find[ing] none that met two of our basic requirements—writing about her own death, and a life sufficiently well recorded for us to reconstruct it."[19] Sharalyn Orbaugh's critique of such a "masculinist and modernist" "uniquely male genealogy" of suicide almost two decades later in her insightful essay "General Nogi's Wife" (1996) suggests the persistence of this problem.[20]

Naturally, there are limits to what any study can include, and this is true of my own project here.[21] It, too, is necessarily beholden to an archive. My examples depend on the written traces left behind, and one of my central goals *is* to prioritize the words of those who chose to die and to self-write that self-death. Many of the usual male highbrow literati examples are key to examining this phenomenon and appear with dedicated chapters or sections below. But I have found it undesirable to limit myself to those alone. Instead, I seek out other material and textual traces in the land (in maps and monuments, at graves, tourist sites, etc.); in visual and print culture, in the mass media, and in popular culture; and also in official government statistics, suicide prevention policies and strategies, and in accounts offered by mental health professionals. It is my hope that this approach enables access to a broader spectrum of others, including people and places, that have tended to be left out of the story of suicide in modern Japan. Equally importantly, by considering a diverse array of materials that go beyond highbrow canonical literature even for the more famous male authors included here, I hope to help open up our understanding of even these most well-known, well-rehearsed examples.

Three of my central case studies focus on women who prefigured their own suicides in their writings. These include aspiring poets Matsumoto Kiyoko and Nagasawa Nobuko (in chapters 2 and 9) and indie manga artist Yamada Hanako (in chapter 8). Another key example is the woman whose suicide at Aokigahara forest back in the mid-1970s is said to have inaugurated a rash of "copycat suicides" that helped make it into one of the world's top suicide sites even today (chapter 4). In other sections, I touch more briefly on people whose names are no longer known to us but whose traces survive in fragmentary form, for example found only in brief notations on a "suicide distribution map" created by the meticulous ethnographer Kon Wajirō in the 1920s or in Tsurumi Wataru's controversial best-selling 1993 how-to guidebook *Kanzen jisatsu manyuaru: The Complete Manual of Suicide* (chapter 3).

My case studies also include lesser-known male writers like the young aspiring poet Kishigami Daisaku, who left behind what he titled "Boku no tame no nōto" (A note for myself) in 1960, as well as complete amateurs like marathoner-soldier Tsuburaya Kōkichi (in chapters 6 and 7, respectively). Such examples help remind us how writing in the face of self-death is never merely some academic or highbrow literary exercise.

At the same time, they reveal how difficult it can be to recover certain kinds of voices than others. In the case of less well-known individuals, locating any surviving trace can present a challenge, one that is both logistical and ethical. For some, we have access to their self-writings, but only because these texts were posthumously published, sometimes against the express or implicit wishes of their writers. For example, both Kishigami's and Tsuburaya's suicide notes attracted widespread critical acclaim notwithstanding being explicitly addressed to "[him]self" in the former case and to his family members and coaches in the latter. Manga artist Yamada Hanako's private diaries were released under the sensationalist title *Jisatsu chokuzen nikki* (A diary just before suicide) by her father, who himself was an aspiring writer. While it is important to remember that we are far from the original designated audience for these texts, without these self-writings, we are sometimes left to rely on posthumous accounts by others who narrate these suicides from a distance in ways that are often distorted, if not outright disparaging.

Conversely, in the cases of the most famous authors, like Akutagawa, Dazai, Mishima, and to a lesser extent Kawabata, finding the traces they left behind has been easy, sometimes all too easy. Famed artists' famed "last words" have been widely published and probed—whether in the form of a death poem (*jisei*), a suicide note, a last essay or interview, or fictional or semi-fictional works of art. These texts, however, often circulate in highly digested forms to the point that the soundbite version dominates the story. For these, my goal is to dislodge what have become overly simplified and simplistic interpretations of these complex texts.

To do this, I use a strategy of juxtaposition, putting these canonical authors and texts in dialogue with a host of others that can open up our understanding of these oft-rehearsed examples. Akutagawa's most famous suicide note and its frequently quoted line that purports to explain his motive for dying as attributable to "a vague sense of anxiety" is examined in the context of a host of other texts he wrote, read, and referenced in this note and in the ten other suicide notes he left behind (chapter 5). Nobel Prize–winning author Kawabata and his decision not to write in the face of his own suicide is considered in dialogue with the suicide of the Olympian marathoner Tsuburaya and with his fellow writer Mishima, who also praised the young man's suicide notes (chapter 7). Dazai Osamu is situated in contemporary Mitaka—which has recently been marketed by city developers as "the town where Dazai lived" (and also where he wrote, died, and is now buried)—and alongside those who chose to die with and after him: his lover Yamazaki Tomie and his protégé Tanaka Hidemitsu. Finally, in the last chapter on Mishima, his well-known story-turned-film *Yūkoku* is considered alongside his other multimedia productions. These include his underground "gay version" of the story, a "seppuku ballet" adaptation, and his many stints as a movie actor and photography model who died over and over again in genre films and in photography shoots during the last decade and weeks of his life, including the belated publication of

Shinoyama Kishin's photography book, *The Death of a Man* (*Otoko no shi*)—on the fiftieth anniversary of Mishima's death in 2020.

In sum, in the pages that follow, I both revisit well-known writers and texts and introduce some new, less familiar ones, while proposing a more self-conscious approach to navigating literary suicide. It is my hope that in so doing, we can reconsider not just who we treat but how we treat them. Before turning to my case studies, I offer a brief overview of the ways the subject has been handled in existing scholarship.

SUICIDE AND THE LITERARY CANON, SUICIDE AND SOCIOLOGY: A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Suicide has long functioned "as a marker of literary value" and "as a marker of Japaneseness … a metonym for Japanese culture" and a "masculinist" one at that.[22] In the early 1970s, psychiatrist and leading suicidologist Ōhara Kenshirō estimated that the suicide rate for Japan's most famous modern authors was three hundred times higher than the national average.[23] His method for calculating the rate of Japanese author suicides at five thousand per hundred thousand (versus the overall male population rate of 16.1) is far from scientific or without its own selection biases, having used as his point of reference a pool of one hundred male authors from "one publisher's complete works of modern Japanese literature." But the statistic is revealing in another sense. It captures the circular relationship between canonicity and suicide in Japan and suggests the degree to which suicide is something of an unavoidable topic for readers, students, and teachers of modern Japanese literature.[24]

Writing back in 1974, Masao Miyoshi stressed the special centrality of suicide to the formation of the modern Japanese literary canon, claiming, "If A. Alvarez is right in seeing an essential relationship between modern literature and suicide, the modern Japanese novel and its authors are surely the most representative case."[25] Here, Miyoshi was drawing on the seminal work of British writer and literary critic Al Alvarez. In 1971, spurred by the suicide of his acquaintance the poet Sylvia Plath and by his own suicidal crisis, Alvarez penned *The Savage God*, a study of suicide in Western artistic and philosophical traditions from ancient to contemporary times that has become a canonical work. Lying at the heart of both the self-destructive impulses of modern (and especially modernist) artists and art, he finds "this earth-bound Savage God, who … has thrived on blood-sacrifice."[26]

In a similar vein, in 1984, the French cultural anthropologist Maurice Pinguet offered a sweeping parallel study of *La mort voluntaire au Japon* (widely translated into a variety of languages, including *Jishi no Nihon-shi* in 1986 and *Voluntary Death in Japan* in 1993), which sketches an even longer trajectory for the prominent place of suicide in Japanese cultural and literary traditions, from the eighth-century *Kojiki* legends, medieval war tales, and eighteenth-century love suicide

plays to Japanese military leaders after defeat in WWII and modern authors. In writing against what they perceive as reigning societal taboos and prejudices against the act of suicide, both Alvarez and Pinguet stress the ways that suicide offers a long-lived aesthetic resource. If it can regrettably lead to self-destruction, it also serves as the wellspring of creativity that can be traced from antiquity to modernity.

For Miyoshi in his *Accomplices of Silence* (1974), suicidal impulses fuel both literary creation and writers' self-destruction, but here with significantly more pessimistic conclusions about their artistic effects. Although his study is not overtly focused on the topic of literary suicide, it becomes central to his thesis in its second half. As his book (and the above-noted chapter) titles might suggest, suicide is interpreted as yet another form of self-silencing—"a powerful compulsion throughout the whole society"—that makes Japanese authors complicit in their own marginalization vis-à-vis Western writers and modern literature. Writing in the face of death (and even writing at all in Japanese, a language he characterizes as marked by "the typical Japanese dislike of the verbal") is both "an act of defiance" and a signal of "defeat and exhaustion … tantamount to the writer's sacrifice of himself." This tendency to regard suicidal writings and writers as heroically defiant but inevitably defeatist is one that pervades most accounts. In Miyoshi's case, defeat is inevitable, and the deficiencies of the modern Japanese novel stem in large part from "the Japanese attitude toward personality … [which] is basically profoundly negative," an assertion that is fueled by the sociological research of Nakane Chie and Ruth Benedict, among others.[27] Even if this is primarily a literary critical appraisal, the concerns driving it are quite sociological in nature.

These concerns come to the fore in social scientists George De Vos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma's 1973 "Alienation and the Author: A Triptych on Social Conformity and Deviancy in Japanese Intellectuals." They diagnose three Japanese authors—Akutagawa, Dazai, and Sōseki (who, it is worth noting, did not die by suicide, although he famously wrote about the topic in *Kokoro* and other fictional works)—as suffering from "anomic conditions and personal alienation."[28] To make their case, the authors rely heavily on isolating biographical details about the writers' lives and times while citing relevant key passages from selected works—including letters, memoirs, and fiction that are often, but not always, autobiographical—to substantiate their assertions. Later work employing a similar methodology and Durkheimian framework to analyze Japanese writers' suicides (which again include the famous foursome as well as Arishima Takeo) was undertaken by the sociologist Mamoru Iga in 1986.

For these researchers, the rationale behind including so many literary figures in their studies is based less on any quantitative claim about the statistical relevance of suicidal Japanese authors than on a qualitative assessment of their use value. As Iga explains, these writers are both "highly representative of Japanese culture" and offer a privileged glimpse into the mindset behind Japanese suicide: "Considering that writers are more capable than ordinary people of analyzing their own

thought processes, their suicide notes, other personal documents, and literary works should shed much light upon suicidal motives;" De Vos and Wagatsuma put it even more bluntly: "Their own writings and personal documents concerning them well illustrate in dramatic form experiences more or less common to the less articulate Japanese of their times."[29]

To offer just one example of where this analysis tends to lead, the final famous scene of Kawabata's 1937 novel *Yukiguni* (*Snow Country*), in which the protagonist stares from a distance at the burning body of a young woman, testifies to "Kawabata's capability for emotionless observation [that] made for a lack of real intimacy in a society where personal cohesiveness is emphasized. … His lack of social involvement made for an egoistic suicide in Durkheimian terms."[30] That Kawabata's own suicide occurred in 1972, thirty-five years after this work of fiction (in which death, but no suicide, appears), goes unnoted here. To explain the context and motivations behind acts of suicide, any act of writing serves in retrospect.

These sociological studies of literary suicides attempt to conduct what might be called an "autopsy of a suicidal mind," to borrow the title of a book written in 2004 by Edwin S. Shneidman, the leading founder of the field of suicidology. But in their case, a diagnosis of some *ism* (whether egoism, fatalism, nihilism, narcissism, and/or aestheticism) serves to pathologize not just an individual but society as a whole. Indeed, their goal is to explain Japan's phenomenal postwar economic recovery as based in large part on "the cultural psychology of the Japanese" that also entails a downside: a suicidal predisposition, or as Iga's book title puts it, the thorn in the chrysanthemum.[31] Like many other contemporaneous social scientific studies, the quest is to define the cultural peculiarities of "Japanese people's suicide."[32] If some laud their exceptionalism, others lament it.

In *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Dazai Osamu* (1990), all these aforementioned scholars are taken to task, especially De Vos and Alvarez but also Pinguet and Miyoshi, among others. In this work, literary scholar Alan Wolfe offers an ambitious deconstruction of "the way in which suicides play a role in the construction of Japan's twentieth-century narrative of modern development" by focusing "on the life and writings of Dazai Osamu (1909–1948), … whose prominence as an object of study for literary critics and sociologists alike calls attention to the paradigmatic status of the suicidal writer in modern Japanese literary history."[33] If other scholars have depicted Dazai as emblematic of Durkheim's anomic suicides as a means to figure Japan as either atavistically premodern or fashionably modern, Wolfe depicts him as a "poststructuralist *avant la lettre*."[34] Wolfe's focus on dismantling the critical establishment's writings on Dazai, however, leads to surprisingly little material exploring Dazai's own writings. Instead, they (and he) figure as some abstract exercise in literary criticism and theory rather than as an issue involving a person's death.[35]

One recent work by historian Francesca Di Marco has gone a long way toward deconstructing grand narratives that can tend toward cultural essentialism and

chauvinism. In *Suicide in Twentieth-Century Japan* (2016), Di Marco writes against what she calls "the usual story of suicide" in Japan as an "unchanging, atemporal concept" by offering a detailed evolution of psychiatric and psychological discourses and practices through the mid-1980s. Durkheim, she finds, was not as central a founding father of suicidology in Japan compared to other nations as previous scholarship might suggest.[36] Her analysis demonstrates what she calls "a medically heterogeneous response" to suicide by considering how its treatment—in both medical and evaluative senses—shifted over time alongside rapidly shifting historical contingencies and debates surrounding Japanese national identity. Her work also nicely highlights the ways that women (and other less desirable suicidal actors and acts) were often exempted from triumphalist ethnocentric interpretations of suicide as uniquely Japanese.[37]

Also in this study, however, literature and the arts are depicted in broad strokes that suggest they only served to propagate "the usual story of suicide" in Japan. They are bracketed as part of a monolithic and singular culturalist narrative of suicide, or what Di Marco calls "the romantic cultural discourse on suicide."[38] She describes how the "customary romantic narrative of voluntary death" was consolidated at the turn of the twentieth century after "centuries [of] Japanese legend, literature, and drama had portrayed suicide in a positive and romantic light" by "journalists and literati [who] were revivifying premodern images of romantic and noble suicides" and shored up again in the postwar by "many intellectuals and novelists during the 1950s [who] continued to romanticize and glorify suicide as a peculiar feature of the Japanese."[39]

As I hope my work demonstrates, there never was any singular cultural discourse to be had, and legend, literature, and drama are far from such easy containers for any ideologically driven notions of suicide. The texts I examine are rife with ambivalence. Neither the artists themselves nor journalists, intellectuals, and literati, much less friends and family of the dead, consistently glorified or romanticized suicide. The act of representation itself should not be so easily conflated with celebration. Instead, a closer, slower look at the texts in question suggests the ways that each medium—whether a death poem, suicide note, memorial, or multimedia production—offers its own challenges for re-presenting self-death at all.

SCRIPTING SUICIDE

While my examples are designed to demonstrate the great variety and types of writings that remain in the wake of suicide, I seek to identify a shared dilemma at their core: How to script suicide? And to what end? These are far from simple scripts in either sense of the word. They do not offer simple "rehearsals" of the "final act" for their authors prospectively, nor do they retrospectively offer readers a transparent record of the author's psychology in his or her final moments. If they are not straightforward communiqués, they are also not subconscious slips of

the pen. Instead, they are highly mediated for all involved, not scripts set in stone but graven images and words nonetheless that serve to mourn the dead, whether oneself or another.

These writings demonstrate conflicting desires for absence and presence, for bodily erasure and textual presence. They straddle two impulses: to put the dead to rest and to keep them alive therein forever. The image that graces this book's cover—a self-portrait by artist Yokoo Tadanori (b. 1936)—beautifully and hauntingly captures the tension between these two poles. Created in 2018, this huge-scale oil painting (over seven feet tall and six feet wide) suggests that the specter of suicide hangs over the artist, simultaneously framing his existence and also documenting the threat of his self-erasure with the artist fading into the black oblivion.

The most difficult part of this project has been navigating my own distance and proximity to the subject. At times, I found myself a receptive reader, at times highly resistant. When my own struggle with these materials was also one shared by the writers themselves, the materials were easier to approach. Visiting historically famed suicide sites or the graves of those distant in time and space came easily, often yielding receptive and informative locals who were eager to share their knowledge of these long-dead sites and people.[40] I still worried that there was something unseemly about probing these sites of writing, especially ones that were clearly designated for their intimates and did not include or anticipate a distant reader from a century and continent away. But in reading, I could feel like I was stumbling alongside them, retracing their own hesitancies and scruples, their fears and hopes that this last writing might embody them forever helping guide me and my own writing, too.

Even more difficult, however, were those that seem to collapse the distance between acts of writing and acts of suicide too neatly—ones that anticipated their own publication and widespread distribution, seemingly designed to stand as a symphonic finale, a definitive and resounding punctuation mark that closes the final chapter. Somewhat counterintuitively, the more loquacious the dead, the trickier.

None confounded me more than an artist like Mishima, who so forcefully directed readings of so many of his multimedia texts to coincide with his highly publicized and public seppuku. Mishima is often figured in studies on suicide in Japan as "the last act," suggesting that there is little more left to say about the subject.[41] Initially, my project was motivated in part by a desire to displace this disproportionate focus on Mishima. In the pages that follow, I hope to have done so by offering a more expansive and updated exploration of the diverse ways that suicide is scripted in Japan that go beyond highbrow literature and beyond an exclusively male genealogy. Yet despite myself, Mishima concludes this book as well—not, I hope, as some grand finale but instead as an open-ended dialogue initiated by the dead, one that is taken up again and again and yet is never complete.

Toward the end of his fourth and last installment of his radio address, Améry points to the necessarily incompleteness of this communication: "Nothing more

remains to be said. Or I would have to begin again with the situation 'before the leap.' And everything would repeat, without an end, like a canon, a song that no one completely sings to the end."[42] In the pages of this book, I follow these songs in the hopes of taking up the refrain, not to "the end" but rather "into the middest."[43]

In Japanese, there is a phrase—*Shinin ni kuchi nashi* (死人に口なし). It suggests that the dead tell no tales, or more literally, "have no mouths." It conveys the powerlessness of the dead to speak on their own behalf. To the contrary, I believe that these texts reveal the many ways the dead do speak; to hear them, I suggest, we need only listen.

I turn now to the words left behind by the young Fujimura Misao, who carved his "Thoughts at the Precipice" into an oak tree before leaping to his death there over a hundred years ago.

1

Thoughts at the Precipice

Fujimura Misao at Kegon Falls

On May 22, 1903, Fujimura Misao (1886–1903), a sixteen-year-old student from the elite Tokyo Imperial University preparatory school, hiked to the top of Kegon Falls, etched a lengthy farewell poem titled "Gantō no kan" (巌頭之感, Thoughts at the precipice) into the trunk of a Mongolian oak tree, and leaped to his death. For forty-two days, his corpse remained undiscovered and unrecoverable in the swirling pools a hundred meters below the falls. In the absence of his body lay his poem.

The poem remained there etched into the tree until mid-June, when it disappeared overnight. According to a friend who made a pilgrimage to the falls on both June 18 and 19, it was there one day and gone the next. The local authorities had scraped the poem from the tree, "certain that the totally incomprehensible 'Thoughts at the Precipice' had such allure it would pull people in" (*nan demo kano imi no wakaranai 'Gantō no kan' toka iu mono ni miryoku ga atte, hito o hikiyoseru ni sōinai*).[1]

In the aftermath of Fujimura's suicide, the poem quickly became so well known as to make any efforts to censor it futile. Fellow student (and later famed philosopher) Watsuji Tetsurō claimed that its words were "soon burnt into our hearts," its lines quoted by youths on city trains and even among country boys.[2] Two days after his death, Fujimura's uncle traveled to the site, transcribed the poem, and then had it published alongside his obituary in the newspaper.[3] Family, friends, and even complete strangers made their own pilgrimages. Some sought to imitate his suicide, literally retracing his steps. Others went for his writing, bringing home a souvenir in the form of a rubbing of the poem they themselves made or a postcard being sold by an enterprising local who had snapped a photograph of the carving before it was deleted by authorities. One of these postcards featured a photo of young Fujimura

FIGURE 1. Postcards for sale at Kegon Falls: Fujimura and his poem etched onto the landscape. Courtesy Nikkō Shiritsu Nikkō Toshokan.

in kimono superimposed beside the waterfall and another of his poem etched into the tree (fig. 1).

Although the authorities attempted to scrub all signs of Fujimura's suicide and his poem from the scene, Kegon Falls remains associated with these to this day. Newer versions of the postcards, which were confiscated and banned after the incident, remain bestsellers at the Kegon Falls shops.[4] For many years, the Nikkō Tourist Association included a transcription of the entire poem on both their Japanese and English webpages "because there are so many inquiries." They no longer do so, however, presumably in an effort to align with more recent media guidelines. In the process of writing this book, the website was revamped, and all mention of Fujimura's suicide there, including the poem, have been removed.[5]

Over a century later, similar impulses surround the traces of the dead. If one side strains to recover and preserve any trace, the other seeks to erase them forevermore. Fujimura himself demonstrated the tension between these competing impulses of self-preservation and self-erasure with the decision to etch his "Thoughts at the Precipice" into the site in the moments before his suicide. Lamenting the death of his nephew, his uncle wrote:

> A beloved youth of great promise has passed. Never to return, gone without a trace. Ohh, how lamentable it is.
>
> Mirai tabō no kōshōnen wa satte kaerazu, kiete ato nashi. Aa kanashii kana.[6]

In fact, a plethora of traces remained. Most prominent of all was his poem captured in photographs, transcribed in newspapers, and preserved in hand-traced facsimiles, its words on the lips of Japanese youths across the nation. Even today, Fujimura's poem makes top lists of famed suicide notes, and he makes an occasional appearance in mystery novels, tourist guidebooks, and sensationalist photo collections that purport to have captured "ghosts at famous suicide spots."[7] In the immediate aftermath of his suicide, still other traces were discovered in the young man's library, in the texts that he had read and in those he left behind for friends and family. Those who survived him sifted through these traces, seeking him in the textual remains.

Afterward, many of his contemporaries turned to produce their own texts in response. These included obituaries, memoirs, and memorials; letters authored ostensibly by "the person of the precipice;" poems, prose fiction, and dramas by some of the era's most well-known writers; and tabloid accounts, strident op-eds, and satirical manga that appeared in mass media.

In large part, what ensured that the incident received such attention was the high-profile status of his family and friends, who make up something of a Who's Who list of Meiji era intellectuals. His uncle was Naka Michiyo, pioneer of the discipline of East Asian history and a teacher at the elite First Higher School where Fujimura was also enrolled alongside some of the most prominent intellectuals of the time, most notably his teachers, author Natsume Sōseki and philosopher Kuwaki Gen'yoku, and his fellow students Uozumi Setsuro, who became a famous literary critic, and the philosopher-educator Abe Yoshishige, who married Fujimura's sister. The public platforms for commenting on Fujimura's suicide were many, including a memorial service held by the family at the top of Kegon Falls on June 4 with over two hundred in attendance and eulogies by his uncle, his friend Uozumi, and his teachers, as well as a public lecture "On Fujimura Misao's Death" on June 13 delivered by Kuroiwa Ruikō, the president of *Yorozu chōhō* newspaper, who was popular among students as both the founder of Risōdan (Ideal Society) and as the recent author of *Tenjinron* (May 1903).[8]

Fujimura's suicide spurred fierce debates among medical professionals, philosophers, journalists, literati, and educators in both the popular press and specialized journals. The debates revolved around not just the ethics of his choice to die by suicide, but also around his choice to write. Whether condemning or condoning his decisions, commentators were forced to grapple with the responsibility of writers, both those who, like Fujimura, wrote in the face of suicide and those who, like themselves, were writing in its wake.

I turn now to a close reading of his final farewell poem in order to explore how a text that marks the disappearance of its author instead results in an enduring

and controversial presence. What about the poem, its author, and his acts of writing and suicide in situ enabled the endurance of a text that itself disappeared alongside its short-lived author in Kegon Falls over a century ago? What kept the poem alive for so long? How does it enliven the dead and, perhaps, also deaden the living?

> "GANTŌ NO KAN" (巌頭之感, THOUGHTS AT THE PRECIPICE)
> How vast are heaven and earth,
> how endless are ancient and modern times.
> Striving to measure this greatness with my meager five-foot body,
> the philosophy of Horatio, what authority does it hold in the end?
> All truth is encompassed in just one word:
> "Incomprehensible."
> In anguish over this resentment, at last I have decided on death.
> Standing already on the precipice,
> without the slightest unease in my breast,
> knowing for the first time
> how to unite great disappointment with great hope.
>
> 悠々たる哉天壌、
> 遼々たる哉古今、
> 五尺の小躯を以て此大をはからむとす、
> ホレーショの哲學竟に何等のオーソリチィーを價するものぞ、
> 萬有の眞相は唯だ一言にして悉す、
> 曰く「不可解」
> 我この恨を懐いて煩悶終に死を決するに至る
> 既に巌頭に立つに及んで
> 胸中何等の不安あるなし、
> 始めて知る
> 大なる悲觀は大なる樂觀に一致するを[9]

Any reader of Fujimura's poem is sure to have their own individual reactions to this text from over a century ago. What I ask us to consider here is a twofold question: How does this poem work to present the now long-dead Fujimura to us now? And how might it have worked on and for Fujimura himself at the moment before his leap?

His poem emplaces the speaker on the precipice. It roots him there on a literal and metaphorical cliff. At the same time, the poem possesses an uneasy temporality. The speaker simultaneously "stands *already* at the precipice" (*sude ni gantō ni tatsu*) in a state of transcendence and narrates his struggle up to that point. It marks his arrival in two senses—a physical one at this spot where he *now* stands (*tatsu ni oyonde*) and a conceptual one charting his arrival at the decision to die *at last* (*tsui ni shi o kessuru ni itaru*).

This journey to the precipice is described using a symmetrical structure that neatly follows the narrative formula of problem, solution, and resolution. The

opening four lines paint a panoramic vision of the cosmos, past and present, in which the dwarfed and ill-equipped speaker struggles. The middle lines are the central kernel that is invariably quoted as a soundbite to explain Fujimura's suicide:

> All truth is encompassed in just one word:
> "Incomprehensible." (「不可解」, *fukakai*)

His epiphany about the incomprehensibility of life is both the solution and the problem. It offers an answer (of sorts) to the questions that plague the speaker in the first four lines and raises another irresolvable problem that leads to his resolve to die. As the next line indicates, this choice is "at last" (*tsui ni*) made "in anguish over *this* resentment" (*kono urami o idaite hanmon*). As if to solidify the causal link between these two things, Fujimura inserted the deictic marker "this" (*kono*) in the process of proofreading.

In the poem's final five lines, the turn inward deepens as the panorama yields to a first-person embodied perspective from the ledge. Standing there is what relieves the anxieties that had formerly tormented him and is also what yields self-knowledge of "how to unite great disappointment with great hope … for the first time." These final lines insistently emplace Fujimura on the ledge, as does the poem's title, "Thoughts *at* the Precipice." The nominal marker (*no*) linking the thoughts to the precipice was another belated addition made during the proofreading stage, as was the verb *knowing* (*shiru*) that marks his triumphant arrival of self-knowledge in the penultimate line.

Even as the poem insistently locates Fujimura as proximate to the site of transcendence, there is, of course, a necessary gap. The speaker may have arrived at the ledge and the epiphanic moment, but the writer of the poem carves away at an adjacent site. The tactile nature of his medium only exacerbates this sense of a gap. Crafted and carved, the poem's own materiality cannot help but remind the reader of the torturous act of inscribing the poem into the tree. His edits even suggest a proofreader who is conscious of future readers and who is himself rereading his own text in these moments prior to dying.

They also suggest a writer who had scripted this text prior to arriving at the precipice. The poem's neat symmetrical structure, lofty neoclassical prose replete with Chinese parallelisms, and a Shakespearian reference certainly give the impression of a carefully drafted work, as did the foresight evident in the perfectly sized clearing (whose semicircular shape, perhaps not coincidentally, evokes a tombstone) carved out for the poem.[10] Inscribing the lengthy poem into the rough, deeply grooved bark of an oak tree was no mean feat, and many noted his careful preparations—the writing brush, ink, ink stone, and knife he had brought along were depicted in sketches of the spot.[11] No draft was recovered, but it is not hard to imagine that one may have accompanied its writer down into the falls.

Another note that Fujimura left behind suggests that he had composed, or at least conceived, the poem even before undertaking this journey there. He articulated the same resentful sentiments over his unresolvable existential dilemma in

an inscription that he left behind for his cousins on the inside cover of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's eighteenth-century plays. There, he wrote:

> In vain, I leave behind my resentments over being unable to resolve the conundrum of life to the echoes of Kegon Falls.
>
> Boku no jinsei mondai no kaiketsu o ezu shite urami o ada ni Kegon no hibiki ni nokosu.[12]

Fujimura anticipates here how the echoing falls would embody him long after his own self-willed bodily absence.

For his friends and family, his poem offered an embodiment of the dead. His good friend and classmate Abe Yoshishige reflected on its importance in his memoir, writing that: "It is not enough to say that the 143 characters that make up Thoughts at the Precipice are words of tears or blood. It is not blood nor bones, but the letters written upon there that carry the entirety of his being."[13] When his other friend discovered that the authorities had neglected to delete one single character from the tree, he carefully carved it from the bark and returned it to the family.[14] In a literal sense, this suggests how a textual body might substitute for the corporeal one.

For Abe, this substitution process was rudely disrupted when confronted with his friend's actual corpse that was recovered forty-two days later. In his memoirs, he recalled feeling torn between the romantic beauty of the locale and the gruesome reality of death when he accompanied Fujimura's uncle on his trip to retrieve the body: "I felt that Fujimura had chosen a good place to die, but when I smelled the rotted corpse, I just wanted to leave him there stored in the bottom of the pool forever."[15] Abe's impulse was to bury the dead at the site of his own choosing, one that was as aesthetically pleasing as the lofty philosophical poem etched there. As we will see below, this was an impulse shared by many of Fujimura's contemporaries. Some, like his uncle, would seek to inter his physical remains at the site alongside the grand poem and falls. Others sought a less literal mode of burial, instead enshrining him in literary prose that sometimes situated him in those very same aestheticized pools. Both acts were controversial for those who, like the censorious authorities, sought to sever any seductive associations between the locale and suicide. These parties would undertake their own competing acts of writing, rewriting, and unwriting in response to the many copycat suicides that ensued in the wake of Fujimura's suicide.

THE PULL OF THE POEM AND THE FALLS

In just the two months following Fujimura's death, nine youths died by suicide at Kegon Falls, and two others attempted. Before graduation, three students at First Higher School killed themselves at other locales. By the end of 1903, there were sixteen suicides at the falls and twenty-six attempts. Followers were reported to have imitated Fujimura by staying in the same inn, by wearing a school uniform, and/

or by etching their own death poems into the tree. One youth who had apparently traveled to the falls not to die but only to make a tracing of Fujimura's famous poem accidentally slipped and met the same fate. By August 1907, according to a sign posted by the nearby Buddhist temple, the tally reached 185 attempts with over forty dead. Such suicides were said to belong to the "Kegon Sect," a newly coined term that played on the derivation of the falls' name from a Mahayana Buddhist sutra.[16]

The poem was thought to embody both Fujimura's own anguish and that of his contemporaries, who belonged to what was dubbed the "cult of anguish" (*hanmon-shū*).[17] In a letter to friends, Uozumi explained, "I felt that no one other than Fujimura could know my recent pains and that no one other than I could know what lay in Fujimura's dying heart. … I didn't know the details, but even now I feel that his anguish and mine were one and the same." His friend Abe remembered feeling as if "a voice was ceaselessly following him," one that articulated the existential doubts he shared with his fellow students and that "occupied our hearts and minds."[18] The falls themselves were personified as embodying both contemporary youths' angst and its solution, a siren beckoning them into its waters. As a *Hoji shinbun* headline on July 21 warned, the "sounds of Kegon Falls" were like "The voice of the devil" (*Akuma no koe* [*Kegon no takioto*]).[19]

Even those who did not follow Fujimura noted the strong pull that his death exerted on them. In his eulogy, Uozumi proclaimed that "death incessantly beckons to me, making me desire it deeply." Iwanami Shigeo, a graduate of the First Higher School and later publishing giant, believed that Fujimura's example "showed that death is the only means to peace and reason, but I regretted that my own lack of courage and sincerity prevent it in my case, although many thought I would commit suicide."[20]

Not all those who claimed to be affected and infected by Fujimura's suicide were intimates, however. The September 1903 issue of the *Japan Weekly Mail* noted disapprovingly that "There have been no less than 16 known cases of imitation of his act, and the imitators have by no means been all students—mechanics and servants have figured among the victims to this strange delusion."[21]

Two months after Fujimura's death, one young man named Kōda Minoru left behind a note before leaping into the falls in a clear echo of "Thoughts at the Precipice:"

> Last dying thoughts. How calm the sounds of Kegon Falls. How it tumbles at the time of death. A second world-weary lone traveler.
>
> 臨終の感、悠なる哉華厳の瀑声、磊なる哉臨終の時、第二厭世の孤客
>
> Rinjū no kan, yūnaru kana Kegon no bakusei, rainaru kana rinjū no toki, daini ensei no kokaku.

Despite any claims of being a "lone traveler," by virtue of his choices, Kōda was, of course, claiming an affiliation with Fujimura, albeit an exaggerated one. He

was actually a post office worker from Nagano who had embezzled money with no known personal ties, and yet he left behind a Waseda school uniform atop the falls and in a suicide note to his brother explained that "ever since the suicidal jump of Fujimura Misao, out of extreme weariness with life, I've been grieving terribly and so decided on this action." It was this stranger's death that led to the recovery of Fujimura's corpse, although he was derided in the press for "throwing away his life like rubble after being moved by a bit of feeling, despite his healthy young body and education. The height of foolishness and idiocy, not something to pity, but rather to laugh at."[22] Three years later, an Okayama student and avid reader of philosophy cited Fujimura's poem in her own note before committing suicide by poison and earned the sobriquet of "the female Fujimura Misao."[23] Suicide may have meant extinguishing the self, but it also could signal a desire for membership in a community of fellow death seekers.

Even when that desire was not present, the link was often made by virtue of association. An Imperial University student (and alumni of First Higher School) scornfully noted that Fujimura's "death couldn't avoid being badmouthed for seeking fame" and declared that he "would show 'em by dying in the middle of some dirty lake where no one would even know." By virtue of his pronouncements, this young man's death on June 11th that year was, in fact, known. He was even misidentified by the press as a close friend of Fujimura's who had chosen to die out of grief.[24]

Fujimura was not the first to commit suicide in such a spectacular location or to leave textual traces there. As evident from the little-known case of a lovelorn twenty-two year old who left behind a bundle of his unrequited love letters before leaping to his death there in September 1902, method and locale alone did not guarantee making one's suicide noteworthy or praiseworthy.[25] Journalist Kuroiwa began his June 1903 speech touting the merits of Fujimura's philosophical suicide by distinguishing it from "common suicides of passion or insanity [*chijō no jisatsu ya hakkyō no jisatsu*]."[26] Even the records kept by local Nikkō authorities opened with Fujimura at the head of the list and tersely attributed the cause of his suicide as being "for the sake of philosophical research" [*Genin: Tetsugaku kenkyū no tame*]."[27] His position as the ostensible "first" at Kegon was unassailable.

Not all praised Fujimura, however. A writer for *Kokkei shinbun*, a consistently strident critic of Fujimura, blamed his uncle, Naka Michiyo, for publicizing his suicide and his poem and thereby luring them to "the place where fools die" (*bakamono no shinibasho*), as the article title put it. In this August 5, 1906, piece, the author demanded that his uncle be charged with the crime of aiding and abetting suicide:

> First of all, Fujimura inscribes Thoughts at the Precipice and leaps, and then his uncle-by-marriage, the Doctor of Letters Naka (Michiyo), rushes to the scene and after reading the charming Thoughts at the Precipice once through to the end, he edits its lines, completely whitewashing the note. As if that were not enough, he then

> informs a certain Tokyo newspaper that Misao had recorded a thing of elegance about his determination to die and Fujimura Misao's name immediately spreads to every city and town, and in the end weak-willed youths of both sexes are lured to Kegon. And then, what's more, the ever-mischievous Dr. Naka then tries to install a memorial stone for Misao on the precipice at Kegon.[28]

Whereas his uncle and friends sought to ensure that Fujimura's presence remained at the site—either by literally burying his remains there or by installing a memorial stone with his poem inscribed on it—the authorities sought to erase all traces. They so feared the power of its grand philosophical sentiments imprinted onto a natural site of such grandeur "to pull people in" that they had safety fences installed and eventually tore down the entire tree.

Nevertheless, the poem took on an afterlife of its own. As the most public and publicized trace remaining, it engendered a fierce debate among commentators at the time who found themselves divided on two questions: Did it suggest that Fujimura's act of suicide was praiseworthy? And was the act of writing itself a worthy undertaking in the face of death?

A HIGHFALUTIN' PHILOSOPHICAL SUICIDE

Most important for anyone trying to answer these questions was discerning Fujimura's motives. His poem certainly lent itself to a highbrow philosophical interpretation. For many, Fujimura's stance invited flattering comparisons with Empedocles, who leaped into the volcano at Etna, and with the Greek poet Sappho's lovelorn leap into the sea at Cape Lefkátas, "martyrs to their beliefs."[29] There was a tinge of nationalistic satisfaction in these parallels. The founder of *Yorozu chōhō* newspaper, Kuroiwa Ruikō, heralded Fujimura as "the first true philosopher in our country. Actually, no, it's not that we have no philosophers, but no one in our country before has ever died for the sake of philosophy."[30]

Others denigrated the act as cowardly and weak willed, no different than the fifty students annually "who hold the future of our country in their hands and have a moral duty … but instead live in a dream world and take their own lives." One critic advocated more vigorous physical education in schools, while the most severe of the bunch, literary critic Hasegawa Tenkei, complained that "it's one thing to look into the mysteries of life, but to go as far as dying because of life's incomprehensibility is too much."[31]

The medical community diagnosed Fujimura and other suicidal youths, moving from biological and genetic explanations to a "biopsychiatry tinged with eugenics" that increasingly pathologized and criminalized the individual and the act.[32] The ever-critical *Kokkei shinbun* again skewered Fujimura while lampooning this tendency. An article titled "Jisatsu no ryūkō" (Suicide trends), published in September 1906, opened with the assertion that "those who commit suicide out of

the incomprehensibility of life, out of the agonies of a broken heart, from poverty, illness, or insanity" are "good-for-nothing weaklings" and advocated "a national policy of encouraging such thugs to commit suicide in the interest of elevating our reproductive powers and the flourishing of our race."[33]

The fierce arguments over Fujimura's suicide were embroiled with larger ongoing debates that pitted the development of individualism, subjectivity, and ego against citizens' duties to the nation, especially with the advent of the Russo-Japanese War in February 1904. Some commentators credited Fujimura's suicide and anguish as a natural and even welcome sign of modernization that proved the "successful infusion of awareness of the self from abroad" and that rejected the "idiocy of asserting that bodies belong to the nation." His friend Uozumi published a defense of suicide titled "Jisatsu-ron" in May 1904. Elsewhere, he praised Fujimura for offering "us fellow students" an example of one who is "grounded in individualism" and "who wagered on death for the sake of human life."[34] The *Dictionary of Modern Japanese Philosophers* identifies Fujimura's suicide as marking "the transition among contemporary First Higher Students from blind and uncritical nationalism to individualism and liberalism."[35]

Others worried about this trend among youths and especially its implications for national security. In the interest of dissuading would-be copycats, a nearby Shinto shrine erected a sign at the entry to Kegon Falls warning that "suicide is an act of pollution and filial impiety that threatens the retardation of culture and patriotism."[36] In an echo of this tact, during the mid-1930s suicide boom at Mount Mihara (the subject of chapter 2), an elderly postal worker took it upon himself to travel from village to village with this sign on his back: "During this time of national crisis, your life is priceless. For the sake of the nation 'please wait a bit' and come take counsel."[37] When deemed contrary to national interest, the act of suicide could prompt severe censure.

One curious example from 1931 depicts Fujimura's suicide as entirely compatible with nationalist projects. In an *e-maki* illustrated chronicle of noteworthy historical incidents, Fujimura's leap was juxtaposed with the signing of the Japanese-British alliance the previous year almost as if they were a single event (fig. 2).[38]

The presentation and pairing of the two events here equate acts of national and self-determination. If the aligned flags of the two nations demonstrated, as the caption indicates, the "degree to which Britain, a nation proud of its glorious isolation, entrusted our nation and markedly raised our international stature," Fujimura's athletic leap with furrowed brow and arms outstretched suggested his unwavering self-determination. The picture's iconography willfully asserts its Japaneseness with incongruous and inaccurate pairings: sakura petals beside the flags (although the treaty was signed in January), Japanese maple leaves in autumn behind Fujimura (although he leaped in May), and his kimono and haori dress (although he wore his student uniform, as was widely reported). Perhaps it was not coincidental that this print appeared in the same year that Kegon became an

露國の滿洲侵略は韓國の獨立を危くし、その西藏占領は英領印度の危險に及ぶ憂かある。かくては東洋の平和は到底望まれない。日英兩國は爰に同盟を締結して露國の暴威に備ふる事となつた。光榮の孤立を誇る英國が我國に信賴する此態度は我國際的地位を著しく向上せしめたものであつた。

主なる事項

三十四年
△愛國婦人會成る（一月）
△皇孫迪宮（今上陛下）御降誕（四月）
△ストライキ節流行す
△シンガーミシン始めて輸入さる
三十五年
△歩兵第五聯隊八甲田山に雪中行軍をなし多くの將卒壯烈なる最期を遂く（六月）
△秩父宮殿下御降誕（八月）
△ひさし髪漸く流行、腕時計始る
三十六年
△良子女王（皇后陛下）御降誕（三月）
△小學校教科書國定となる（四月）
△上海マニラを經て米國へ電信開通
△絹シヨール流行す

明治三十五年

明治三十六年

學生藤村操の投身

（五月廿七日）

人生哲學に深く惱んだ第一高等學校の一學生藤村操は『巖頭の感』なる一文を殘して華嚴瀧に身を投じて自殺した。

巖頭の感

悠々たる哉天壤、遼々たる哉古今、五尺の小軀を以て此大をはからんとす、ホレーショの哲學、竟に何等のオーソリティーを價するものぞ、萬有の眞相は唯一言にして悉す。曰く、不可解。我この恨を懷いて煩悶終に死を決するに至る。既に巖頭に立つに及んで胸中何等の不安あることなし。始めて知る大なる悲觀は大なる樂觀に一致するを。

FIGURE 2. Fujimura's patriotic leap (1931). *Meiji Taishō Shōwa dai-emaki* (1931), Tokyo: Dainihon Yūbenkai Kōdansha.

official "government-designated scenic spot" (*koku-shitei meishō*, 國指定名勝). As this example suggests, Fujimura's suicide offered a highly malleable incident that could be refashioned to suit a variety of contexts and agendas.

Before turning to consider other creative adaptations of the incident, I want to turn our attention back to the poem. Although the above commentators were implicitly judging Fujimura based on his own poetic articulation of his motives, their commentary was rarely explicitly engaged with the poem itself. Instead, they extracted its motive and encapsulated it in a single word: *philosophical* if they were a fan, *incomprehensible* if a critic.

TO WRITE OR NOT TO WRITE

What about the poem he chose to inscribe and the act in principle—writing before suicide—invited such disparate reactions? It was the poem's relationship to this dying, writing body on the precipice that seemed to attract and repel in equal measure. To Anezaki Chōfū, a scholar of comparative religion, the poem articulated a fundamental existential dilemma, "truly and splendidly expressing the skepticism that arose from this issue of To be or not to be."[39] As the Shakespeare citation here (and in Fujimura's poem, too) suggested, this philosophical question was entwined with a literary one. As much as this was an existential dilemma about voluntary death and self-will, it was also about the act of writing. To write or not to write, *that* was the question.

For some poets, Fujimura's death and his death poem were the height of poetics. Keigetsu, for example, celebrated this "young philosophy student who flung his body into Kegon Falls at Nikkō. … That death, how marvelously poetic. The peerless words he left behind as a youth of only eighteen [sixteen by Western count], how exquisite. A person who leaves behind such exquisite prose and achieves such a marvelous death is rarely found in any age."[40] The two acts—writing and dying—were perfectly complementary, parallel events that were extraordinary for being unparalleled in history.

For his critics, writing in the face of death, much less a philosophical poem in a lofty, neoclassical scholarly register, merited only scorn. One particularly harsh critic lashed out, "What the hell is that affected prose?" (*Ano kidotta bunshō wa nan da*). Miyatake Gaikotsu, a journalist and editor known for his antiestablishment politics and satirical wit, called Fujimura's "big epiphany nothing more than a big self-advertisement" (*hajimete shiru, ōnaru hora wa ōnaru baimei*).[41] If for some, the poem suggested that Fujimura had transcended such mundane concerns, for others, the laborious act of writing itself offered de facto evidence of his hypocritical failure to shed attachments. In journalist Kuroiwa's mind, what made his "death one to be respected, as beautiful as it was elevated" was Fujimura's own quite literally elevated perch: "He stood at a spot with the clearest and grandest view in the world, hung up a sign marking his deep skepticism, and dared to take this

extraordinary and unprecedented step." There, Fujimura "had already achieved 'enlightenment' [*satori*] and so his heart was at peace and surely enabled a peaceful good death [*daiōjō*]."[42] Literary giant Futabatei Shimei came to the exact opposite conclusion about Fujimura's state of enlightenment. In a conversation with fellow writer Masamune Hakuchō, he declared, "If I were going to die, I wouldn't write such a thing. I'd just die. Writing just means he still had attachments" (*Are o kaku uchi wa mada miren ga aru no da*). In response, Masamune chided, "Well, I publish in newspapers and journals. My works are my 'Thoughts at the Precipice.' The moment I can no longer write is the moment I die."[43]

Literary critic and educator Tsubouchi Shōyō was less concerned about how Fujimura himself had scripted his suicide than with subsequent commentators who fell prey to the impulse to aestheticize such spectacular suicides. In an essay titled "Jisatsu zehi" (The rights and wrongs of suicide) that appeared in *Taiyō* as part of a series of nine articles responding to Fujimura's suicide in summer 1903, Shōyō noted, "In all ages and nations, heroic suicides are considered beautiful, whether dying after seppuku by flinging one's innards up at the ceiling or dying by dancing one's way down a 60-meter giant waterfall." He acknowledged that suicide is part and parcel of modern civilization, "a special by-product of the civilized world [*bunmei no tokusan*]," but denounced the impulse to praise it as "a crime of society" (*shakai no tsumi*).[44]

It is important to point out here the ways that Fujimura's very same writings and actions generated entirely opposite conclusions among these writers. Although the literati are often accused of uncritically subscribing to and promoting what has been sometimes called "the romantic cultural discourse" on suicide, not all writers endorsed this position if there was ever a singular one to be had. As we will see below, a writer like Sōseki—as an educator who knew Fujimura personally—occupied an especially ambivalent position.[45]

To Fujimura's critics, there was an irresolvable contradiction between extinguishing the self and leaving behind a text that would ensure its survival by proxy. The motives for dying and for writing were, in their minds, incompatible. As the lake-jumping youth had put it, it was Fujimura's fame-seeking behaviors that "could not help but be badmouthed." This youth had scorned Fujimura's choice of locale, claiming that "rather than drowning myself in some place like Kegon Falls, I'd pick a noble death at Mount Asama where my body would burn up in the volcano flames."[46] This is a somewhat paradoxical comment since Asama, another suicide hotspot in the early twentieth century (with over 250 attempts by summer 1933), seems as idealized a location as Kegon. But the crucial distinction drawn here is as much about romanticized versus mundane locales (a volcano or waterfall versus "some dirty lake") as it is about critiquing the desire to leave traces of oneself behind, whether that trace was textual (prose) or bodily (corpse).

That one's body of writings could, and would eventually, substitute for the body of any writer was at the crux of the debate. It was this point that Masamune

eventually convinced his fellow writer Futabatei to acknowledge when he got him to concede that "the desire to want to leave behind some kind of trace [*ato-ashi*] of having lived a worthwhile life in this world" is a natural one, little different from literary creation.[47] As we will see, the uneasy role that these traces occupy is an issue faced by writers who choose to write in its face, and by those left behind with only a text in its wake.

SŌSEKI ON WRITING, READING, AND VIEWING SUICIDE FROM THE SIDELINES

For Natsume Sōseki, one of Fujimura's First Higher School teachers, the issue was not merely academic; it was also personal. Sōseki would tackle the incident afterward repeatedly in works of fiction and literary criticism alike only to offer different assessments each time, articulating both defenses and critiques of Fujimura while harshly censuring commentators who dared to judge this youth from the sidelines.

Rumors quickly circulated that Fujimura had committed suicide because of a recent scolding by Sōseki for his lackluster academic performance. In an oft-recounted anecdote in Japanese literary histories, when Sōseki asked a student why Fujimura had died a few days afterwards, the student responded reassuringly, "Sensei, you needn't worry. It's okay," and Sōseki exploded, "Don't worry about something like this? I mean he's dead after all, isn't he?!"[48] Although his role was likely overexaggerated as a contributing cause, Sōseki's own literary responses to the incident only fueled the perceived connection. He referred to the suicide in four separate works that appeared within four years' time: a poem, "Minasoko no kan" (Thoughts at the water's depths) in February 1904; scattered references to Kegon and Fujimura in his *Wagahai wa neko de aru* (*I am a Cat*, 1905–6), in his novel *Kusamakura* (1906), and finally in his *Bungakuron* (*Theory of Literature*, 1907). Here, I first focus on the latter two examples that tackle the ethics of writing and reading about suicide.

In *Kusamakura* (1906), in one of his many lengthy monologues about the "purity of aesthetic principle," the painter-protagonist recounts the incident as if a tale from long ago:

> A long time ago, there was a youth who left behind a poem at the precipice before making his way down into the swift waters running just beneath the 500-foot tall falls. The way I see it, for the sake of a single word—Beauty—this youth threw away a life that should not have been thrown away. Such a death is extremely heroic, though the impulse that prompted it is difficult for us to comprehend. But how can those who fail to grasp the heroism of that death dare to deride the young Fujimura's action? Such people, who can never taste the emotions of one who accomplishes such heroism, must surely forfeit all right to scoff, for they are inferior to this young man in being unable, even in circumstances that justify such an action, to achieve that heroic end. Therefore, I say they have no right whatsoever to scoff.[49]

Given the unabashed aestheticism of this narrator, this passage might be interpreted as an unqualified endorsement of a suicide for the sake of art. The bulk of this passage is a fierce condemnation of "the louts and riffraff" (*gesu-gerō*) who criticize Fujimura and fail to acknowledge the "extreme heroism" (*makoto ni sōretsu*) of his suicide. But an attack on attackers is not necessarily the same thing as a ringing endorsement. And this defense of Fujimura also contains some of its own criticism:

> The way I see it, for the sake of a single word—Beauty—this youth threw away a life that should not have been thrown away.
>
> Yo o miru tokoro ni te wa, kano seinen wa bi no ichiji no tame ni, sutsubekarazaru inochi o sutetarumono to omou.[50]

Is the suggestion here that producing beauty *is* worth disposing of a life? Or is it that no single or singular writing, no matter how beautiful, is worth a life?

Either reading is plausible. Elsewhere in the novel, a more strident critique of writing in the face of suicide is articulated by the beautiful Nami, a character who acts as a foil to the painter's pompous aestheticism. When the two hear from an old local woman the legend of the Nagara maiden who drowned herself after composing a famous tanka poem, the painter marvels, "Little could I have dreamed that I would find myself in such a poetic place, hearing from such a poetic figure this elegant, time-worn tale, told in such elegant language!" In contrast, Nami finds herself untouched by the suicidal woman's plight or her famed death poem. When the painter appraises the poem as "touching" (*aware*), she asks, "Hmm, is it touching?" and tells him, "If it were me, I wouldn't compose any such poem. To begin with, what a cliché to drown oneself in the Fuchi River."[51] Here, Nami rejects the Nagara maiden as a model, and, like the lake-jumping youth cited above, implicitly Fujimura too.

If there is no definitive statement made in *Kusamakura* about Fujimura's act of writing a death poem, there is a spirited attack on the many misreadings by others in its wake. According to the painter, these stem from an inevitable gap between actor and audience, for "such people … can never taste the emotions of one who accomplishes such supreme heroism." In contrast with the riffraff, however, the artist declares himself uniquely positioned because he possesses perfect aesthetic detachment. As he emphatically declares in the passage immediately following this statement, "I am a painter [*Yo wa gakō de aru*]. And, as a painter, a man whose professionally cultivated sensibility would automatically put me above my more uncouth neighbors, even if I were to descend to dwelling in the common world of human emotions."[52]

The question posed by this novel is what posture an artist *should* adopt toward the spectacle of self-death and its re-presentation in art. It grapples with the tricky ethical question of the appropriate distance for both artists and audiences when writing and reading about suicide. Two alternatives are offered,

one from the perspective of the male painter-subject and another from that of the female model-object. In much of the novel, as suggested by the above passages, there is an endorsement of the artist's detached viewpoint and a rejection of the overly invested identification of the hoi polloi. But in his work of literary theory the following year, Sōseki instead suggests that the reverse was true. He calls for a reading practice that brings readers into close proximity to the dead, even at our peril.

Revisiting Fujimura's suicide in his work of literary theory *Bungakuron*, Sōseki explicitly addressed the ethical quandaries involved in writing and reading about suicidal acts:

> Mr. Fujimura Misao leaped and drowned himself in Kegon Falls just like long ago Empedocles jumped headlong into an erupting volcano crater. Despite the fact that hearing or reading about these actual facts produces a sense of extreme heroism [*sukoburu sōretsu*], if we had encountered them attempting to die when standing beside Kegon Falls or when seated on the peak of Mount Etna, should we stand by idly and regard that death in order to satisfy our heroic aesthetic [*waga sōretsu-bi*], or should it make us cry out wildly and propel us to save them?[53]

In a complete reversal of the earlier conclusions advanced by the narrator in *Kusamakura*, here Sōseki rejects any heroic interpretation. Instead, he stresses the ethical responsibility of readers to respond to representations in the same way we would in reality rather than succumb to our desire for what he pointedly calls "*our* heroic aesthetic." Beauty is beside the point. Readers and listeners, he suggests, have as much access to and responsibility for an incident described in a text as they do to an event in real life. He calls for readers to imagine ourselves more proximate to the textual (or aural) event and to the dead. In other words, Sōseki demands that we emplace ourselves beside Fujimura on the precipice.

ALTERNATIVE READINGS: PHILOSOPHIC SUICIDE OR SORDID SHINJŪ?

Fujimura's "Thoughts at the Precipice" were not the only words cited and thoroughly dissected in the public arena. Material traces were sought everywhere to explain the act. Everything was fair game for interpretation and for republication, including numerous suicide notes to friends and family and his personal correspondence in the months leading up to his suicide.[54] His public poem may have directed an exclusively philosophical interpretation, but his other inscriptions encouraged the theory that he was dying for love.

Literary texts were at the center of that interpretation. Much was made of the fact that a day prior to setting off for Nikkō, Fujimura had given a young woman a copy of Takayama Chogyū's 1894 *Takiguchi nyūdō* (The monk from the top of the waterfall) with a passage underlined in red about a young suitor asking a father's

permission to marry his daughter. The recipient, Dairoku Tamiki, was daughter of the president of Tokyo Imperial University. After her death in 1982, the book was donated to the Museum of Modern Japanese Literature, and splashy tabloid headlines asserted that Fujimura's "incomprehensibility about life" was really "his one-sided love for an older girl."[55]

Such theories, in fact, had been bandied about back in 1903, when they were either dismissed as spurious and inconsequential by supporters or mocked by his detractors. *Kokkei shinbun* derided him mercilessly in its "Jisatsu annai" (Guide to suicide):

> For those who are still attached to this world and are loathe to display their horrid corpses, the best method is to jump into the sulfur pools at Hakone and a good option for those young, pedantic greenhorns who suffer from one-sided lost love but feign philosophical incomprehensibility is to kick the bucket at a famous waterfall.[56]

Some theorized that Takayama's novel, which had just recently been republished, had even influenced Fujimura's chosen method, since one of its protagonists carves his final testament into a large pine tree before committing suicide.[57]

The books in his library and those he had left behind as keepsakes were probed as well. Especially telling was *Hamlet*, which he had referenced in his poem's brief mention of Horatio, a character whom Hamlet encourages to live on to tell of his suicide. For his cousins, Fujimura left behind a volume of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's works that included his famous love suicide play "Sonezaki shinjū" ("Love Suicides at Sonezaki") and inscribed a dedication on its inside cover "to call [their] attention to the arts and to encourage [them] to study life's truths."[58] (This volume was belatedly discovered in 1931 at a used bookstore after being mistakenly believed for decades to belong to author Shimazaki Tōson because of their homonymous names (藤村; Tōson/Fujimura). The buyer got a discount when he pointed out that the penmanship did not match Tōson's.)[59]

REVISITINGS, REWRITINGS, AND AFTERLIVES

What keeps Fujimura's death alive and well is the proliferation of traces in its wake. Some have resurfaced decades later to reignite age-old debates, while others have spurred tales that revive the dead in prose, plays, and in pictures for motives that are sometimes personal, sometimes commercial, and for tragicomic effects.

In many of these, Kegon Falls becomes a protagonist in its own right, a character that lures foolish and bookish youths to their deaths. In Sōseki's *I am a Cat*, the cat-protagonist worries that a distressed pupil "could well compose one of those rock-top suicide poems and then fling himself from over the lip of Kegon Falls," and another character warns, "Based on the way he looks, he's already on his way to Kegon Falls."[60] Tayama Katai's 1909 *Inaka kyōshi* (*Country Teacher*) censoriously links jumping into Kegon with obsessive book reading and the study of sublime

philosophy among pale-faced youths. The associations among Fujimura, philosophy, and suicide were so long-lived and deeply engrained that literary critic Kamei Katsuichirō recalls his parents' forbidding him from studying philosophy as a teenager living in Hokkaido in the early 1920s out of fear that he would commit suicide like Fujimura.[61]

Kegon became so marked as a suicide site that it came to offer a convenient shorthand that was synonymous with youth suicide. In June 1903, shortly after Fujimura's suicide, one young man used this shorthand to signal his suicidal intent, leaving a note on a postcard that indicated only that he was headed "to Kegon Falls" (*Kegon no taki ni*).[62] A comic strip published in *Tokyo Puck* in 1903 employs similar shorthand by depicting a Meiji student who progresses (or rather regresses) in each panel, from a promising, studious young man and avid reader to a dropout with a broken heart who drowns his sorrows in drink, and finally, in Kegon Falls.[63] In 1912, another example in *Osaka Puck* spoofed the literati's impulse for a poetic death by depicting a down-and-out "pessimistic man-of-letters" at Kegon asking a policeman where to leap in order to achieve a "poetic suicide" (*shi-teki jisatsu*; fig. 3).[64]

After Fujimura's death there, suicide was etched onto the landscape, making Kegon Falls into a place where it was natural to feel and purge, or to act on, suicidal thoughts. Two pieces set there written by Tayama Katai before and after the Fujimura incident demonstrate the power of this singular incident to transform the site. In a travel essay penned in July 1901, the top of the falls offers a scenic, jubilant setting for Katai and his fellow young author Kunikida Doppo to celebrate their inaugural poetry collection. When reworking this episode sixteen years later, the trip to Kegon Falls offers a site for the writers to contemplate their own suicidal impulses.

In his 1917 short story "K to T" (in English, "K and T," K standing for Kunikida and T for Tayama), the two aspiring writers are frequently assaulted by "gloomy thoughts … when K had stared at his sword late at night and wondered whether he should choose life or death, or when T, plagued by terrible spiritual and physical torments, had also on occasion contemplated doing away with himself." It is worth recalling that "K and T's" actual trip to the falls occurred back in 1897, six years before Fujimura's suicide. The narrator of the 1917 story admits that "In those days, there was no safety-fence at the top of the waterfall. Countless youthful thoughts of incomprehensibility [*wakai fukakai no kokoro*] had yet to be poured into the pool at their base." Nonetheless, the locale is credited with sirenic powers, as if the "falls possessed some sort of mysterious power that was trying to lure K." After K notes what a quick death it would be from such heights, T replies, "It would just take resolve. This is *the* place to come to die." (*Hito omoi de ii na. Shinu toki wa koko ni kurun da na*).[65]

If these works imagined Kegon Falls as a site of certain death, especially for romantic literary youths, others were *Forest Gump*–like popular adaptations that imagine Fujimura actually living on to participate in key historical events, like the miner's strikes at Ashio or the colonization of Hokkaido. Izumi Kyōka's 1903–4

FIGURE 3. A poetic suicide, the inevitable trip to Kegon Falls for Meiji men of letters. "Shi-teki jisatsu," *Osaka Puck* no. 7 (1912): 14. Courtesy Kyoto Seika University International Manga Research Center/Kyoto International Manga Museum.

Fūryūsen (The elegant railway) advances the theory that a philosopher-robber named Muraoka Fujita was part of the railroad strikes group but faked his suicide and retreated to a hideout deep in the mountains. Alternatively, there are fantastical tales of him being saved by angels who fill him with drink and dance until he accepts the limits of human knowledge, or ones that describe his redemptive encounters with magical snakes and a wise old ascetic nun, who help him to live on in the forest depths.[66]

Many of these adaptations borrow the voice of Fujimura, listing "Misao" or "the person at the precipice" (*gantō no hito*) as their author, as if he is speaking from

beyond the grave. Three-quarters of a century later, these imaginings of Fujimura's life and death persist. The 1973 detective novel *Nihon no Hamuretto no himitsu* (The secret of Japan's Hamlet) depicts a novelist who finds in a used bookstore a book called *Kegon spiritualism*, mistakenly thought to belong to the library of Shimazaki Tōson. When the novelist publishes a newspaper essay linking the author with the Kegon sutra, Fujimura's granddaughter surfaces to correct his error and to tell the true story of Fujimura's life after the leap.[67]

MOURNING AND BURYING OUR DEAD IN THE LAND AND IN LITERATURE

These many reworkings attest to an enduring fascination with Fujimura. Incorporating his sensational suicide offered authors a means of injecting their works with topicality, and undeniably also with cultural capital. But, less cynically, they could also offer a collective or individual means of mourning the dead. In some cases, his close friends or teachers authored these texts that imagine a magical, peaceful reunion with their dead, including his friend Fujiwara Sei's 1905 tale that dreams of an encounter with Fujimura on the precipice where he decides against dying and now spends his time reading books under giant trees.

Before closing out this chapter, I offer two last moving examples in which Kegon Falls is figured as a site of haunting and mourning where the dead are laid to rest. The first example by Shimazaki Tōson, an author who as we have seen was often inadvertently mixed up with Fujimura over the years, is "Tsugaru kaikyō" ("Tsugaru Strait," 1904). It offers the perspective of a family grieving over their son's suicide in Kegon Falls. In this short story, the parents are at sea, quite literally. They mourn their son as they make their way by ferry to Hakodate under the threat of the retreating Russian fleet. In clear echoes of Fujimura's own poem, the father-narrator defends his son for "investigating the meaning of life" but "discovering that his learning made him ignorant." The parents especially mourn having lost his unrecoverable corpse to the waterfall. The father's desire for a reunion with his son even in some incorporeal form is palpable when he entertains some magical thinking: "If the dead body should float up from the basin of that waterfall, and be borne away by the current, where would it go? Nowhere but into this ocean! Yes, yes, this restless place of wind and wave; this must be the grave of my son."[68] The father words strive and strain to mark a place of burial for his beloved, even if only in a vast watery grave. Apparent here is a natural desire to bury one's dead, to put the dead to rest in a literal sense.

Let us step back for a moment to ask, Why might literature matter to this process? How might written texts act as a repository for our dead, as a place to mourn and remember them from a distance?

In *The Dominion of the Dead*, Robert Pogue Harrison offers fascinating insights that suggestively link the enshrinement of dead bodies in the earth to their long

afterlives in less corporeal forms. In his examination of the cultural meanings of burial through far-ranging examples in Western literary and philosophical traditions—from Dante and Vico to Nietzsche and Joyce—he points out how crucial it is that the bodily corpse be recovered and buried so that they may be properly mourned and thereby live on. As he explains, "It is only because their bodies have a place to go that their souls or images or words may attain an afterlife of sorts among the living." Their remains need to be put to rest so that they might remain among us "in the earth, in our memory, in our institutions, in our genes, in our words, in our books, in our dreams, in our hearts, in our prayers, or in our thoughts."[69]

Central to this mourning process is burying the dead *in* the land (the return of the human to the humus) and marking that site (with a *sema*, the Greek word for both grave and sign). In contrast, it is the "uninscribable" nature of "gravestones on the sea" that cause "the loved ones of those who sink into its unfathomable grave … [to] suffer a special form of anguish." As Ishmael laments on behalf of widows of sailors lost at sea in *Moby Dick*, "Oh! ye whose dead lie buried beneath the green grass; who standing among flowers can say—here, *here* lies my beloved, ye know not the desolation that broods in hearts like these."[70] In Tōson's story, too, the words of the bereaved father strive to mark the spot even though, or perhaps especially because, it is unknown:

> Yes, yes, *this* restless place of wind and wave; *this* must be the grave of my son! Here my son must be sleeping forever and ever … .
>
> Sō da, sō da, kono namikaze no katatoki mo yasumanai tokoro, koko ga segare no hakaba de arō, koko ni [segare] ga itsumademo nemuru no de arō.[71]

This literary fictional text offers a means of effecting a metaphorical burial of the dead.

The absence of a corpse precludes proper burial and mourning rites. This lasted, in Fujimura's case, for the forty-two days after his suicide. His friend Uozumi lamented in his eulogy that "without his bodily remains" (*ikotsu nashi*) to mourn, his family and friends could only gather together in grief to offer prayers at Kegon Falls. Fujimura was like the undead, subjected to dying over and over again, a "re-death replaying ceaselessly in our minds" (*ware saishi* [再死] *o kaite tomazu*).[72]

This impulse to bury the dead, to fix a burial place, even an imagined one, that might offer the dead and those mourning him respite is perhaps especially pressing in the case of a violent self-death. This desire is not merely an aestheticizing impulse intent on romanticizing suicide but part and parcel of a fundamental mourning process. For those left behind by Fujimura, where he had emplaced himself—both literally and in his literary inscriptions—guided their own placement. If some visions sought to restore him whole atop the precipice living on and thinking his deep philosophical thoughts, others sought refuge in visions of his body peacefully stored at the bottom of the pools forever.

In February 1904, his teacher Sōseki wrote a poem in response to his suicide that reimagines the site as a peaceful grave uniting Fujimura with his unrequited lover beneath the waters:

> "MINASOKO NO KAN" (水底の感, THOUGHTS AT THE WATER'S DEPTHS)
> In the water's depths, the water's depths.
> To dwell in the water's depths.
> Vowing deeply, sinking deeply,
> let us dwell there long, you and I.
> Black hair, long and disheveled.
> Drifts gently, alongside the seaweed.
> In a dream life that is not a dream?
> In a darkness that is not darkness.
> Happy depths of the water.
> For pure ones like us, slander is far off,
> unhappiness does not penetrate.
> With unsettled wavering hearts,
> a shadow of love just faintly visible.
> by Fujimura Misao's girl[73]

Sōseki's poem situates Fujimura's death in the tradition of double love suicides, imagining the lovers blissfully reunited under the waters. Its poetics transform the site from a place of violent self-death into one of peaceful repose. If there is any critique here, it is lodged against those who might "slander" this "pure" couple. The couple themselves are far removed from any such mundane disturbances. This poem creates an intimate cordoned-off space for their own private dialogue.

One way to think of Sōseki's poem is as an intimate dialogue with the dead. But this is not a straight communiqué. Curiously, he chose to sign the poem "Fujimura's girl" and to send this on a postcard with no further explanation to his poet-disciple, Terada Torahiko, who called it a "weird poem" (*kawatta shi*). Although it later became part of Sōseki's published works, at first it was a private communication between two men. In a fascinating article on this topic, Robert Tuck argues that in sending this to his disciple, Sōseki was attempting to reassert homosocial bonds that were threatened by heterosexual desires. In this reading, Sōseki counterintuitively evokes an image of conjugal bliss between Fujimura and "his girl" in the afterlife in order to restore male-male bonds in this one.[74]

The question remains as to what kind of bond Sōseki was asserting, or severing, with Fujimura in creating this poem. Adopting the voice of Fujimura's female lover is a complex move through which he seems to have been renegotiating his own relations with his young pupil in the aftermath of his suicide. The poem suggests a doubled act of ventriloquism. As much as Sōseki is speaking in the voice of the dead female lover to Fujimura, he is also echoing both Fujimura's voice and medium of choice. Sōseki is speaking both *to* and *through* Fujimura here.

In its rhetorical echoes of Fujimura's own last writing, there is a literary reckoning with the dead. Sōseki strategically echoes his pupil's poem by using a similar symmetrical structure. Its middle lines—"In a dream life that is not a dream? / In a darkness that is not darkness"—lean toward a similarly philosophical inquiry, while its title offers the clearest echo with its elevated "thoughts" (*kan*). But the intimate voice of Sōseki's poem is a far cry from Fujimura's lofty monologue. The echoes appear to be as deliberate as the differences.

The biggest difference is that Sōseki points to doomed love as the cause. Invoking the love thesis at all was something of a taboo among Fujimura's supporters, who instead clung to the notion of suicide for philosophy's sake. Sōseki's poem grounds the young man quite literally—bringing him down from his perch and situating him bodily beside his would-be lover in the pools. Rather than any lofty monologue, there is a cozy dialogue between "you and me," "we pure ones." Although this may seem like a put-down, no criticism is evident here and we should not take this too literally. Instead, I would suggest that it points to a metaphorical attempt to effect a burial.

In moving from the precipice to the watery depths, the poem reflects a desire to put Fujimura to rest. As discussed above, this requires the disposal of the body so that the dead might live on in some other register. The opening of Sōseki's poem evokes the physical bodies of the lovers, weighted by their vows and by their bodily heft, sunk to the bottom of the pools, long tangled locks of hair drifting this way and that along with the seaweed. The word Sōseki uses for seaweed—*mokuzu* (藻屑)—evokes not just sea algae but the metaphor of dying in a watery grave. In contrast with these active, visceral bodies that dwell, vow, sink, and even implicitly have erotic entanglements beneath the sea, in the latter half of the poem, any physicality is erased. Only the purest emotions remain, faint shadows of love glimpsed in the happy depths.

If Fujimura's own poem moved from vast metaphysical realms toward an embodied presence standing on the precipice, this one has an opposing movement. The bodies are invoked only to disappear. While Fujimura's poem suspends the speaker on the precipice at a moment of transcendence, Sōseki's releases him to dwell beside his lover in a happy watery grave forevermore.

DIALOGUING WITH THE DEAD IN GRAVEN WORDS AND IMAGES

In the wake of Fujimura's suicide, his family and friends, too, sought to put him to rest in his chosen site. In early June, before there was a body to bury, two hundred friends and family gathered at the precipice to conduct a memorial ritual to placate his restless spirit. *Yomiuri shinbun* announced the plan and explained that its impetus stemmed from their "inability, no matter how they searched, to discover the corpse of the world-weary youth Fujimura Misao that was either sunk

in the depth of the waterfall basin or stuck beneath the tumultuous currents." The uncomfortable specter of his absent presence at the site required this "ritual to beckon the spirit" (*tamashii o manegi saiten*). Uozumi's eulogy, delivered there atop the precipice, opened by addressing the dead directly: "Aah, out of feeling such sorrow that you have passed and without your bodily remains [*ikotsu nashi*], your family and old friends can only offer a memorial service to your spirit in the distant heavens above."[75]

Once the body was recovered, his uncle pressed to have Fujimura buried near Kegon Falls, but his mother insisted his remains be interred in the family grave at Aoyama Cemetery in Tokyo. In lieu of his grave, a memorial stone was to be installed at the head of the falls that reads:

> O, here stands the monument to Fujimura Misao.
> From an early age, you bore resentment over life's incomprehensibility, and on May 22, 1903, you threw yourself into Nikkō Kegon Falls and ended your life.
> At the final moment before casting yourself from the large tree beside the precipice, you handwrote a last note.
> These words are carved on front of this stone.
> At that time, you were eighteen years old, in your first year in the humanities at First Higher School.
> Upon hearing of your death and unable to bear the pain, over 200 people gathered here working together to build this monument to express our grief.

The memorial stands as an expression of collective grief. The speaker cries out in pain, both his own and that of his fellow mourners, as well as Fujimura's, but strives to put this anguish to rest with the words on the stone.

These graven words and images achieve a formidable rhetorical feat. They offer relief in relief. Rhetorically, this is accomplished by the use of a slippery and sliding narrative voice and perspective. Again, there is a near verbatim citation of Fujimura's own final words. The eminently quotable soundbite from his poem explains the cause: "resentment over the incomprehensibility of life" (*jinsei fukakai no urami o idaki*). But here, the words are speaking *for*, *about*, and *to* the dead, even slipping from third to second person address. Factual information about Fujimura—his age, school, date of suicide, and so on—is interspersed with raw emotion. The inscription asserts his loved ones' physical and emotional proximity to the dead, who is addressed directly with the affectionate "kimi" or tagged with the familiar "-kun:" over two hundred people gather *here* in grief having heard of *your* death.

The intended audience for this memorial is both Fujimura himself and his immediate kith and kin, although it also encompasses the sightseers who will visit in years to come. In a July 1903 article, Fujimura's friend Uozumi revealed its uneasy status as both memorial and tourist attraction quite plainly, writing, "We plan to build a memorial stone not far from this precipice with these words carved

in stone for the peaceful repose of your soul. Tourists who come to enjoy Nikkō in the future will have one additional thing they should see."[76]

In fact, the memorial is not located at the falls. It instead resides at the Fujimura family plot at Aoyama Cemetery, where it was installed in January 1909 after the nearby Shinto shrine that owned the land near Kegon Falls denied permission.[77] The misleading wording that situates it atop the precipice appears to be the result of poor timing. Nonetheless, it is suggestive of the ways that memorials strive to link the dead to the site of their death, as well as to wed the living to those people and places. The dead remain a stubborn long-lived presence in our midst.

Today, most traces of Fujimura's suicide have been eliminated from Kegon Falls. Just two signs of his death remain, and they, too, reveal coexisting impulses to memorialize and to commercialize the dead. The first is a remake of the original postcard of Fujimura superimposed next to the falls and another of his poem "Thoughts at the Precipice." The passage of time has necessitated the addition of a libretto and kana readings for today's less literate readers. A bilingual Nikkō guidebook sold at the falls explains in greater depth the story of Fujimura's leap and how it led to the waterfall's enduring fame as a suicide spot with over 100 attempts per year.[78]

The second remaining trace is a Buddhist statue dedicated to all those who died at Kegon Falls. After the collapse of the original teahouse from a landslide in the mid-1920s, another company installed an elevator that now takes tourists to outdoor concrete platforms located across the basin. There, a small shop sells the usual souvenirs alongside the postcards and tourist guides. In the tunnel that takes visitors to the falls stands a small Buddhist statue with an inscription that reads:

> Here I dedicate this statue in prayer for the repose of the great many souls who have fallen as dew from the precipice of Kegon Falls.
>
> September 1966 Donor Chiaki Yasushi

Visitors can no longer ascend to the precipice. Once they emerge from the tunnel, they are left to take refuge in the distant panoramic view and in comforting natural metaphors of falling dew. Gazing at the falls from the safety of distanced observation decks, we are a long way from Fujimura's own poem and perspective.

PART ONE

Mapping Suicide

Jisatsu Meisho, *the Poetic Places of Suicide*

IN A MAY 1907 CARTOON TITLED "SEKAI-TEKI JISATSU" (Worldly suicide; fig. 4), a Japanese man in a three-piece Western suit leaps down into a crowd of six consternated onlookers. Each man wears a headband identifying them by the locale at which they committed suicide—"Nai" written in katakana shorthand for Niagara Falls on the newcomer's headband, the others labeled "Kegon," "Nachi" for Nachi Falls in Wakayama Prefecture, "Aso" for Mt. Aso, and so on. The text reads:

> There appears to have been a Japanese who jumped into Niagara. To put it nicely, how very international. His forefather Fujimura Misao pales in comparison down in Hades. One has to wonder if some Japanese won't leap into the volcano at Vesuvius looking to receive a laurel crown from Enma [the Buddhist king of hell].[1]

In the print, Fujimura sits in the foreground wearing an old-fashioned *yukata* and *hakama* with his hand to his head and his brow furrowed in apparent chagrin as he receives yet another western-clad newcomer to their illustrious, and increasingly crowded, group.

This cartoon illustrates the ways that Fujimura at Kegon quickly came to be thought of as the first in a long line of suicides that themselves were markers of Japan's "worldliness," as its title suggested. Famed suicides at famed sites were linked together as indicators of Japan's shifting international standing as a modernizing, westernizing nation. Whether suicide marked the nation as desirably (or undesirably) modern or traditional, as Western, universal, or uniquely Japanese, depended on your political perspective and on which kinds of suicides were making your list.

FIGURE 4. Fujimura the forefather, in Hades receiving followers from other famed suicide sites (*jisatsu meisho*). "Sekai-teki jisatsu," *Tokyo Hāpii* 2, no. 9 (May 15, 1907): n.p. Courtesy Kyoto Seika University International Manga Research Center/Kyoto International Manga Museum.

If this cartoon identifies Fujimura as "the forefather" (*senzo*, 先祖), the first to script a new mode of modern Japanese suicide that was perceived to be the exclusive purview of modern men, it also suggests how that script quickly ran away from its author. This was true in two senses. First, as discussed in the previous chapter, even if the highbrow philosophical interpretation of Fujimura's suicide has become the shorthand by which we know it today, the interpretations of it—both then and now—were never so monolithic. Fujimura clearly started

something, but he could not control its aftermath, notwithstanding the highly directed reading he provided in the form of his lofty poem inscribed onsite. Instead, in the wake of his death, multiple texts and traces surfaced that opened up alternative discourses operating at significantly less lofty registers.

Second, Fujimura came to occupy a crowded field with unanticipated bedfellows. His twinned acts of self-writing and self-death in this spectacular location spurred many others at this site, and still more at a linked chain of other sites. It offered a long-lived precedent for the enactment and reception of suicide in modern Japan. One that could be repeated or repudiated but that endured as a touchstone against which subsequent suicides could be singled out for praise or condemnation.

Looking back in 1949, Yamana Shōtarō, an *Asahi shinbun* journalist who was one of the earliest, most prolific writers on suicide in Japan, credited Fujimura's philosophical leap at Kegon with "opening up a new chapter in the history of modern suicide in our nation."[2] That chapter could take our story in two different directions. One genealogy places Fujimura at the head of a list of highbrow literati suicides that stretch from poet Kitamura Tōkoku (1868–94) to literary critic Etō Jun (1932–99). The other is a long line of famed suicide sites that stretch from Kegon at the turn of the century to the so-called suicide forest of Aokigahara today.

In what follows in part 1, I first take this latter path to trace a genealogy of these famed suicide sites (*jisatsu meisho*, 自殺名所). Organizing this first section by place has several advantages. Most importantly, it enables me to capture otherwise untraceable suicides that we would miss if we examined only highbrow literary culture. As we saw above, certain kinds of suicides committed by certain individuals (and for certain reasons) often did not merit inclusion in this illustrious genealogy. In many, no single writing like "Thoughts at the Precipice" and no singular individual like Fujimura Misao stands at the fore. Instead, place becomes the central protagonist rather than the person. Paradoxically, this approach brings to light a diverse mix of people and genres that might otherwise be forgotten.

The other key advantage is that a place-focused inquiry enables a longer look at a series of discrete locales that transformed over time. By virtue of their shared choice of location, these individuals were asserting a link with those who came before them. Often, there was a clear sense of following a preexisting script that was sometimes quite recent or that sometimes harkened back to premodern tropes. Just as often, however, there was an awareness of inserting oneself into a tradition while tweaking that precedent ever so slightly or upending it entirely. In either case, once a site became a *jisatsu meisho*, it was impossible to claim no relationship at all to the prior script.

The term *jisatsu meisho* requires a bit more explanation before we turn to these case studies. In English, a "suicide site" or "hotspot"—for example, Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, Beachy Head Cliffs in East Sussex, England, or the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge in China—is defined as "a specific site, usually in

a public location, used frequently as a location for suicide, which has easy access, and gains a reputation and media attention as a place for suicide."[3] As this definition suggests, equally important is access to that place in reality and through representations of it in the media. The Japanese term *jisatsu meisho* more explicitly suggests the key role that representations—and poetic ones at that—have in constituting these sites.

Meisho (名所) are place-names in classical Japanese poetry that refer to a specific geographic locale while simultaneously calling up a host of poetic associations and allusions. The seventeenth-century scholar Keichū explained in more poetic terms:

> When there is a place-name in a Japanese poem, it does for that poem what a pillow does for us in sleep. When we rest on a pillow, we have lavish dreams. When we refer to famous places, we make fine poems. Is this not why we call them "*utamakura*" [poem pillows]?[4]

The poetic associations are so embedded in a *meisho* that even if you travel there and do not actually see the conventional imagery, in a sense, you do. Or at least you compose poetry as if you had witnessed it firsthand; as one early poet put it, "As for Yoshino and Shiga, one composes as if the cherry trees are in bloom even after they have scattered."[5] Once a place became famed for a certain something—be it a blooming cherry tree or a spectacular suicidal leap—the associations endured in a literal and a literary sense.

Jisatsu meisho are generally sites of great natural beauty conducive to imagining or enacting suicide in a setting worthy of the term's resonance with classical Japanese poetry. They include spectacular waterfalls like Kegon, active volcanoes, seaside cliffs, and dense lush forests. But with suicide as the attraction, the poetics are complicated even at such scenic sites. As the oxymoron suggests, the visceral physical act of "self-killing" (*jisatsu*) collides with the poetics of a place (*meisho*).

For critics, poeticizing self-death at these sites is precisely the problem. In their 2017 guidelines (also translated into Japanese), the World Health Organization advocates: "Particular care should be taken by media professionals not to promote such locations as suicide sites, by, for instance, using sensationalist language to describe them or overplaying the number of incidents occurring at that location."[6] Even the term *jisatsu meisho* itself has been deemed problematic enough to warrant self-censorship. While the phrase appeared in early 2007 Japanese policy documents that outline the government's Strategy for Suicide, by the 2012 revised version, the term is conspicuously absent. Instead, it appears strategically retranslated as *jisatsu no tahatsu basho*, or "locales where there is a high incidence of suicide."[7] This cumbersome and decidedly unpoetic retranslation suggests the perceived importance of controlling representations.

Below, I begin with two case studies that, like Kegon Falls, represent the more aesthetic and aestheticized sites of great natural beauty. The first, the subject of

chapter 2, is Mount Mihara on the island of Ōshima. Mihara became a hotspot in the mid-1930s after a woman in her early twenties leapt into the active volcano crater in a sensationalized "same-sex double love suicide" (*dōsei shinjū*). My second in-depth case study in chapter 4 centers on Aokigahara Jukai forest, currently listed as the top suicide site in the world and a hotbed for debates over how to control the enactment and representation of suicide in contemporary Japan.

For each of these sites, my primary interest lies in considering the ways that acts of writing and reading were key to the establishment and sometimes also to the dissolution of a famed suicide site. As we saw above, for Kegon Falls, the poetic inscription of suicide onto the landscape was quite literal, a poem etched onto a tree. Its erasure was equally literal with the poem subsequently carved out of the bark and the tree later cut down by authorities out of fear of spurring copycat suicides. In the case of Mount Mihara, too, before leaping, the young woman had composed lofty poetry that situated her in this beautiful spot and as part of a classical poetic tradition that stretched back to the earliest extant poetic anthology, the eighth-century *Man'yōshū*. In its aftermath, competing discourses arose in the media that pitted romantic distant visions of lovers disappearing into the volcanic smoke against moralistic and scientific accounts that purported to reveal the ugly reality of the volcano interior and of these sickly "patients of Mount Mihara." Again, a youth wrote poetic works in the face of suicide only to have them rewritten and overwritten by a host competing texts and images that, in this case, came to dominate.

Aokigahara offers a curious reversal of its predecessors because, in this case, an act of reading came first. In 1974, the skeleton of a young woman was discovered in the forest with a copy of a detective novel featuring a female protagonist who plans to commit suicide there. As if a literal embodiment of an *utamakura*, the book served as the young woman's pillow.

In each of these cases, representations of suicide were central to these sites' making, and often to their un-making as well. *Jisatsu meisho* may initially become famous because of suicidal acts committed there, but what ensures their perpetuation is the many ways those acts get inscribed into both the landscape and the literature. Importantly, that literature includes not only highbrow art but also genre fiction, songs, movies, and tabloid journalism. As we have already seen in the case of Kegon and will see more below, even these more aestheticized sites of natural beauty were not always depicted in aesthetically pleasing ways. Instead, they demonstrate the extraordinary variety and range of writings that can mark suicide.

If suicide is not always prettified in these representations, neither are all *jisatsu meisho* pretty. Many stand as ugly symbols of modern life. These include the Tokyo suburban Takashimadaira *danchi* apartment complexes in the late 1970s and the Japan Railways express trains in Tokyo today. As might be imagined, these grittier urban and suburban sites tend to yield little in the way of poetics. There is not nearly as much material available for them, largely because no

single death at these locales managed to attract such fame or notoriety. The kinds of writing they do engender are telling, however. In contrast with the in-depth narratives available for Kegon and Mihara in journalist Yamana's accounts, for example, high-rise suicides from a fifteen-year period (February 1917—December 1932) merit only a chart. No single case stands out from the others; individuals are rendered into statistics (although even here, motive is delineated).[8] In the case of train suicides, even barer-boned lists offer only the number of incidents per station.[9]

To capture how suicide was scripted at these less idyllic sites requires that we shift and widen our focus. In chapter 3, "Suicide Maps and Manuals," I consider three urban and suburban sites where suicide is marked in texts that include maps, tourist guides, graves, and sensationalist how-to suicide manuals. My first example is Inokashira Park on the outskirts of Tokyo, where ethnographer Kon Wajirō created detailed maps with literal X's marking the spots where individuals took their lives over a three-year period in the early 1920s. The second case study is the neighboring town of Mitaka, which now actively promotes tourism based on being the site where author Dazai Osamu lived, died, and is buried after committing a double suicide with his lover in 1948. Literary tourism meets dark tourism here with a literary museum, walking tours, and an annual memorial service that revisit sites of writing and dying alike. My last case in this section centers on the best-selling 1993 *The Complete Manual of Suicide*, which offers four "suicide maps" (*jisatsu mappu*) of famed suicide sites. These run the gamut from the ugly suburban sprawl of the Takashimadaira apartment complex to natural oases including Mount Mihara and Aokigahara, the subjects of chapter 2 and 4, respectively.

In part 1, my analysis often takes more of an above-the-trees approach out of necessity. Materials that might offer a first-person perspective are rarely available. If these case studies cannot always tell us what any individual, much less "a people," felt when visiting a *jisatsu meisho* in reality or in representations, they made (and make) them available for the taking.[10] This more distant lens does have the benefit of shifting our perspective. It enables us to see how the construction of a *jisatsu meisho* was sometimes less of a conscious project undertaken by those who chose to die at a famed suicide site and more of a top-down undertaking by everyone from local mapmakers, city tourist boards, and tabloid journalists to Hollywood filmmakers and YouTubers. In each case, the ethics of writing and reading about suicide come to the fore.

Taken together, these case studies in part 1 offer us a map of sorts. Like any map, it provides a useful overview of the terrain, albeit necessarily imperfect and reductive at times. Each site helps locate the larger phenomenon of scripting suicide in Japan into a series of smaller, more manageable, discrete locales. Each has its own specific topography and boundaries that concretized at a certain point only to eventually dissolve, sometimes for clearly practical reasons—such as the

implementation of physical barriers to entry—and sometimes for less obvious ones, with a site gradually or suddenly losing its cache as a desirable destination. Acts of writing, rewriting, and unwriting were often crucial to their longevity or, alternatively, to their obsolescence. The birth and death of these sites depended on actions taken there by those seeking to die, by those mourning them, and by those seeking to prevent suicide. Crucially, for all parties, these processes also often entailed a discursive deconstruction and reconstruction that was aided and abetted by cultural productions.

2

Mount Mihara's Same-Sex Suicides and Flippant Flips

In many respects, the 1930s suicide boom at Mount Mihara offered a repeat of Kegon. After the suicidal leap of an elite university student into the fiery volcano crater in May 1933, scores of imitators followed, and the site quickly became Japan's newest *jisatsu meisho*. Many of the same elements were present that had ensured the canonization of Fujimura's leap at Kegon: a highly educated, poetry-composing youth from Tokyo had traveled to die at a distant site of great natural beauty. The island volcano offered the similar promise of disappearing one's corpse. And again, what remained in its stead were poems and poetic visions that situated the dead forever at that idyllic site.

Mount Mihara was no Kegon Falls, however, and the poetics were rapidly left behind.

As time went on, the incident failed to conform to this precedent. It was revealed that one of the young women survived, having purchased a two-way ticket and having led another young woman to her death there a month earlier. After being tagged a "same-sex love suicide" (*dōsei shinjū*) with a "death guide" (*michizure shinjū*), media coverage abruptly shifted. Aestheticized visions of the act from a distance gave way to pathologizing diagnoses of evil temptresses who lured virgins to their early death in the bowels of the volcano.

The site soon became associated with a frivolous exhibitionism that compared unfavorably with the more philosophical suicides at Kegon. As one critic complained in April 1933, Mihara suicides "lack the purity of feeling or logic of leapers at Kegon Falls. The cause of suicide in each and every case lacks any specific reason. Instead they are decadently *playing with death*."[1] Unlike the more cultured and spiritual Kegon Religion that afflicted followers of Fujimura, these suffered from Mount Mihara disease (*Miharayama byō*).

The media coverage followed a predictable pattern that is ripe for a critique of its gendered and heterosexist biases. In the wake of this woman's suicide and the revelations about her surviving companion, the two women, and girls' culture more broadly, were subjected to a spate of sensationalist and moralistic discourses in the media ranging from articles with titles like "Dōseiai o sabaku" (In judgment of same-sex love") to "Shojo no shi o kataru zadankai" (A symposium on the death of young girls) sponsored by the women's journal *Fujin sekai* for the national conference of girls' high school principals.[2] This time, the debates would be infused with recent scientific discourses on suicidology, sexology, and even geology. Scientists joined forces with journalists intent on preventing suicide at Mount Mihara to plumb the volcano's depths in an attempt to expose and thereby undermine its sirenic powers.

In what follows, I stress the importance of tracing the aestheticized narratives of this incident as much as these pathologizing ones that came to dominate. The latter are much easier to locate in the surviving traces, if at times they are all too predictable. In an era known for *ero-guro-nansensu*, short for "erotic-grotesque-nonsense," lowbrow materials—often salacious and sordid journalistic and pop culture works—abound. To offer a few representative examples, a short story by popular writer Yoshida Genjirō titled "Yōgan no michi" (Path of lava) was serialized in *Fujin kōron* two months after the incident and included the disingenuous disclaimer that it "was most certainly not a mere titillating novel"; tales of reporters who traveled to Ōshima encountering the ghosts of young girls appeared in a serialized collection titled "Shima musume wa nageku" (Grieving island girls) in *Niroku shinbun* in August 1933; and Gosho Heinosuke directed a film that year called *Shojo yo, sayonara* (Young virgin, sayonara).[3]

The Mihara incident may have lacked a Sōseki writing on its behalf, but for the young woman whose suicide was said to have started it all, the poetics of the site were crucial to making it a desirable place to die. Finding the poetic traces she left behind proves to be its own exercise in recovery, for they quickly got buried in the *ero-guro* noise. But as I hope to show, her self-representations too did not appear in a vacuum but instead tapped into preexisting narratives that offered distant views of besotted virginal girls worshipping at the volcano's "sacred fire." These had been cultivated by island developers in the interest of boosting tourism and propagated in poetry and in pop culture.

The enduring success of all these tie-ups led author Sakaguchi Ango in 1950 to sarcastically note that the young women's suicides offered their own commodity that could be packaged for mass consumption and profit decades later: "The several glorious pioneering schoolgirls are worshipped like gods as the progenitors of suicide at Mount Mihara. Not so much by the masses of suicides who follow in their wake, but for the local islanders. Huge memorial stones standing before countless tea shops declare themselves a resting place for these founders [*shiso*, 始祖]."[4]

These founding mothers were said to have ushered in a new "suicide age" (*jisatsu jidai*) for the 1930s. Ironically, even these declarations of an entirely "new" mode of suicide that was utterly unlike its predecessors suggested repetition as much as difference. As the lines of the popular 1934 song "Onna gokoro" (Woman's heart) put it, Mihara was considered the new Kegon, especially for the fairer sex: "When you're young, the alternative to Kegon is Mihara."[5]

These were the newest members of the circle led by "Fujimura, the forefather." And again, the story could be controlled only so much by its founders after their deaths. I turn now to trace the rapidly shifting contours of this incident and its legacy. At the same time that it would spur antecedents that strayed far from their lofty predecessor, it engendered suicide prevention strategies that tapped into age-old methods dating back centuries while proving perfectly suited to the contemporary *ero-guro* climate.

ŌSHIMA, THE ISLAND OF POETRY AND DEATH

Ōshima's reputation as an "island of poetry" preceded its notoriety as an "island of death" (*shi no shima*), and yet these two aspects were entangled from the start. This image was somewhat inadvertently cultivated by island developers intent on attracting tourists to this closest and largest of eight islands set off the coast of scenic Izu peninsula about seventy-five miles from Tokyo. The island's central attraction is Mount Mihara, an active volcano whose 2,500-foot-high peak offers spectacular panoramic views.

In the late 1920s, Ōshima was first developed, in the words of one developer, as a respite from "the health problems, philosophical conundrums and other various problems afflicting city dwellers these days."[6] This required basic infrastructure like roads and electricity, but alongside such necessities were concerted efforts to cultivate an aura of mystery around the island, especially its virginal girls and sacred volcano. In 1928, ferry service started, as did business at the Sacred Fire Teahouse (Goshinbi chaya); the same year phones were installed saw the arrival of two camels and eleven donkeys to carry tourists across the sands. Photos of the famous *shinpa* theater and film actress Mizutani Yaeko riding a camel silhouetted against the volcano and setting sun sold in huge numbers, as did ones of the emperor at the peak during his visit in May 1929.

Cultural productions helped construct a romanticized vision of the island. In 1928, the steamship company Tōkai Kisen commissioned prominent writers, like journalist Tokutomi Sohō, who published a travel account, I-novelists Tokuda Shūsei and Chikamatsu Shūkō, as well as painters and manga artists. That same year, singers Satō Chiyako and Fujiwara Yoshie performed the hit song "Habu no minato" (The port of Habu). Written back in 1923 by a songwriter who had never visited the island, the lyrics were filled with inaccuracies, such as claims that one can see the sun setting over the water from this southeastern port city and images

of "island maidens living amid the sacred fire" who tearfully bid farewell to lovers at the harbor. Like any *meisho*, poeticizing the site was not necessarily based on any tangible reality, or even on actually having visited it, but instead on a conjured vision of it from afar.

Even works not explicitly set in Ōshima were appropriated retroactively to shore up this image of the island as a romantic site of love and loss. For example, Kawabata Yasunari's 1926 story "Izu no odoriko" ("The Izu Dancer") and its many film adaptations (including the 1933 one also directed by Gosho Heinosuke, who as we will see had something of a reputation for making films about contemporary suicide incidents) are listed in the official timeline for the island's history. Fujimori Seikichi's 1914 debut novel set in Ōshima, was initially titled *Nami* (Waves) but later retitled *Wakaki hi no nayami* (The anguish of youth) in line with contemporary discourses about suicidal youths. Another song, the 1932 hit "Shima no musume" (Island girl), does not specify any island name, but in August 1936, Ōshima officials installed a stone inscribed with lyrics describing a sixteen-year-old girl's lost love, a sailor who perished in a storm, sinking to the bottom of the sea with "the waves as his pillow night after night" (*yogoto yogoto no nami makura*).[7]

The volcano offered the island's central attraction, and it, too, could evoke undying love or, alternatively, dying for love. In promotional articles placed in *Yomiuri shinbun* in January 1932, which offered three thousand lucky readers free trips, photos of camels silhouetted against the peak were accompanied by folk tales and songs celebrating sacrifices to the "sacred fire" (*goshinbi*).[8] In poetry, hot fiery volcanic smoke had long conjured associations with enduring, yet burning love, and therefore with love suicides as well.

> Love burns / like a fire / Its flame never-ending.
>
> *Hi no gotoku / koi wa moete / hono'o no taeyaranu.*[9]

Other volcanoes that became suicide hotspots in the mid-1930s, like Mount Aso and Mount Asama, helped fuel this connection. The eternally burning sacred fire (*moyuru goshinbi*) of Mount Mihara was celebrated as a site where love was lost but also eternal. A hit song of this title ("Moyuru goshinbi") from June 1933 celebrated both in its refrain:

> Longing for love, Mount Mihara / The mountain smoke / forever and ever.
>
> *Koi shi natsukashi Miharayama / yama no kemuri yo / itsumademo.*[10]

This song was the tie-in for the Gosho Heinosuke film about Mount Mihara released that same month—*Shojo yo, sayonara*. The film itself is not extant, although its song lyrics suggest how it tapped into the same images of black-haired island virgins, tearful partings, lost loves, donkey rides, and desert moons that had been propagated by the island developers.

The success of these measures designed to draw in tourists was phenomenal; Ōshima went from around fifty thousand visitors in 1929 to over eighty thousand in 1931 and reached nearly two hundred thousand by 1933.[11] The numbers of suicides in the volcano also peaked during this period; the first reported one occurred in January 1928, while in 1933 alone, 129 people died there and over six hundred attempted. The boom was attributed to one suicide that was particularly sensationalized by the press, one that invited publicity because it was thought to involve same-sex love and foul play among young women.

SAME-SEX SUICIDE AND LITERATURE-LOVING LESBIANS AT MOUNT MIHARA

On February 12, 1933, two second-year university students from Tokyo Jissen Girls' school—Matsumoto Kiyoko (aged twenty-one) and Tomita Masako—ascended Mount Mihara, but only Tomita returned. According to the initial report that appeared two days later in *Tokyo Asahi shinbun*, they had planned a "same-sex love suicide" (*dōsei shinjū*), but one of them was saved by a guard from the nearby Sacred Fire Teahouse. The journalist imaginatively reconstructed their arrival on the island: "As soon as the schoolgirls disembarked from the ferry, the two beauties walked the path up to the billowing white smoke of Mount Mihara," choosing "this great site of natural beauty as their place to die." The next day's edition offered an eyewitness account of Kiyoko's spectacular leap in highly aestheticized terms: according to the teahouse guard, "she leapt wearing a purple silk crepe kimono with the morning sunlight shining in front of her. With her sleeves billowing and shining in the yellowed smoke, she looked exactly like a cicada flying off."

When the Asahi journalist Kinoshita Sōichi got the exclusive scoop in a telegram from the Ōshima news desk the next night, he recalled thinking, "A volcano, a female student, or rather two of them—Wow! [*korya sugoi!*]"[12]

As Gregory Pflugfelder explores in his article "Schoolgirl Intimacy and 'Same-Sex Love,'" journalistic representations of same-sex suicides in the early twentieth century "observed well-established formulae" dating back to Edo-period love suicides. These included attention to clothing and physical beauty as well as aestheticized descriptions of the *michiyuki*-like poetic journey to the death site. Also evident was a more modern inclination to assert a "discursive link between literary tendencies, 'same-sex love,' and death that had become well-entrenched by the 1930s."[13] Indeed, in this first Asahi article reporting on the 1933 incident, a splashy large-font and bolded sub-headline characterized Matsumoto as a "Talented student who graduated from a virtuous girls' high school and **LOVED LITERATURE IMMENSELY**." It noted her penchant for writing both Japanese *tanka* and also *kanshi* in the style of the famed Chinese poet Li Bai, whose penname

she had adopted. When interviewed for the article, her father was careful to point out that although she was an avid reader, he had "warned her against becoming addicted to books [*dokusho no chūdoku*]."[14]

Although the early media coverage honed closely to the established formula for double suicide narratives, the incident itself did not. The two had not jumped in one another's arms in the fashion of *dakiai shinjū* perishing together in the crater. One of the women had not died. Tomita Masako was reportedly restrained from following her friend by the guard installed beside the crater, but she had also, unlike Matsumoto Kiyoko, purchased a round-trip ferry ticket. More suspiciously, it was soon discovered that she had also guided another classmate to her death at Mount Mihara the previous month.

When this was revealed, the tone of the reports shifted abruptly from an image of conjugal bliss in an idyllic setting to one of a bizarre pathological "death guide" (*shide no annai*) who was luring young woman to their deaths in the fiery volcano. This gave rise to speculation about Masako's "abnormal neurology" (*ijō shinkei*) and her demonization as "the girl who invited death" (*shi o sasou musume*), as one headline put it. Even after this revelation, titillating speculation about the sexuality of these schoolgirls persisted. The "bizarre! two-time guide" was hyped in articles that appeared beside headlines that admitted in a confusing and disingenuous mix of font-sizes "**DŌSEIAI** nazo de nai" (**SAME-SEX LOVE** riddle, it is not).[15] The April 1933 *Fujin sekai* special issue titled "In Judgment of Same-Sex Love" drew parallels between female-female love and dying at Mount Mihara or "divorce" (a euphemism for suicide leaps) at Atami, and its advertisements warned that readers "would be astonished by the terrifying evils of same-sex love."[16] Alarmist articles touted the incident as a "warning bell to mothers of the world!" and asked, "The nature of modern female students: What makes these virgins throw their bodies into the volcano of Mount Mihara?"[17]

As this might suggest, the tendency to pathologize suicide was particularly pronounced in women's cases, and all the more so in the case of female-female love suicides. In her article "Dying to Tell: Sexuality and Suicide in Imperial Japan," Jennifer Robertson contrasts the biased coverage of an attempted lesbian double suicide by an all-female revue actress and a beloved fan in 1935 with the media's unabashed celebration of the "pure love" of the young heterosexual couple in the Sakata incident three years earlier.[18]

Writing back in 1949, Yamana Shōtarō noted the divided gendered reception of suicidal leaps into the volcano, with men's coded as "extremely brave" compared to the "mysterious allure" of women's "sacred fire suicides."[19] The not-so-subtle gender politics at work were laid bare in a comment from publishing giant Kikuchi Kan: "In contemporary society, past morals have lost their authority. If even men are at a loss over what to do about this, it's only natural that women are all the more so."[20] Even when choosing self-death, women were depicted as lacking manly volition,

instead "seduced to suicide" (*jisatsu o izanatta*) bedeviled by their beautiful female companions or the mother of all volcanoes, "the beckoning sacred fire."[21]

As Francesca Di Marco's work demonstrates, psychiatric and popular discourses often converged in the early 1930s to pathologize suicide when it failed to conform to the desired heroic mode that could be aligned with national policies. While *shinjū*, Buddhist martyrs, and bushido-inspired seppuku were often exempt from such critiques as expressions of desirable cultural values in an era of increasing ethnocentric nationalism, the Mihara suicide was "a case of female psychological maladjustment and emotional instability."[22] Not only was Masako pathologized as an evil, sick temptress; so, too, was the volcano, whose victims were labeled "the patients [*kanja*] of Mount Mihara."[23]

But it is also important to remember that such pathologizing discourses coexisted beside aestheticizing ones and that these were not mutually exclusive. Author Yoshiya Nobuko divvied her assessment of the incident into two halves that could be neatly assigned to each tendency and, conveniently, to each woman. She asked:

> Does the psychology of the suicidal Kiyoko stem from a long-held deep fascination with death in these times of instability? Is it characteristic of young girls today whose stance toward life is to separate themselves from a reality that gets more and more real every day? Might we venture to say that this is a weak resolution? Masako's psychology, on the other hand, appears a bit abnormal [*chotto abunōmaru*] with some kind of personality disorder [*seikaku no hatansha*]. Kiyoko achieved such a "Man'yō aesthetic suicide" [*Man'yō tanbi jisatsu*] that she seems like an old-fashioned maiden, but a partner like Masako who caused the incident makes for an interesting point of comparison.[24]

In these comments that suggest familiarity with burgeoning psychoanalytical and sexological discourses, Yoshiya exhibited some sympathy for the aesthete Kiyoko while allowing Masako none. Although she is slightly critical of the escapism of young girls like Kiyoko, taking refuge in the lyricism of ancient poetic anthologies like the eighth-century *Man'yōshū* transforms the girl into an old-fashioned maiden (*kofū na musume*) from a long-ago tale.

Female suicide could be pathologized and aestheticized in the very same breath. As we will see in the next sections, Matsumoto's own last writings and final words straddle both these impulses while leaning heavily toward a prettified vision of death from afar. In her choice of locale and her final words that situate her forever there, Matsumoto, too, seems to have taken refuge in the reassuring distant image of the ever burning sacred fire.

SELF-WRITINGS AND SELF-DEATH AT MIHARA

Matsumoto left two suicide notes by the volcano mouth, one to a good friend (who later married her brother) and another to that friend's mother. Both were dated the day of her death. To the mother, she offered the closest thing to an explanation of her motives. She paints a picture of a person in extreme pain seeking release:

> I will kill off the human being that I myself hate the most. I believe that is the absolute best that my other self can do.
>
> Watashi no mottomo kiratte iru watakushi to iu ningen o koroshite shimaimasu, sore ga tahō no watakushi no saizen da to omowarete narimasen.[25]

With her splintered selves here, she anticipates the Freudian-influenced psychoanalytic theories that Karl Menninger famously advanced in his 1938 *Man against Himself*. He diagnosed suicidal individuals as embodying three drives: the wish to kill, the wish to be killed, and the wish to die.[26] Interpreted through this lens, Matsumoto's murderous impulse extends to the one self, who wants to die, while allowing for another self to emerge, or remain, in its stead.

It is hard to know what to make of this trace, which received little to no attention from the press after her suicide. It is filled with raw emotions and simultaneously devoid of emotion. Its detached clinical language defies any poetic reading; even if it points to a rebirth, it is far from the reassuring (and oft-quoted) image of a cicada taking off into the sunshine that had been offered by the teahouse guard. While it points to a deep-seated self-hatred that could reveal a motive of sorts, the source of that feeling remains unremarked. In the absence of a clearly stated motive, as with Fujimura's at Kegon, everything from the mundane to the sacred would be invoked in this death's aftermath.

The fact that Matsumoto had left this note behind for her friend's mother but was motherless herself led friends to speculate that this loss was the root cause, one compounded by the more recent death of her married elder sister the year before.[27] Other possible explanations included a desire to avoid marriage (and the implication of homosexuality), her unhealthy aestheticism and bookish addictions, an unlikeable grandmother, or, alternatively, her lonely life with only a brother and an elderly father to look after her. Such assertions could only remain at the level of speculation. Her traveling companion, Tomita, claimed that the only explanation that Matsumoto offered on the way up the mountain was that "the time for me to go to heaven has come."[28] It was impossible to know her motive given her own failure to articulate one or, perhaps more accurately, her pointed refusal to do so in any of her communications.

Matsumoto's other note to her good friend was signed with only a penname that evoked her somewhat self-effacing association with an "insignificant breeze in the temple halls of Murasaki [Shikibu]." The note itself contained only a famous poem by Ariwara no Narihira (825–80). Even this closest friend gets a privileged (though borrowed) communication in the form of a citation of another's poem:

> As the famed lover Narihira too has already put it,
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | It will be best | *omou koto* |
> | to keep silent | *iwade zo tada ni* |
> | and not say what I think | *yaminu beki* |
> | for there is no other | *ware to hitoshiki* |
> | who shares my feelings. | *hito shinakereba*[29] |

In effect, Matsumoto declares a self-willed silence two times over here. With the use of a penname, the death of its author has been effected even before the pen was taken to paper only to parrot the words of another long-dead author, who himself is said to have left this as a deathbed composition, his second to last.

At first glance, the two textual traces—the self-hating letter and the Narihira poem—that Matsumoto left behind at the volcano mouth seem to be polar opposites. The one echoes the clinical language of psychiatry, while the other draws from traditional poetics. Despite their different registers, both articulate an overwhelming desire for silence and self-erasure, even while marking this desire in writing. By offering textual remains that mark the writer's own prospective absence, they reveal competing impulses for self-destruction and self-preservation.

In these and other final communications, Matsumoto conspicuously avoided narrative explanations for her suicide, instead favoring a fragmented poetics. When setting off to Ōshima, her final parting words to her father, who begged she not do anything to worry her aging parent, were just as enigmatic as her two suicide notes; she said only, "Like a cloud" (*kumo no yō na mono desu*).[30] In the wake of her death, other similarly poetic fragments she left behind would endure, especially those that located her symbolically as an enduring if ephemeral presence in the natural world. If these traces do little to explain her motive, they reveal a great deal about her chosen symbolism. I turn now to consider the nature of these traces and to speculate on their function for both Matsumoto herself and the loved ones she left behind.

POETIC CORPUS AS SUBSTITUTE CORPSE: ETERNAL SMOKE AND IMMORTAL POETRY

After her first trip to Ōshima with a couple dozen friends back in late October 1932, Matsumoto was said to be entranced by the island and especially the billowing volcanic smoke (fig. 5). She composed this poem after her return from that first trip:

Burnt grasses and trees	*yakekusaki*
lined up along	*yōgan no*
the path of lava.	*michi tsuzukitari*
On Mount Mihara	*Mihara no yama ni*
smoke rises and rises.	*kemuri tachitatsu*[31]

In the days before her final trip there, Matsumoto had told her father:

> Think of the smoke rising from Mount Mihara as my mortuary tablet.
>
> Miharayama no kemuri o mitara watakushi no ihai to omotte kudasai.[32]

In both, the immortal smoke offers a consoling image that endures in the face of natural and unnatural death. As we saw above, this symbolism had long been

FIGURE 5. Billowing eternal smoke of Mount Mihara, 1930. Friedrich M. Trautz, *Japan: The Landscape, Architecture, Life of the People* (New York: Westermann, 1930).

crucial to the poetics associated with volcanos in particular. The volcano and its smoke offered a simultaneous promise of ephemerality and immortality.

When bidding her family to think of her as the volcano smoke, Matsumoto denies them the corpse or its memorialization into words on a mortuary stone. In its stead, she offers the natural symbol of smoke rising from the volcano. With her words, she disposes of her bloodied corpse and replaces it with poetic visions of wispy smoke.

Matsumoto had been quite explicit about her own sense that the poetic corpus she left behind was to substitute for her body. To her friends, she had repeatedly declared that she did not want to leave behind her exposed corpse when she died. (Ironically, this was reported in newspaper headlines again with a disingenuously mixed font size that drew the eye to the "**CORPSE** that she detested the idea of exposing.") She had also often claimed, "I would happily die if I could just write one poem that pleased me."[33]

Poetic composition was paramount. Matsumoto had reportedly proposed this return trip to Tomita with the suggestion that they travel not to die but to create beautiful poems inspired by the island's famed camelias. (Other less flattering accounts suggested that Tomita had been blackmailed with the threat of exposing

her role as accomplice in her other classmate's suicide at Mount Mihara the month before.) Curiously, though, rather than creating any of her own new poems during this trip, Matsumoto instead cited classical poets, as we saw above, one by Ariwara no Narihira in her note to her friend and another by Ono no Komachi, which she recited when ascending the volcano peak with Tomita:

Color of the flower	*hana no iro wa*
has already faded away.	*utsuri ni keri na*
While in idle thoughts	*itazura ni*
my life passes vainly by,	*waga mi yo ni furu*
as I watch the long rains fall.	*nagame seshi ma ni*[34]

Again here, she defers her own authorial voice in favor of a poetic citation that this time offers a negative example of what she does *not* want to say. According to Tomita, Matsumoto criticized this poem written when Ono no Komachi was in her late eighties as an "embarrassment for having lived so long" (*ikihaji no uta*).[35] Taken together, these comments suggest that Matsumoto believed her own bodily existence, especially an aged one, was no longer required or desirable if a poetic text or image could live on in its place. Her own choice of poetic imagery—the rising volcano smoke—is telling, for it points to an ephemeral but enduring presence; it goes but stays, too.

Before turning to consider how alarmed moralists tried to counter this imagery with less aestheticized visions of death by volcano, let us briefly compare Matsumoto's poetic choices to Fujimura's. The differences are as revealing as the similarities. Although she did not self-write her death by physically carving it into nature as Fujimura did, she, too, marked her prospective absence on the landscape and in poetry. What is striking is the different temporalities and perspectives. While Fujimura's situates the speaker of the poem at the moment just prior to the leap, Matsumoto fast-forwards to long afterward. Her disembodied voice speaks from a future point in time when her death has already passed and the body is gone, or at least transformed. If Fujimura's poem offers a point-of-view shot of him looking down from the head of the waterfall, with Matsumoto, the view is set further afield both spatially and temporally. A bodyless mourner mourns a bodyless object from afar.

Both views have the power to console. As we saw above in Fujimura's case when his friend Abe balked at the belated discovery of his body, the corpse can threaten to haunt the living. But what consoles are the words and images left behind by the dead and those preserved (and produced) by those left behind. Perhaps those who died in such a way as to ensure that there were no corporeal remains intuited this connection. In offering their final texts as a substitute, they might displace the specter of their dead body with their body of texts—to replace corpse with corpus—whether those writings were lengthy philosophical meditations like Fujimura's or the oblique, poetic fragments left behind by Matsumoto.

In Matsumoto's case, her body was never recovered. A poem and her photo lived on in her place at the family home. On the memorial set up by her father

「左様なら」と一言
遺書を渡し火口へ

「三原山の煙を見たら私の位置と思つて下さい」——この言葉は貴代子が死の家出をする數日前、父市太郎氏と戯れの内に言殘した言葉の言葉だつた、國文科に輝を放いて余りに感傷的な彼女は死體を晒すことをひどく嫌つてゐたらしい、去年春學友二十名余と大島に遊んで三原山の大自然美に觸れた彼女は死元酩の日、親友の富田昌子さんを麻谷區中通りの下宿先に訪ね、かねての口癖である「私の最期を見届けて下さい」と三原山への死の旅を誘つた「私の位置三原山」の語を度々聞かされてゐた昌子は容易に受

やけるとき
淡あのろ
つ…
三原の
かた
け…
ふさ…

FIGURE 6. Matsumoto Kiyoko's poem and photograph, from *butsudan* to national news. *Tokyo Asahi shimbun* (February 15, 1933).

at the household Buddhist altar was her photograph and this final composition written in her own hand:

For whose sake	*yosōwamu*
would I make a show of it?	*kokoro mo ima wa*
My heart now	*asa kasumi*
like the morning mist,	*mukau kai nashi*
setting out is futile.	*ta ga tame ni ka wa*[36]

This poem would seem to lack much power to console. The speaker's immobility here offers a strong point of contrast with Matsumoto's other poems that transport her, and us, to the beautiful landscape of Mount Mihara. Rather than as "smoke rising and rising at Mount Mihara," it situates her back in the home where she is being mourned, beside her aging father. Perhaps, though, as Harrison puts it, burial effects a "remaking of the world, as the dead take their 'proper' place in individual and collective memory."[37]

What we might call the afterimage of the dead can take many different forms, from death poems or photos displayed on Buddhist altars and graves or memorials to popular songs, films, and tabloid reporting. What is all too clear, however, is the fact that these afterimages do not always accord with the stated desires of the dead. When one of the Asahi reporters visited her father just moments after he had

found out about her death, he borrowed this last handwritten poem and her photograph to include in the national newspaper. While removing these items from the Buddhist altar, the journalist was reported to have "made a deep respectful bow that seemed to touch the old man's heart."[38] It was not this poem that made the national news, however. The newspaper photo instead featured her earlier poem celebrating the forever rising smoke at Mount Mihara (fig. 6).

Those who die rarely get the last, or even second to last, word on how they will be memorialized or represented.

SUICIDE PREVENTION: DISPLAYING THE DEAD

For the authorities, the words left behind by those who choose to die possessed the fearsome power to attract copycats. Especially if readers were able to situate themselves in the same spaces as its writer in a metaphorical or literal sense. As we saw with Fujimura, anything that placed him or those mourning him near the precipice were forbidden—his poem, the tree, his bodily remains, or even his memorial stone declaring "O! Here stands the monument to Fujimura Misao."

For potential followers at Mihara, it was instead any distanced perspective that worried contemporaries. As the poet Saitō Mokichi put it in an article in *Kokumin shinbun* in May 1933, "People who die at Mount Mihara are unaware of the truly barbaric nature of committing suicide, thinking it mysterious or beautiful. … When they see the volcanic smoke, they think leaping seems heroic."[39] Most worrisome was the distant volcanic smoke celebrated in Matsumoto's own poems and in other cultural productions. The combination of the peak's high visibility and natural beauty combined with the invisibility of the crater's interior offered the potential for an aestheticized distant spectacle, a vision that could take the reassuring form of cicadas taking flight into the sunlight or volcanic smoke rising forever.

With the ostensible aims of countering such perceptions and the not-so-subtle aims of selling a lot of newspapers, *Yomiuri shinbun* embarked on a large-scale investigation in May 1933 that promised "to prevent suicide by revealing the truth of the volcano interior" (fig. 7). The editorial announcing the venture lamented that "'Mount Mihara of the Sacred Fire' has been sadly transformed into the loathsome 'Mount Mihara of Death' due to the *heartless acts* of suicide jumpers who appear day in and day out. Deeply regretting this, our company secretly undertook this operation of greatest importance in the world." The exploration was designed as much to dispel this gloomy image that could harm tourism at Mount Mihara as to dissuade would-be suicides from leaping there. This would be accomplished by a demonstration of scientific rigor "unprecedented even in foreign countries" that would counter any illusions of a certain and aestheticized death in the crater. As Dr. Nakamura from Tokyo University put it, "If the exploration to the crater's bottom succeeds and we expose the pathetic appearance of those who committed suicide, we will put an end to the Mount Mihara patients who are drawn in by the mystery."[40]

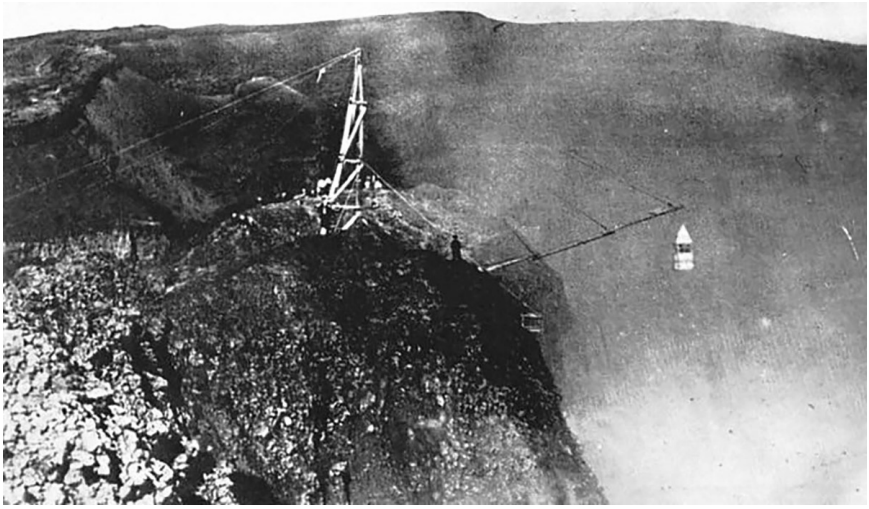

FIGURE 7. *Yomiuri shinbun*'s scientific probe of the volcano, July 1933. *Rekishi shashin* (July 1933), Rekishi Shashin Kai, Wikimedia Commons.

With much fanfare, *Yomiuri* readers could trace every step of the exploration, from the initial descent with a monkey, a pair of rabbits, and six marmots designed to test the effects of lava and gases to the discovery of corpses. The first discovery of a young shopkeeper's body was touted shamelessly in a headline that read, "Found a souvenir! [*Omiyage ga mitsukatta zo!*]," while another salaciously reported, "Corpses everywhere, even a half-naked woman." Only the final article conformed to the stated purpose of the descent: "The sought-after 'death by sacred fire' in reality is all too wretched."[41] Stories of corpses discovered on the ledges, starving there, dying slowly of smoke inhalation, or hitting a ledge early on and having to jump repeatedly in order to die uncovered this reality in all its wretchedness for readers.

Dying by jumping into a volcano seemed to offer assured death and the erasure of the physical body, a death without any messy remains. It is for these reasons that *The Complete Manual of Suicide* (1993) coarsely recommends dying at this outdated but picturesque spot: "Mount Mihara has the advantage that your corpse won't surface. Inside the mouth of the volcano is an unexplored region. Unlike [Aokigahara] Jukai, there are no massive search parties for corpses."[42]

If part of the attraction of dying by volcano was the notion that the body of the dead was no more, then displaying the corpse was the antidote. In a sense, this tactic resembled the Edo period practice of exposing the corpses of love suicides as punishment and disincentive. Left on display under bridges for three days or doubled up with feet and hands tied together, they were bundled into a straw mat and thrown nameless into a common grave. A 1723 shogunal edict deemed, "When a man and a woman have committed suicide for love, their bodies shall

be left unburied. If one of them survives, he shall be treated as a murderer. If both survive, they shall be put in the pillory for three days and reduced to the rank of beggars. It is strictly forbidden to write down and circulate, or act out, accounts of such deeds. Offenders will be prosecuted."[43]

At the time of the Mihara suicides, too, many professed that the media should self-censor representations of these self-deaths even while they endorsed the *Yomiuri* campaign to unearth the dead in all their gore. The campaign offered the perfect synergy of old and new suicide prevention tactics. Its roots could be traced back centuries to shogunal law while reflecting the much-touted "scientific" (*kagaku-teki*) spirit of the age and suiting the demands of *ero-guro* journalism.

Underpinning this campaign is a presumed relationship between corpses and texts. Romanticized perceptions of death encountered in aestheticized texts were thought to be countered only by facing the bodily remains of the dead, if not in reality then at least in prose or photos. This may seem paradoxical, but it makes sense when we recall the point that the burial of the dead and disposal of the physical body is what enables them to live on in the realm of representation.

TWEAKING THE SCRIPT

Unsurprisingly, the *Yomiuri* campaign was not successful in stemming the tide of suicides at Mount Mihara. Just days after the exploration concluded, as one headline put it, "The Sacred Fire, again, swallows another youth."[44] Despite the press hype over female-female love suicides and a crisis surrounding suicidal schoolgirls in the wake of Matsumoto's death, those who followed did not always share her same demographic. Newspaper reports from June and July of that year indicate that they also included males of all ages, family suicides, hetero- and same-sex-love suicides, ex-convicts, and runaway youths.[45]

Nor did these suicides neatly conform to any romanticized script. Those seeking to die at Mount Mihara may have chosen a location infused with romantic images of sacred fires and virginal maidens, but their mode of dying there—both their final words and their leaps—often conveyed a distinct sense of ironic detachment from any such prettified narratives. The leaps of many were performed in front of witnesses, either close friends so-called death guides or random passersby whom they enlisted unwillingly. They did not hike up in the dead of night to die without anyone knowing it. Far from it. Some chose flashy jumps, running leaps, or swan-like dives in daylight before the eyes of willing or unwilling spectators. One ninety-one-year-old man, who was restrained from jumping in 1934, reported that he was hoping to get the record for the oldest leaper.[46]

Most seem to have offered only terse and laconic farewells just before leaping: Matsumoto merely said, "My regards to everyone in the group" (*Gurūpu no minasan ni yoroshiku*); one young woman's final words were "Many thanks for your trouble" (*Gokurō deshita*) to a shopkeeper who tried to save her; a man bid

"Sayōnara everyone" to the sightseers milling about, while another apologized for going first (*Osaki ni sumimasen*); four young men who met by happenstance at the crater's edge took turns one by one, alternating "First me" (*Kondo wa ore*), "Next is me" (*Tsugi wa ore da*)"; and another, whom the teahouse guard tried to stop by calling out "Hello, hellooo" (*Moshi moshi*), responded only with "You gotta be kidding me. Buzz off [*Fuzakeru na*]".[47]

The casual and public nature of many suicides at Mount Mihara led Yamana Shōtarō to reflect that "the era of the single suicide has passed." He claimed that quiet, solitary suicides committed in locales like Kegon Falls following the Greco-Roman tradition were no more, or at least were no longer notable. If Fujimura's typified the Meiji period, Mount Mihara's, he claimed, reflected the 1920s and 1930s exhibitionism and voyeurism characteristic of *ero-guro* journalism and I-novelists who exposed their deepest flaws for all to see. With suicides now occurring at tourist destinations, on city streets, and on railroads, "openness," "playfulness," and "groupism" reign. "In the past," wrote Yamana, "suicides were committed in ways not to attract people's attention since it was regarded as a crime [*zaiaku*]. But nowadays, Mihara patients leap amid tourists in broad daylight."[48]

We should be wary of making sweeping generalizations about any era's suicides or the ways they are scripted. Exceptions (and omissions) abound that make any such attempts to neatly periodize suicides certain to fail. There is also a risk of flattening the diversity of any one era or locale. Some ascended Mount Mihara with a "death guide," like the first young woman who was accompanied by Tomita but in the end bid her on her way and chose to die without a witness present.[49] Those who imitated Fujimura and died "alone" at Kegon Falls cannot be said to really be dying solo since it meant joining, at least symbolically, a long line of priors. And as we saw above from the excoriating remarks made by his contemporaries, not all Meiji individuals endorsed or employed Fujimura's mode of self-writing or self-killing.

Moreover, as we will see below in part 2 on suicide notes, many examples from this era do not conform to the laconic notes, cheeky parting words, or spectacular public leaps for which Mihara became so famous. In fact, even the first recorded suicide at Mihara resembles Fujimura's more than any of its successors. In 1928, a twenty-seven-year-old man from the Tokyo suburbs ascended the mountain and carved into the branch of a cherry tree a brief notice marking "the journey of no return" (不帰の旅立標) besides his name and date. Into the dirt, he scratched out this message: "Life is difficult, death easy———I choose to die."[50]

What remains most striking about the Mihara examples is a seeming refusal to tap into any one designated script, whether ones featuring a romantic vision of besotted island girls and sailor boys lost at sea, images of conjugal bliss and love suicides in the fiery crater, abnormal temptresses who lead victims to their deaths unaware, or flippant flips taken on a whim. Yamana's above point that suicides and the writings left behind are intimately tied to contemporary literary developments

is worth highlighting, nonetheless. The self-writing of suicide could not help but be influenced by journalistic, literary, and scientific discourses, and vice versa. Not surprisingly, whereas Fujimura's high-minded, philosophical poem was largely conducive to highbrow poetic and literary adaptations, Mihara suicides fueled popular journalism, songs, movies, and even a Ginza department store exhibition of artifacts left behind called "Nights at Mount Mihara."[51]

Notwithstanding the shift in register, moralistic discourses surrounding suicide and its writing demonstrated considerable continuity. If Fujimura's poem was subjected to overt censorship, or what we might call an un-writing, then at Mihara, concerned parties sought to erase any euphemistic, poetic visions of death with overrepresentations. Pathologizing narratives that exposed the interior reality of the volcano and the psychological interior of "patients of Mihara" strove to undo aestheticizing ones that had been so key to luring tourists and suicides alike to the island from the start.

In the wake of these famed suicides at these famed locales came competing attempts to rewrite, un-write, and overwrite the origin stories that had inscribed suicide into the locale so pervasively in the first place. These rival acts of writing competed to represent the dead for eternity. In the next chapter, I turn to consider less remarked (and less remarkable) urban and suburban suicide sites that nonetheless depended on the many markings left behind.

3

Suicide Maps and Manuals

In the final act of Chikamatsu's 1721 puppet play *Shinjū ten no Amijima* (*The Love Suicide at Amijima*), the doomed lovers Jihei and Koharu walk aimlessly over bridge after bridge in old Osaka seeking a place to commit suicide. In frustration, Jihei remarks, "No matter how far we walk, there'll never be a spot marked 'For Suicides.' Let us kill ourselves here." For the play's audience, however, the final destination is definitively marked both in the title and in the penultimate lines of the play that clearly mark the spot: "They have come now to Amijima, to the Daichō Temple. The overflowing sluice gate of a little stream beside a bamboo thicket will be their place of death."[1]

As with his earlier 1703 love suicide play set (and titled) "… at Sonezaki," Chikamatsu's locales were dictated by real-life suicides reported in the broadsheets. In the hopes of being memorialized themselves, young couples were said to be imitating the drama played out onstage in such great numbers that authorities subsequently banned both fictionalized depictions of love suicides and criminalized the act by punishing the dead with the desecration of their corpse. While one strategy tackled the problem by disallowing any textual reproductions that would mark the event, the other sought to mark the corpse.

As we have seen, there were many possible ways to mark a suicide. If it was sometimes poetic, it was sometimes more literal, as we have seen was the case with the "sign" (標) marking "the journey of no return" carved into a cherry tree branch at Mount Mihara by one man in 1928. After Fujimura, it was as if a sign did, in fact, point the way to Kegon Falls, or as a character from Tayama Katai's 1917 story put it, "This is *the* place to come to die."[2] Satirizing this notion, one manga artist depicted a death god beckoning travelers next to a sign pointing one way to Kegon

and the other to its new rival, Shiobara, a locale made famous in March 1908 after the double suicide attempt between author Morita Sōhei and his student (and later feminist activist-critic) Hiratsuka Raichō.[3]

In this chapter, I consider these more literal signs, including maps, tourist guides, gravestones, and suicide manuals. As we will see, even the flatter, more factual markings among these—sometimes literal X's that mark the spot—entail ethical responsibilities for writers and readers alike.

INOKASHIRA PARK: KON WAJIRŌ'S SUICIDE DISTRIBUTION MAP

My first example is a scholar's attempt to map the more traceless and anonymous suicides that occurred in a suburban Tokyo neighborhood. This was undertaken by ethnographer Kon Wajirō, who lived near Inokashira Park in the mid-1920s. If not for Kon's maps, park visitors would likely never know that it was once the site of many a suicide. In fact, I myself was utterly unaware when living in this area—just blocks from the park in neighboring Mitaka—while doing dissertation research in 2001. I routinely ran the trail around the park, admiring the lake, boaters, and the many picnickers under the cherry trees that line its banks. I never knew, or even considered, this locale as a suicide site. Only while researching this book over a decade later did I discover Kon's detailed map.[4] On a research trip in June 2017, I spent a long day orienting and reorienting myself, struggling with print map in hand and attempting to decipher its handwritten inscriptions while walking around the lake with a newfound vision of what the place contained.

Kon's "Inokashira Park suicide distribution map" (Inokashira kōen jisatsusha bunpuzu) marks out eight locations in the park where suicides occurred when Kon was living nearby, having taken refuge in this sleepy suburb after the Great Kantō earthquake of September 1923 (fig. 8). Each numbered spot is marked by a crudely drawn stick figure beside short descriptions jotted down in terse language resembling a police blotter: "⑥ 1926.3.23: a.m. discovery, hanging on a single cedar tree. Apparent craftsman, kimono, stiff sash, hung by loincloth. Shikishima [culture matches] in pockets (half-filled)." Some entries are more elaborate, such as this one from the day of Emperor Taishō's funeral service: "⑧ 1927.2.7. Discovery on morning of the Imperial Funeral, apparently had come at night after ground froze, 32 or 33 years, male, appearance of a clerk, matching serge *haori*, sturdy body, hanging, loincloth tied between two cedar trees, a newly purchased white cotton cloth placed over the loincloth. –9 sen in pocket, complaints from the villagers because he used as a footstool some logs that had been set aside for use during the next day's Imperial funeral procession" (253).

In May 1927, Kon wrote an essay to accompany the map that he had cobbled together over the years, "the paper gradually getting older and yellower with use until [he] moved from the area and gave up on the project" (252). In it, he offers

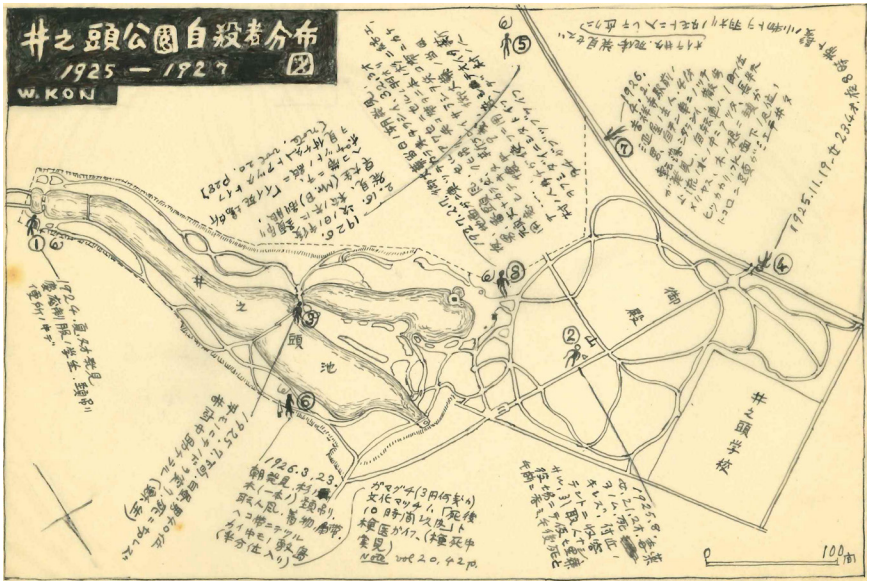

FIGURE 8. Kon Wajirō's "Inokashira Park suicide distribution map, 1925–1927" ("Inokashira-kōen jisatsusha bunpuzu, 1925–1927"). Courtesy Kogakuin University.

a more elaborate narrative description of each incident while retaining the same flat factual tone. For example, the above entry opens: "(No. 8) 1927 February 7: The park had been peaceful for a while but on the morning of the Imperial funeral I got word that 'There's been one! [*Aru!*]' –A hanging on a cedar tree behind Daiseiji Temple" (258). For another, he reveals in the same neutral tone that he knew the person who had died, a "Waseda student in uniform who hung himself on a pine tree in a withered forest on the park outskirts and whose body was found the following day with a note in his pocket reading, 'I found a good place to die' [いい死場所ヲ見ツケタ]" (255).

In a companion essay that he published alongside this one in his 1930 *Modernologio: Kōgengaku*, Kon included a similarly hand-drawn map of "Inokashira Park spring picnickers" (Inogasira-Kōen no picnic no mure).[5] In this one, numbered markers indicate where families ate hardboiled eggs on a park bench, where a middle-aged man read a Bible, and where young couples gazed at the lake, while the other depicts spots where individuals hung, drowned, and poisoned themselves. The former captures a precise moment in time, a sunny Sunday, April 18, 1926, at 3:10 p.m., when Kon and his collaborator, Yoshida Kenkichi, divvied up the park and sketched out the forty-odd groups they sighted over a five-minute period. The latter records eight suicide attempts that Kon either heard about secondhand or witnessed firsthand between the summer of 1924 and winter 1927.

There is something perverse in Kon's juxtaposition of picnics and suicides. It begs the question: What might have impelled him to capture these in twin mapping exercises? And what is a reader to do with these overhead maps that record these ephemera from a bird's-eye view?

Evident in both projects is Kon's signature method of cataloguing people in public spaces, a methodology based in the new field of urban ethnography that he dubbed modernologio. Like his famed diagrams capturing the demographics of passersby strolling down Ginza streets in early summer of 1925, in his suicide distribution map, too, he is similarly attentive to the person's gender, age, clothing, and occupation.[6] What they wore and what they carried on their person get special attention, as does their chosen method, timing, and location, each of which he carefully notes both in his essay and in shorthand on the map. (Only for females does he note their marital status, in both cases, a young "wife" [*fujin*].) At the end of the essay, he lamented his lack of sufficient data on these "outdoor suicides" (*yagai jisatsu*). Given more, Kon might have created one of his signature graphic representations. Based on the data he did have, perhaps a sketch of a body whose parts were proportionally split by clothing type (63 percent kimono and 25 percent school uniforms); gender (75 percent male and 25 percent female); or by method (half hanging, one-quarter drowning, and an eighth each for poisoning and stabbing). Suicides committed in public places were an observable phenomenon and, like any other, subject to his scientific gaze.

For someone who was interested in capturing "the moving present" (*ugoki tsutsu aru*), suicide offered an especially attractive, if slippery, prospect.[7] As he pointedly notes, he began this project in the aftermath of the devastation wrought by the 1923 Kantō earthquake. Kon's suicide map also offered a means of preservation in the face of (self-)destruction.

In many ways, his record resembles the kind of suicide data collected by the Japanese government since the early 1880s—a list of suicides by age, month, gender, and method. Importantly, though, these official records also catalogue "suicide motive" (*jisatsusha in'yu*), or, as the bilingual French translation designed to facilitate overseas distribution puts it, "*Suicides par motifs présumés*." Beginning in 1882, motive was parsed into thirteen distinct reasons ranging from love and remorse to mental alienation and reversals of fortune, and in 1884, motive began being broken down also by gender.[8] Today, annual white papers issued by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare continue to track suicide rates by cause, albeit with now significantly less colorful and more streamlined categories: "Problems at work, home, or school, with health, love, or finances."[9]

Motive (*in'yu*, *gen'in*, or *dōki*) usually heads even the most barebones list. As we saw above, Kegon officials included "Cause: For the sake of philosophical research" alongside an otherwise stark list of Fujimura's name, age, address, and date of death.[10] Another fascinating example from 1971, a comprehensive chart listing literary works featuring suicide that range from premodern

to contemporary times, even attempts to delineate the motives for fictional characters' suicides.[11]

In contrast, motive is conspicuously absent in Kon's work. He displays a marked refusal to psychologize actions, instead relying on his usual method of recording externally apprehensible phenomena. As Miriam Silverberg notes, unlike other ethnographers, Kon "did not concern himself with the consciousness of the urban practitioners. … He did not investigate how choices are considered."[12] Not one of Kon's case studies speculates about the reason behind the deaths. Even when he knew the person who had died, as in the case of the young Waseda student, there is no sense that the individual was his focus, much less their psychology. He may have aspired to capturing the world "as though observed by a divine eye," but godly omniscience is not the point; as he put it in his October 1927 manifesto of sorts for his fellow modernologists, "We harbor neither envy nor sympathy toward the world. … We pay attention to the manners of people today from the same standpoint as one would look at the behavior or customs of animals."[13]

If Kon refuses to individualize or personalize any one death, he also does not aggregate them into sheer numbers. If the latter helps his project from seeming like a callous god's point of view, even more important is the way he refuses to allow the data collector to disappear from the picture.[14]

For each entry, Kon begins by carefully specifying his source, whether it is secondhand or how he came to witness the aftermath of a suicide firsthand. When he describes his penchant for firsthand observation, he exhibits a slight sense of compunction over pursuing such a morbid subject and enlisting the help of neighborhood informants in the process: "A young middle school girl would come running to say, 'Mister, they told me to tell you that there's a hanging at the park right now,' and I would say, 'Thanks,' and happily (?) would leave whatever I was doing aside and take off for the park" (251–52). In another episode, he notes how he had "a reluctant acquaintance [*iyagaru shijin*] guide him straightaway to the spot where he had witnessed an unbelievable hanging [*monosugoi kubitsuri o jikken shita*]" (254–55). In these moments, Kon authenticates his own position as an all-seeing observer while implicating himself as an embedded and embodied spectator. At the same time, he resists any visceral descriptions of the sights, sounds, and smells he might have encountered. It is this combination that saves the project from becoming either dry, flat reportage or a ghoulish rubberneck-worthy spectacle.

Kon's choice of a map to represent these suicides is crucial to treading this fine line. It enables a certain degree of de-individuation by presenting a bird's-eye view of the locale from the safe distance of an overhead shot. This privileging of place over person has its limitations, however. Kon himself admits that his chosen medium falsely delimits boundaries; he notes, for example, that his map's boundary has forced him to omit some suicides that he himself witnessed just outside the perimeter. A map, he suggests, imposes a frame of reference that does not necessarily capture his own personal experience. This tension becomes especially

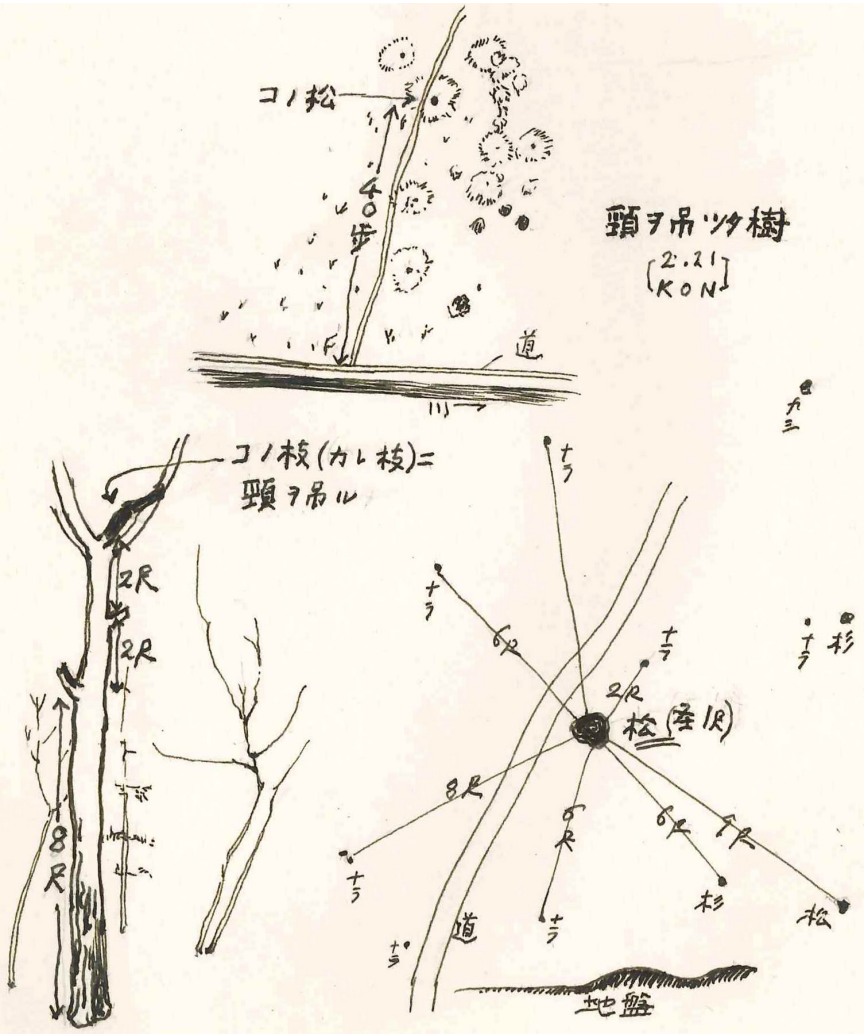

FIGURE 9. The hanging pine tree ("Kubi-tsuri jisatsu no basho"). Courtesy Kogakuin University.

clear in his detailed discussion of the one suicide whom he personally knew, the Waseda student.

For this one, Kon includes three supplementary drawings of the pine tree used by the student to hang himself (fig. 9). In two overhead sketches, Kon carefully marks the distance of the pine tree from the road (forty paces) and from other trees (seven elms, two–six *shaku* away; another pine tree, nine *shaku* apart; two cedars, …). In the third, the perspective changes to that of a walker encountering the tree in the forest. In this close-up view, he marks out the precise heights of its various branches with an arrow pointing at "this branch (a dead branch) for hanging" (257).

In these drawings, maps, and narrative accounts, there is a sense that Kon is self-consciously grappling with the appropriate distance, tone, and form for capturing these self-deaths. His approach wavers between being above the forest and in the trees, quite literally.

What is a reader of Kon's maps and essay, or a picnicking park visitor, to do with these obsessive markings? The map is now available digitized, courtesy of an anonymous netizen on Google Maps.[15] It helpfully (?) pinpoints the precise locales of Kon's hand-drawn markings.

At the very end of the essay, Kon at least offers us a suggestion of how they functioned for him. In a rare display of some emotion, he notes that "the hanging tree has never been cut down and still stands. When I walk the park, it always makes me feel a bit somber, but I can also see, in that very same spot, scenes of young couples shy with one another and families happily opening up their picnic lunches" (258). Here, he offers himself and the reader a rewrite of the scene that lingers in his mind's eye. If his own maps have revealed the haunting invisible specter of suicide at the park, they can also assuage that vision by supplanting it with images of happy picnickers. These otherwise traceless picnics and suicides, lives and deaths, have gained a surprisingly long afterlife through Kon's meticulous acts of mapping.

MITAKA: "THE TOWN WHERE DAZAI OSAMU LIVED"

In 1948, the Tamagawa Canal that runs through Inokashira Park would become famous as the drowning suicide site of author Dazai Osamu (1909–48) and his companion Yamazaki Tomie (1919–48). Like Kon Wajirō, who relocated to these suburbs after the 1923 earthquake, the area offered Dazai a refuge, in this case from 1940s war-torn Tokyo. He lived in neighboring Mitaka for most of his final seven years, died there on June 13, 1948, and now lays buried nearby at Zenrinji Temple.[16]

Neither Inokashira Park nor the city of Mitaka ever became a famed suicide spot on the same scale as Mihara or Kegon Falls, although in November 1949, one of Dazai's literary disciples followed him to the grave; fellow author Tanaka Hidemitsu (1913–49) committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills and cutting his wrists at his mentor's gravesite. Tanaka had anticipated this act in his own fiction and also had left behind a work titled "Sayōnara" in an echo of Dazai's unfinished final work "Guddo-bai" (グッド・バイ, Goodbye). Lest these clues were too subtle, he had inscribed his suicide note onto the tattered cover and title page of an edition of Dazai's complete works.[17] In so doing, Tanaka was taking a page from his mentor's book in more ways than one, imbricating his suicide and death writings with those of Dazai, a writer who himself was well known for scripting suicide.

Dazai repetitively fictionalized his suicidal desires and his multiple attempts. By one scholar's count, no less than eleven characters in just six of Dazai's works commit suicide, and he himself attempted suicide five times. [18] As Alan Wolfe's work has shown, Dazai relentlessly fostered an intertextual reading between

his life, suicide, and writings in a way that frustrates easy interpretations. He ultimately died in such an ambivalent fashion—leaving only a couple of hasty, nearly illegible suicide notes scribbled in his drunken, shaky hand—that many claimed it was tantamount to a murder-suicide plotted by his lover. The open-ended and incomplete nature of his many suicidal texts and attempts have led to unending debates over the degree to which he exerted control over his writings and over his self-death.[19]

Rather than revisiting this debate, here I want to focus on Mitaka and its construction as a Dazai memorial site that commemorates this long-dead author in the places where he lived, wrote, and died. My central question is how a site that is so haunted by self-deaths—not just Dazai's but Yamazaki's and Tanaka's, too—and a site so haunted by self-writings about self-death could be transformed into a desirable literary tourist destination. Predicated on the life, writings, and suicides of this famous author and two of his faithful companions in death, Mitaka would seem to offer an uneasy tourist attraction.

In recent years, Mitaka has become something of a mecca for Dazai fans and for local officials seeking to revitalize a flagging city economy by marking (and marketing) Dazai's sites of self-writing and self-death alike. In 1998, at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of his death, they undertook a conscious project to transform the city into a Dazai memorial. The aim was to revitalize Mitaka as a literary haunt where many celebrated literati formerly lived, including Dazai, who remains perhaps its most infamous denizen.[20] City officials nominally promote tourism in Mitaka as the "town where Dazai Osamu lived" (*Dazai Osamu ga ikita machi*) but are also clearly capitalizing on it as the place where he died and is buried. Coincidence helps link Dazai's birth and death dates since his body (alongside his lover's) was belatedly recovered from the Tamagawa Canal on June 19, 1948, his thirty-ninth birthday. Since 1949, every year on this day, a memorial service called Ōtōki takes place at Zenrinji Temple.

Mitaka is both the setting for many of Dazai's works and the site where Dazai wrote a large portion of them.[21] The entangled nature of these things is evident in the detailed marking system adopted in an illustrated "Dazai map" published by the local Dazai Club (fig. 10). Quotes from Dazai's works (in bubbles) appear alongside the words uttered by Dazai himself (in double-lined bubbles), and the settings for his stories are distinguished from where he wrote stories (marked with cherries).[22]

On this crowded map appear sites of living, writing, dying, burial, and mourning: scenes of Dazai reading to his children appear alongside poignant quotes from his fictional works set in and around Inokashira Park. These include the plaintive cries of his fictional protagonists: "I'm sorry for being born" from *Nijū-seiki no kishu* (Standard-bearer of the twentieth century, 1937) appears beside the spot where he and Yamazaki entered the canal with their lined-up geta sandals marking the spot; beside an empty boat in Inokashira Lake, the bitter words of a sister whose alcoholic brother drowned there assert, "No, it is because my brother died

FIGURE 10. Mapping Dazai's life, death, and writings at Mitaka ("Dazai Mappu"). Mitaka Dazai no Kai, Bunshin Shuppan, 2008. Courtesy Bunshin Shuppan.

that we are now happy" from the final line of "Hanabi" (Fireworks, 1942); and beside the "place where [their] corpses were pulled from the canal" (*itai hikisage basho*), the penultimate line from his 1948 *Ningen shikkaku* (*No Longer Human*): "Another year merely passes by."

Like Kon's twin maps of Inokashira Park picnics and suicides, this one, too, offers an overhead view of a locale pockmarked by moments of people's pleasures and pain. This map's two-dimensional sweetly cartoonish representation of Dazai's life and death offers a safe perch from which readers can get a distant overview.

What happens, though, when we travel to these sites ourselves? When a tourist seeks to retrace Dazai's journey from life to death? Or when we take up the invitation of the Mitaka city website: "Won't you try following in the footsteps left behind by Dazai Osamu in the city of Mitaka?" (*Dazai Osamu ga Mitaka no machi ni nokoshita ashi-ato o tadotte mimasen ka.*)[23]

Walking in his "footsteps" (*ashi-ato*) depends on the traces he left behind both in his life and in his literary works. These physical places, where he lived and visited, died and was buried, are overlaid with the many versions of those places he scripted into his fiction that often imagines protagonists who live and die in those very sites. As we will see, capitalizing on their touristic potential requires selective invocations of this author's body and his body of works.

Monthly walking tours have been offered by the volunteer Mitaka Tour Guide Association since 1999, and in 2008, the Mitaka City Arts Foundation established the Dazai Osamu Literary Salon (Dazai Osamu Bungaku Saron).[24] The salon, housed in the former site of the Isemoto sake bar frequented by Dazai, seeks to revive Dazai and his Mitaka, bringing his literature to life with monthly readings by actors and popular radio and TV announcers and with exhibits that display his original manuscripts alongside historical maps and photos of prewar Mitaka.

Although the salon was initially conceived as a temporary exhibit that would last for just a few years, it became such a popular destination (with about 194,000 visitors as of November 2023) that plans aimed to relocate to larger, more permanent quarters. Pilgrims range from young fans to nano- and octogenarians who treasured this cult author in their youth; on one day I visited the salon on the sixty-ninth anniversary of his death in 2017, both demographics were present, a pair of wheelchair-bound elderly visitors accompanied by their hip, stylishly dressed young caretakers all avidly listening to the docent. A vast collection of Dazai paraphernalia is available for purchase: T-shirts, pencils, postcards, coasters, and hand towels emblazoned with Dazai's silhouetted figure in his signature pose, hand broodingly cupped to chin.[25] One can even pretend to *be* Dazai, donning a cape like his own for a commemorative photo opportunity or drinking in Dazai in the form of latte art at a nearby café. Visitors can sit on a bar stool from Lupin relocated from Dazai's favorite Ginza bar, posing there just as his disciple Tanaka Hidemitsu did for his own author photo.[26]

The tours offered by the volunteer-led Mitaka Tour Guide Association and signposts marking them across town enable visitors to see his favorite unagi shop where he ate and drank, places where he wrote and met with his editors, and other more lurid sites. On the tour, the specter of death is not absent, with stops that include "the lodgings where he became intimate with Yamazaki" and "where the two set out for the Tamagawa Canal on Dazai's last day" (#2), the site where they entered the water (#11), and finally his grave in nearby Zenrinji Temple (#16).[27] Visitors are invited to travel Mitaka through Dazai's eyes, along the highs and the lows of his artistic creativity, drunken revelry, and ultimately his suicide.

FIGURE 11. Plaque at Dazai's suicide site, "man-eating river" turned "tunnel of green." Photo by author.

The two tour sites most explicitly marked by his suicide are the canal entry point and his grave. Both sites involved a companion in death, who situated themselves by his side and who also inscribed their suicides into written texts of their own making. Yet in the end, traces of Yamazaki and Tanaka have been largely erased from the scene. What remains here are the less visceral traces—those marked in literature and those perpetuated in literary tourism—that ensure a long-lived presence for the long-dead author. These reveal the crucial role of literary texts to serve as memorials that enable reader-travelers to navigate these locations of violent self-death.

Near the spot where Dazai and Yamazaki entered the canal, a memorial plaque (fig. 11) features a photo of Dazai seated cross-legged in those very grasses under blooming trees beside this quote from his 1941 short novel *Kojiki gakusei* (*Beggar Student*): "It is around noon in mid-April. When I raise my head and look up, I see the Tamagawa Canal flowing past slow and deep. Cherry trees on the banks of the river have already lost their blooms, their leaves a lush green. Their branches drape down, like a tunnel of green leaves."

By blurring the lines between the Dazai in the photo who visited the spot on a spring day, the Dazai who scripted a similar scene into his fiction, and the Dazai who entered the canal to die one night in June, his life, art, and death are collapsed here. Since we, too, gaze on this same landscape, it also collapses the tourist with Dazai. The grammar of the original, which lacks a specified subject, further encourages

this: "When *I/you* raise *my/your* head and look up" (*atama o agete miru to*). We, like Dazai, are prompted to gaze on the beautiful landscape purged of any marks of death.

The choice of this prettifying quote is even more conspicuous when we consider the alternatives from the very same story. Recounting an accidental 1919 drowning in the canal, Dazai writes "Near this area long ago, there was a kind teacher named Matsumoto Torao who drowned trying to save her pupil. The river is not very wide at all, but it is terribly deep with a powerful current. The locals here fear what they call the 'man-eating river.'"[28]

Although this teacher's memorial stone nearby is also part of the walking tour, any such visceral description is conspicuously absent here at the suicide site. Also absent is any mention of his female companion, Yamazaki, who bore the brunt of public scorn in the immediate aftermath.[29] If the tour marks the location of Dazai's death, it also works doubly hard to erase, or overwrite, those traces by envisioning his death site not as any feared "man-eating river" (*hito-kui gawa*) but as a "tunnel of green" (*aoba no tonneru*).[30]

In retrospect, it is Dazai's own words that help transform the locale from a place of violent death to one of peaceful respite. In his fiction, he even foretold his own final resting place, the gravesite at nearby Zenrinji Temple. In his story "Hanafubuki" (Cherry blossom shower, 1943), he wrote:

> In back of this temple is Mori Ōgai's grave. I had no idea how his grave came to be in these Tokyo suburbs of Mitaka. But this graveyard is tidy, as if it contained a shadow of Ōgai's prose. If my dirty bones could also be buried even in a corner of this neat and tidy graveyard, maybe there would be salvation for me. At least this is the sweet fantasy that I secretly nursed some days, but now those dreams have vanished into thin air. I lack the right qualifications. I have no right to rest in the same graveyard as this fine mustachioed hero who fell from the edge of a veranda after brawling drunkenly with another fellow. *No, someone like you is not the sort who can choose his own gravesite. You oughta know better the limits of your station.* Just one glance of Ōgai's upright black gravestone that day had me rushing back home. (emphasis in original)

This passage led Dazai's widow to install his stone diagonally across from Ōgai's at Zenrinji. Even as he modestly denies the power or rights to do so, Dazai scripts his own burial site.

As we have seen, the biddings of the dead are not, however, always followed. In a suicide note addressed to Dazai's wife, his lover Yamazaki wrote, "Shūji is a weak person so he can't devote himself to both me and you, his honorable wife. Because I love him, I will die together with him. … I ask that even the smallest bit of my bones be buried with him."[31] Instead, when the lovers' bodies were discovered bound together by a red sash to signal their love suicide, Dazai's editor-publisher Nohira Ken'ichi cut the tie, and Yamazaki's body was left behind and only later returned to her family.

Dazai's disciple Tanaka Hidemitsu met a similar fate, notwithstanding his own insistent attempts to imbricate his life, writings, and death with his mentor's. Tanaka foretold his own suicide at his master's grave in a posthumously published short story titled "Rikon" (Wandering spirit). The protagonist plans "to take fifty strong sleeping pills, crawl his way to the grave and cut his left wrist with a disposable razor. When he first thought about how this would be his revenge on Tsushima [Dazai's given name], who had left him behind, and on the women who had mistreated him, he became obsessed with the desire to make it happen, no matter if it meant sacrificing his writing or his life."[32]

In a suicide note inscribed onto the cover of Dazai's collected works, Tanaka claimed to be committing a *junshi* of sorts, loyally following his master to the grave. Identifying himself as a "novelist [*shōsetsu-kaki*] and Dazai's disciple … who chose to die because he has nowhere to go," he also requested to be "buried in Dazai-sensei's grave."[33] Like Yamazaki's, his request was similarly ignored. Instead, he is buried at Aoyama Cemetery, and his reputation—literary and otherwise—only suffers from the inevitable comparisons with his mentor that he himself invited.[34]

If Tanaka and Yamazaki are absented and unmentioned at these locales today, it is the more literary traces of Dazai's literature that are invoked in their, and his, stead. Even Dazai's annual memorial service at Zenrinji is named after one of his stories, as if he posthumously christened it. When starting this in June 1949, his friend and fellow Mitaka author Kon Kan'ichi decided to call it "Ōtōki" (桜桃忌, Mourning cherries) after Dazai's story "Ōtō" (Cherries) published the month before his death. The story follows a despairing and suicidal middle-aged writer named Dazai who goes to a bar to console himself with drink after a spat with his wife. In a drunken haze, he fantasizes about delighting his children by returning home with a wreath of cherries around his neck. In a twist on the stereotypical association of sakura blossoms with youthful kamikaze self-sacrifice, in this story, the ripe young fruit (*sakuranbo*) of the tree symbolize the self-sacrificing parent. In the end, instead of bestowing the fruit on his children, he spits out cherry pit after cherry pit while whispering to himself his mantra that "parents are to be valued over children."

As if following a pointedly revised version of the script laid out in this story, Dazai's memorial services find devout fans decorating his gravestone with plump cherries—alongside cans of beer, sake, cigarettes, and copies of Dazai's books—even today.[35]

With his cherry-laden grave by Ōgai's side or sitting beneath the "tunnel of green" on the canal bank, Dazai's presence endures. In a sense, he haunted these places even before his death, for he is depicted as presciently having imagined a semi-fictionalized version of himself dead and mourned in these locales. Like the fourth-person narrator identified as a core feature of Dazai's metafictional literature, a layered haunting (and hovering) presence remains in Mitaka.

FIGURE 12. Dredging up the dead with an X marking the spot. *Mainichi shinbun*, June 20, 1948. Courtesy the Mainichi Newspapers.

Conspicuously, the site where Dazai's and Yamazaki's bodies were ultimately discovered is not part of the official tour and is unremarked in any way. Contemporary newspapers, however, offered vivid coverage of the love suicide and its aftermath, even including photos of the lovers' bodies at this site. In the pages of the newspaper *Mainichi*, for example, appeared photos of search teams dredging the canal with the help of avid Dazai fans, who searched five hours daily for several days to no avail. In pictures from June 19 when the bodies were retrieved from the canal (fig. 12), crowds of spectators on the banks and bridge gather, and an X marks the spot in the photo for the curious newspaper reader. The article headline reads, "The discovery of Dazai's corpse: Found hugging Miss Tomie" (June 20).[36]

How to mark (or un-mark) sites of self-death continues to provoke debate. In fact, the question remains as to whether to mark these sites at all. Currently, plans to establish a more permanent museum in Inokashira Park have been shelved because of all the negative public feedback. The vast majority objected to the choice of location, questioning the necessity of building it in the park's greenspace. One

citizen called for it to be built instead at "a location that was already surrounded in concrete," while another wondered, "Wouldn't it be better at the former site of the 'man-eating' bridge?"[37]

A couple of critics directly address the appropriateness of erecting a monument to Dazai at all. One claims Dazai's connection to Mitaka to be weak at best and asserts that he "lacks any significant worth—either his individual works or in the scope of literary history." One particularly outspoken blogger points explicitly to Dazai's dissolute life and death as the reason for opposing the plans: "The governing administration should prioritize life above all else, but instead seeks to erect a monument to a spoiled literati who got drunk and then to make matters worse, drank poison with his lover and then leapt into the Tamagawa Canal, which served as the waterway for the 23rd ward at the time. Isn't this a perfect example of the government screwing up their priorities entirely? … In this era of high numbers of children who commit suicide, the folly of lionizing a literary hack who killed himself should be avoided at all costs."[38]

There are clear echoes between critics like these today, and those from over a century ago who excoriated Fujimura and his Kegon Falls death poem that would lure "fools" to that death site. The attempt to locate long-dead authors in the places they wrote and died by their own hand remains fraught.

SUICIDE MAPS AND MANUALS

The final example in this chapter is Tsurumi Wataru's controversial bestselling *Kanzen jisatsu manyuaru: The Complete Manual of Suicide* that offers its readers literal directions guiding them to suicide. With its ratings charts divided by suicidal method—hanging, leaping, gassing, poisoning, and so forth—and four "suicide maps" (*jisatsu mappu*), it aids the would-be suicide in locating the best place to die in the most efficient manner possible, or what is billed as a "verbal suicide device that is more useful than the Bible" (*Seisho yori yaku ni tatsu, kotoba ni yoru jisatsu sochi*).[39] Since its publication in 1993, *The Manual* has sold over 1.2 million copies with over a hundred print runs and has also been labeled a "harmful book" (*yūgai tosho*) in seventeen prefectures to date. It has been widely targeted by PTA groups and politicians who accuse it of "teaching how-to methods and inducing people to commit suicide. Entranced by the book, there is a good chance youths will rush headlong toward suicide."[40]

It provides a script for those looking to die. In 1993, two suicides in Aokigahara Jukai forest left behind a copy of the manual, one with it open to "Suicide Map #1: Jukai." A third man who attempted suicide but survived explained to authorities, "I came because I saw it in the book" (*Hon de mite kita*).[41] As we will see in the next chapter, it is far from the only text accused of aiding and abetting suicides at the infamous "suicide forest." Other glossier seductive representations of the forest abound in fictional stories and films made in Japan and in Hollywood.

For these texts, the key question is how and why readers were led to identify with and imitate fictional characters.

The question raised by Tsurumi's suicide maps is a bit more literal than that. Here I ask, How did these maps in the manual offer readers access to the locale and lead some of them to choose to die there? This may seem obvious. It is a map with directions, after all. "I came because I saw it in the book." Taken at face value, this statement suggests a clear cause-effect, with the text leading its reader to the tangled forest to die. The page opened to a map beside a dead body suggests the same. But can a journey to self-death be so straightforward?

In Tsurumi's presentation, this is precisely how the journey to this final destination is presented. Its series of maps, photos, and prose suggest the rhetorical power of words and images to emplace a reader in a suicidal space. As I argue below, it is this same power that policymakers intent on preventing suicide at these sites seek to curtail through strategic interventions both at the site itself and in the representations of that site from afar.

As noted above, grittier urban suicide sites, like railroads and high-rises, are rarely the subject of the kinds of highbrow aestheticized representations as naturally beautiful locales like Kegon and Mihara. But in Tsurumi's suicide maps, both types appear and in a strikingly parallel manner. Readers access the seductively beautiful forest of Aokigahara and the ugly, hulking *danchi* suburban apartment complex of Takashimadaira alike through a succession of images and text that guides a reader directly to the precipice.

Each suicide map is accompanied by a series of photos that offer multiple viewpoints. Long shots suggest the grandeur of the vista—the eponymous "sea of trees" (*jukai*, 樹海) before towering mountain ranges (71) or the "gigantic apartment complex" (*kyōdai danchi*) stretching across the horizon (95)—while point-of-view shots emplace the viewer at and inside the site.

In the manual, the reader-viewer gradually accesses the site, as if mimicking the steps of a traveler intent on dying there. In the Takashimadaira series, images move from the bird's-eye view of the map and a longshot of the looming *danchi* set against the horizon to the exterior of apartment buildings with iron railings and then to the single unit that lacks suicide prevention barriers. A shot of an inside corridor moves to the final first-person perspective peaking over the railing to the pavement fourteen floors below (95–96). In the Aokigahara series, accompanying narration in the form of a second-person address goads the reader along the path. It begins with the promise that "you will go missing and gradually disappear from people's memories," points out an ideal spot from which to enter the forest so that "your dead body will never be found," and anticipates "your" hesitance and "your" disorientation until finally landing at your destination "further from the mountain road and away from people's eyes. And like this, you will eternally fade away from people's memories" (70–73).

If Tsurumi's visual and verbal depictions emplace the reader in the position of an imminent suicide, suicide prevention strategies take the opposite tack by

implementing physical and psychological barriers that restrict access. Tellingly, they do so with a two-pronged strategy that tackles the act itself and representations of the act at these hotspots. While literal, architectural barriers bar physical access to the site, censoring literary and other representations of the site work at the level of the reader's or viewer's imagination. Both seek to foreclose access.

Takashimadaira offers a compelling example that demonstrates the important role representations have in both the making and the unmaking of a suicide site. Located about thirty minutes northwest of Tokyo, the massive suburban complex of sixty-four high-rise buildings and over ten thousand apartments opened in April 1972. It was christened with the lofty name of "Takashimadaira," (Tall island plains, 高島平), a reflection of the high hopes held for these low-rent, maximum-efficiency units. Within two months, a nonresident committed suicide by leaping from a rooftop, and four more occurred by year's end; in 1973, there were five more suicides, and although the number declined to one or two per year, the numbers exploded in 1977 after a pair of incidents particularly sensationalized in the media.[42] Thereafter, the numbers escalated rapidly: twelve in 1977, fifteen in 1978, eighteen in 1979, peaking at fifty total in 1980–81.

Takashimadaira has since been credited as a model of suicide prevention architecture that was implemented by the Japan Housing Corporation in 1981 at significant cost—700 million yen (approx. $8.5 million today)—to install over eight thousand fences (adorned with decorative flowers and islands) along all higher-floor corridors and stairwells. Roof access was closed, safety nets were installed every dozen floors or so, and patrols and phone help lines were put in place.[43] In large part, these tactics were designed to physically restrict access to the site, especially for those nonresidents who represented 80 percent of the suicides there and were traveling from either nearby Tokyo or as far as two hundred miles away for what some have dubbed a "destination suicide" (*ensei jisatsu*).[44]

The officials also tackled the battle over representing Takashimadaira in the mass media. A PR campaign messaged that it was no longer possible to leap at the housing complex. A suicide prevention strategy report compiled after a four-month study was distributed in pamphlet form with one clear message distilled in its title: "Let's eliminate the nickname 'famed suicide spot' for Takashimadaira" (*'Jisatsu meisho' no yobina o Takashimadaira kara nakusō*).[45]

Such rhetorical repositioning is key, for as many suicide researchers admit, there are often fairly simple ways to get around any physical obstacle.[46] But a 2003 report by a team of Japanese psychiatrists titled "Suicide Prevention and Place/Space" approvingly cites the techniques adopted by Takashimadaira for offering not only physical but also psychological barriers against leaping. What this report suggests is the importance of both tactics to disrupt any fantastical vision of a swift, sure death at a famed suicide site. This can be accomplished either by restricting a distant view of the locale from afar that might lead a suicidal individual to travel there or alternatively, if that fails, by restricting their point of view just before the leap.

As the researchers explain, if the attraction depends on being a "geographically scenic spot that easily tempts suicide, one rich with historical or legendary stories of leaps, or one with dramatic, famous precedents that have been sensationalized in news reports," then the remedy is to unwrite these associations. In line with WHO guidelines, the researchers advocate media self-censorship to reduce "chain reactions" of suicides at these sites. Alternatively, they endorse the opposite tact of an overrepresentation that echoes Edo period tactics: "It is effective to educate the public about the injured state of the corpse after death"—or "the wretched aftermath of the death site strewn with flesh and blood"—for "at the very least, it can counter the popularized aesthetic image of suicide [*ryūkō-teki jisatsu bigaku*]."

For those who nonetheless travel to the site intent on dying, the researchers suggest that onsite barriers can work not just on a "hard level" (*hādo-men*), but also to reorient "a person's visual and mental state when standing on an elevated spot" and enable them to "maintain their stability. … If there are no physical supports to keep from falling or visual indexes that allow one to confirm one's own position, then it produces an extremely unstable mentality."[47] Fences, nets, and signs advocating would-be suicides to "Wait a bit" all offer some barrier that might reorient their position and point of view.

Tsurumi's text conspicuously lacks any such orienting devices. Instead, its images and narrative conspire to produce unimpeded sight lines and indiscriminate access to these suicide sites. In fact, the manual acknowledges any physical and psychological barriers that have been put in place to deter suicide only to readily bypass them. As noted above, the Takashimadaira images move rapidly past apartment buildings with guardrails toward the single one that lacks any impediments for a point-of-view shot of the pavement from fourteen stories above. Likewise, the Aokigahara photos quickly move past signs that are meant to deter suicide with reminders to "value this one life you have" and "cherish the life given to you by your parents" (5, 7) back onto the secluded trails (8) and finally "into the primordial forest" where a caption reassures the reader, "If you have come this far, you are safe."[48]

If it is the suicide maps in the manual with an X marking the spot that guide a reader-traveler to Aokigahara forest, it is the narrative's second-person address and the photographs' first-person perspective that offer an unobstructed vision of self-death. I turn now to consider a series of genre films and fictional texts that offer their own maps of sorts guiding audiences to this most recent, infamous *jisatsu meisho*.

4

Aokigahara Jukai, Sea of Trees

In the 2015 Hollywood film *Sea of Trees*, Matthew McConaughey plays a suicidal American man who googles "a perfect place to die" and immediately discovers his destination: "Aokigahara, The Sea of Trees. The perfect place to die." Two clicks later, he finds statistics reporting that more than a hundred bodies are retrieved there annually and that the most common methods used are hanging and drug overdoses. He shuts the computer as the screen goes black.[1]

This scene is one of the many flashbacks that interrupt the central story of our protagonist's suicidal crisis in Aokigahara forest, where he meets a Japanese salaryman (played by Ken Watanabe) whose own suicidal crisis interrupts and eventually thwarts the protagonist's own attempt. The flashbacks lead us through the men's motives in a series of melodramatic twists and turns, false leads, and impossible coincidences that land the protagonists in the forest together. As the Japanese title suggests, the place is a "forest of memory" (*tsuioku no mori*) where one man, a "quintessential American, a rational scientist who denies the existence of God," transforms thanks to his encounter with this "prototypically Japanese" suicidal salaryman with a spiritual bent.[2] Although the film does, as critics charged, fall into the trope of "Spooky Japanese Thing, But With Caucasians To Root For," in the end, the dynamic is reversed in yet another well-worn trope.[3] The wise Asian mystic reveals to the lost American traveler that Aokigahara forest offers not the perfect place to die but a purgatory of sorts where one can confront the past and even reunite with one's own dead.

The film transports the protagonist to this notorious locale with ease. In the opening scene, planes, trains, and automobile trips are accomplished in mere minutes to bring McConaughey to the site. His journey moves from the virtual to

the actual and ultimately to the spiritual plane. Even beforehand, the spectator is whisked there in the film's opening shots that offer panoramic and overhead views of the eponymous "sea of trees." But neither the protagonist (nor the spectator, naturally) is actually in Aokigahara at any point in time. Although stock footage of its exterior views is used for these overhead shots, *Sea of Trees* was filmed in Worcester, Massachusetts. A ban on filming in the forest since September 2012 ensures that representations of Aokigahara are rarely ever shot inside the forest.

This policy is predicated on a belief that foreclosing access to, and representations of, the forest will translate into reduced access for those seeking to die there.[4] Even fictional reproductions not actually set there are accused of inviting indiscriminate access. It is the less literal version of this paradox that I explore in this chapter. I ask, How do representations of a *jisatsu meisho* transport the character and audience alike to the site and to what end? And conversely, how might texts bar or inhibit entry to this final destination?

In the case of Aokigahara, even well before the notorious 2018 incident when YouTuber Logan Paul posted a vlog of a dead, hanged body of an unidentified man in Aokigahara, representations have been blamed for establishing and propagating its image as the "perfect place to die." As we will see, this is not without reason. Many texts set in Aokigahara seem designed to capitalize on the forest's infamy as the top suicide site in the world.[5]

As a well-known lyrical toponym, the place-name comes with an established mythology and iconography. In English, it is often called the Suicide Forest or Aokigahara, which means "plain of green trees," while in Japanese, its more poetic name is Aokigahara Jukai, or just Jukai (樹海) (sea of trees) (fig. 13). It was named for the dense thickets that formed on this plateau on the northwest side of Mount Fuji after a volcanic eruption in 864 CE. Stories circulate repeatedly of uneven terrain with tangled roots and trees so thick that they block the sky from view and hinder operating a compass; images of winding lengths of tape strung amid the trees indicate paths taken by those who left them like a trail of breadcrumbs that could lead them back to the path if they changed their mind or recovery teams to their bodies if not.

The dominant image of the forest that emerges is a place of no exit, of losing oneself. This is both a literal statement about the disorienting terrain—as the locals warn, "once you enter, there's no getting out"—and a more metaphorical one about the promise offered therein. As *The Complete Manual of Suicide* puts it, the forest "guarantees that you will go missing and disappear from people's memories," offering an eternal rest, undisturbed and undiscovered.[6] Dr. Takahashi Yoshitomo, a psychiatrist who investigated suicides and attempts in the forest back in the mid-1980s, found that this location was chosen out of a "desire only for a quiet death, only to vanish."[7] Suicides there were even less apt than the general suicide population to leave behind a note (at 20 percent versus 30 percent generally). Like the promise of a volcano to obliterate the body, the forest is said to "swallow up"

FIGURE 13. The tangled forest of Aokigahara Jukai. Courtesy The Evenesce Photographer/ Alamy Stock Photo.

(*nomikomu*) the dead. Imagery of skeletons and skulls, especially the iconic one with the lower half of its jaw missing, may run counter to the notion that you will never be found, but they do confirm that discovery is far from immediate or assured.

The sense that ghosts linger there fuels this New Age "power spot" (*pawā spotto*) and the many western cultural productions set there, from Hollywood productions like *Sea of Trees* and the 2016 supernatural horror film *The Forest* (directed by Jason Zada) to the dark touristic impulses of vloggers like Logan Paul. As we will see below, Japan, too, has had its share of sensationalist productions critiqued for fueling the attractions of this site as a suicide destination. But as I hope to show, the presumed causal relationship between texts and real life is far from simplistic, even in the seemingly most one-dimensional narratives set in this tangled terrain.

COPYCAT SUICIDE: THE WERTHER AND PAPAGENO EFFECTS

In 1974, the skeleton of a young woman who had committed suicide was discovered in Aokigahara forest with a copy of a mystery novel—*Nami no tō* (Tower of waves, 1959–60) by the well-known detective writer Matsumoto Seichō—as her pillow. In 1993, two suicides in this forest left behind a copy of *The Complete Manual of Suicide*, one with it open to "Suicide Map #1: Jukai." A third man who

attempted but survived explained to authorities, "I came because I saw it in the book" (*Hon de mite kita*).[8]

Although worlds apart, the two texts and their placement at the site offer seemingly indisputable proof for claims of copycat suicide, or what is somewhat less pejoratively called "suicide contagion." Such claims invoke social science theories of imitative violence that are predicated on unspoken assumptions about audience identification, on the ability to map oneself onto another, and to map a fictional locale onto a real one. This chapter seeks to complicate such overly simplistic assumptions about the effect of representations of self-violence on real-world behaviors by reintegrating literary analysis into a subject that has been largely hijacked by social scientific discourse.

The World Health Organization's *Suicide Prevention Guidelines for Media Professionals* (first translated and distributed in Japanese in 2008) defines the impact of media depictions of suicide as either "harmful" or "protective." Intriguingly, both are named after fictional characters: the Werther effect and the Papageno effect. The Werther effect was named after the lovelorn protagonist of Goethe's 1774 *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (fig. 14). Despairing that he is in an unresolvable love triangle involving his best friend's fiancée, Werther shoots himself in the head with a pistol. Countless readers were said to have taken to imitating the protagonist both in his fashion choices—a fad for yellow pants and blue jackets was dubbed "Werther fever"—and his suicide.

The Papageno effect refers to the half-man, half-bird character from Mozart's 1791 opera *The Magic Flute* who overcomes a suicidal crisis thanks to the intervention of three child-spirits who advise him not to kill himself but instead to play his magical bells and summon his lover, Papagena, which works to great success and a very happy end.[9]

While the lesser-known Papageno effect was a later addition by a team of German psychiatrists in 2010, the Werther effect was coined in the mid-1970s by the American sociologist David Phillips, who has explained his choice in this way: "I was proud of the title I gave that paper. … I named this thing the Werther Effect, after Goethe's famous hero. … After the book came out, all sorts of people were said to be copying the fictional hero. And I said, 'Hey let's see if this works in real life as well as in fiction.'"[10] The conflation of real life and fiction here is less egregious than it might at first seem. In his research, Phillips was not interested in linking suicides in fiction to those in real life but rather in identifying the link between publicized newspaper reports of actual suicides by famous people and a spike in suicide rates among the general population.

Nonetheless, in naming these media effects after fictional characters, there is a distinct causal relationship presumed to exist between fictional characters and texts, on the one hand, and readers, on the other.[11] Goethe himself noted the trend while placing the blame squarely on readers' shoulders: he wrote, "My friends … thought that they must transform poetry into reality, imitate a novel like this in

FIGURE 14. The Werther effect. "Werther at the desk, the gun in his hand," contemporary watercolor by unknown hand (with later coloring) based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). Courtesy akg-images.

real life and, in any case, shoot themselves; and what occurred at first among a few took place later among the general public."[12] Researchers posit that imitative suicide is most pronounced in readers whose age, gender, and circumstances dovetail closely with that of the model. This is what is somewhat counterintuitively called "differential identification theory." Both effects, I would stress, depend on exposure *to* representations of the harmful behavior. If the Papageno effect depends on catharsis, the Werther effect rests on notions of contagion. And both would seem to work exclusively at the level of plot and character.

The doubling of fictional and real worlds does not end, or begin, with the reader, however. As Phillips explained, "The famous German author himself was suicidal, … and he wrote his novel … as a way of purging himself of his self-destructive feelings."[13] The novel is indeed semiautobiographical, based on Goethe's own youthful experience of unrequited love with a woman also named Charlotte. As Goethe himself put it, "That was a creation which I, like the pelican, fed with the blood of my own heart."[14] Here, he likens authorship to the act of a self-sacrificial mother by invoking Christian imagery of the pelican who wounds her own breast when no other food is available for her starving chicks. His quote nicely suggests the ways that these fictional creations are presumed to be far from entirely fictional but are instead parasitic blood-fed creatures living off the author's body. Rather than offering any catharsis for the author, writing is instead an act of self-harm and sacrifice.

Although both protective and harmful media effects are theoretically possible, there tends to be an overwhelming presumption of harm that the delayed

introduction of the Papageno effect has done little to disrupt. Werther prevails, notwithstanding 2003 research by German scholars who found few actual cases of copycat suicide after the publication of Goethe's novel.[15] One Japanese mental health researcher has half-jokingly suggested renaming the Werther effect after the doomed lovers Ohatsu and Tokubei from Chikamatsu's play *Sonezaki shinjū* ("Love Suicides at Sonezaki"), reasoning that this incident and text predated the Werther copycat suicides by over a half century; he offered no Japanese Papageno, however.[16]

Naming these media effects after a singular character would suggest a fairly simplistic mode of identification whereby readers follow that character in a literal sense from the beginning to the end of narrative and life. At face value, the young woman who made the novel *Nami no tō* her pillow certainly seems to confirm this simple causal model. In line with the differential identification theory, a young female reader maps herself onto the female protagonist who dies in the forest. In a chain of interlinked readings, later readers of the novel and of this sensational incident in the news emulate the suicidal acts described therein. Textual and real bodies and locales are inextricably linked. And descriptions of the text often mischaracterize it in a way that further fuels this interpretation.

NAMI NO TŌ (TOWER OF WAVES)

Before turning to look more closely at this novel that is said to have incited copycat suicides at Aokigahara, let us first consider the news media's role in propagating the image of Aokigahara as a *jisatsu meisho*. The following excerpt is from the April 25, 1974, edition of *Mainichi shinbun*:

> At around 1 p.m. on the afternoon of the 24th, approximately 400 meters into Aokigahara Jukai on the northern side of Lake Saiko wind cave in Ashiwadamura village of Minamitsuru district in Yamanashi prefecture, there was a skeleton-corpse of a young woman. According to the investigation by the Fuji Yoshida police, she was about 23 or 24-years old with the book *Nami no tō*, a novel set in the famed suicide spot [*jisatsu meisho*] of Aokigahara forest as her pillow. … It is being regarded as a suicide.[17]

Several things are notable about this news item. First and foremost, the flat, concise reporting is conspicuously lacking in any sensationalism. Second, the descriptions meticulously pinpoint the exact spot inside the forest. While its restrained tone puts these media professionals well ahead of their time, they go against later WHO media recommendations to "avoid providing detailed information about the site of a completed or attempted suicide."[18] Even so, this particular spot did not apparently become a hotspot for suicides. And even more importantly, as this news report acknowledges, the forest was already a famed suicide spot prior to this incident or the novel.

The seductive narrative that locates the origins in this single incident and in this single book has taken on a life of its own, however. Making the book into one's death pillow naturally invites an interpretation that seamlessly links acts of reading to acts of self-death. If the physical presence of the book at the site was not enough de facto evidence for such readings, the timing of the novel's republication earlier that year as part of Matsumoto Seichō's *Complete Works* and the wildly popular TV version broadcast by NHK the previous year fueled this claim. (This also may have helped explain away the time lag between the novel's initial publication fifteen years earlier and this incident in 1974.)[19] This origin story for the birth of the suicide forest has become so very commonplace that few are able to resist asserting a cause-effect relationship between texts and acts that locate suicide inside the famed forest. Fewer still seem compelled to read the novel at all.

Instead, commentators rely on the error-ridden plot soundbites that circulate repeatedly in print and online news. That is, when they are not talking about another novel entirely. *Tower of Waves* is often confused with another serialized mystery by the same author that refers to Jukai in its title—*Kuroi jukai* (1958–60)—but whose plot is largely unrelated to the suicide forest of Aokigahara. (This mistake is so ubiquitous that the forest has been called the "Black Sea of Trees," or "Kuroi jukai" in Japanese, an error that is amusingly compounded in English-language accounts that mistakenly render it as "Kuroi kaijū," in an inadvertent reference to monster movies.)

When people do discuss the correct source novel *Tower of Waves*, the most common mistake is to claim that it depicts the double love suicide of two doomed young lovers. This is just wrong; the man never attempts suicide and lives on. Others claim, not entirely accurately, that it depicts the suicide of a young woman in "the most aesthetically stunning setting in Japan. … It is *here* that Yoriko kills herself. The act is depicted in the novel as extraordinarily beautiful."[20] The associations between reading and dying are so strong that few are able to resist the pull to locate suicide *inside* the forest. Even the newspaper's restrained factual account claims this is "a novel set *in* the famed suicide spot of Aokigahara forest" (emphasis mine).

In fact, the young woman's suicide is not depicted at all. Even in the final chapter, titled "Inside Jukai," we never actually get inside the forest. Instead, in the final scene, the young woman has just started heading in, but we see this only from the periphery of a peripheral character. An elderly couple and their daughter are farming their fields on the forest outskirts when one of them sees her walking toward the path of no return. In the regional dialect, the old woman warns this "apparent Tokyoite" in what becomes a constant refrain in the novel and one that is often repeated about Aokigahara: "If you enter that path, you'll never ever be able to return."[21] When the farmer's daughter next glimpses a flash of white on the path, she calls out worriedly but is told she is imagining things. In the next moment, a white rabbit emerges suddenly, causing the leaves in the grove to sway, and the

novel ends with this line: "Just then, the pitch-black darkness descended upon the sea of trees."

On the one hand, this is an aestheticized and highly symbolic vision of death. Like the cicada metaphor used to describe Matsumoto's transformative flight as she leaped off the crater's edge at Mount Mihara, this final refrain suggests that death offers not an ending but instead a reunion with the vast natural world. At the same time, it seems important to point out what it is not: a depiction of the act of suicide. Her suicide may be anticipated, but it is not depicted. The tendency of commentators to suggest that the act of self-violence occurs onscreen is telling, however. It accords with social science assumptions about the contagious effect on the reader/viewer being predicated on the act of representation. The second important point about this novel's ending is that it takes an abrupt detour from the point of view of our Werther character, with whom we have traveled from Tokyo in what resembles a fairly drawn-out *michiyuki*-like journey to the place of death. In the final chapter, with this abrupt addition of three entirely new characters, we are instead left gazing only into the darkness from the perspective of these locals who are external to the drama.

This splintering of point of view at the end is, in fact, characteristic of the entire story, in which love triangles, bribery scandals, and impossible coincidences abound. The novel often offers the perspective of this central female protagonist, Yoriko, an unhappy but uncomplaining wife in her mid-twenties, but just as often, it relays the perspectives of other characters entangled in the drama. Yoriko is having an affair with a young prosecutor, Onogi, who ends up heading the corruption charges against her husband, who himself is having multiple affairs but refuses his wife a divorce. The novel occupies the minds of so many characters (by my count, at least ten) that it becomes difficult not to sympathize to a degree with them all (even the unlikeable philandering husband, as noted approvingly by one male critic).[22]

It skirts the points of view not just of the three characters in the central love triangle but also importantly that of another woman, Wakako, who has recently graduated from college and who represents a younger version of Yoriko. The novel opens with Wakako bristling at the many pressures and expectations for marriage, children, and so on that are imposed by society and by her family, especially her overprotective father (who coincidentally is a police chief also implicated in the corruption scandal). Like a detective, she tries to piece out the mystery behind the love triangle and the unfolding political scandal that embroils all the central characters.

When we are privy to her perspective, it is clear that Wakako sees herself and her future in Yoriko's own plight, just as Yoriko sees her past in Wakako's present; after hearing that Wakako has just graduated, she tells her, "'Well, then, it's all starting for you now.' (*Jya, kore kara desu wa ne*.) The way Yoriko said it made Wakako feel as if there was a bit of envy in her statement" (2:33). That Wakako will literally take Yoriko's place becomes even more obvious toward the end, when Yoriko

FIGURE 15. Yoriko and Onogi, serial adaptations of *Nami no tō* (dir. Nakamura Noboru, Shōchiku 1960).

resigns herself to dying alone and thinks of what a good match Wakako "with her youthful shining cheeks and purity" will make for Onogi once she removes herself from the equation (2:364–65).

As should be clear from its unending plot twists and doppelgangers, there is a seriality embedded in the story that suggests its solid grounding in the generic conventions of a mystery-love story that itself was serialized in the women's journal *Jyosei jishin* (May 1959–June 1960) and in numerous subsequent film adaptations (fig. 15). The journal editor explained that he and Seichō were aiming for a "work that would make women cry but would also be a high-quality literary love novel" and reports that they succeeded beyond expectations, reaching over one million in circulation. Women, he said "went totally crazy over the heroine's tragedy," suggesting with his choice of wording that these female readers "lost or forgot themselves" (*muchū ni natte*) in this single character.[23] And yet the unremitting nature of the work's seriality works against any reader's ability to occupy any single position, instead fracturing our sympathies and attentions unto the end.

I hope this close reading of the story helps to complicate the dominance of the social science model of "harmful or protective media effects" with their singular characters and singular choices—to be Werther or Pagageno. The notion that female readers, in particular, were unproblematically collapsing themselves with the female protagonist in choosing to die in Aokigahara is easily debunked by the statistics as well. As Takahashi's 1980s study shows, "contrary to the widespread view," men, not women, were both attempting and completing suicide in the forest at ratios even higher than the general population.[24]

Moreover, it is not so easy for an audience to lose themselves in fictional others as literary and film theorists have shown. For example, Lisa Zunshine's work on theory of mind demonstrates how literary narratives often compel readers to inhabit the minds of multiple characters at multiple levels of remove and proximity but also often test the limits of this propensity. Carol Clover has shown just how slippery and gender-bending an audience's identifications can be even in horror films that posit only the starkest options of victimizer and victim.[25] Emplacing oneself in the mind or body of a single fictional character is a tricky proposition.

But what about emplacing oneself in the forest? To return to the question at the opening of this chapter, what about these fictional depictions of the locale might have invited or inhibited access to this *jisatsu meisho*?

While the final scene in *Tower of Waves* shies away from bringing the reader and character inside the forest, in other parts, the novel resembles a travel guide. Travel guidebooks, local tour guides, and even maps appear that root the fictional narrative in actual locales, as do detailed descriptions about the characters' journeys there by trains and taxis and on foot. For both the lovers and for the young Wakako, travel offers a temporary escape from the pressures of urban, modern life and its associated pressures. Traveling to the country allows them "to escape things, like the complexity and hassle of human relations … that pressed down day after day" (2:315). For readers, too, the novel and its many filmic adaptations offered a means of escape, even said to spur a boom in leisure travel, especially among young women. The restaurant and inn near Jindaiji Temple in Mitaka, where the illicit lovers have their secret rendezvous, became a favorite meeting spot for young lovers said to "look just like Onogi and Yoriko on a date [*marude Onogi to Yoriko ni natta kibun de dēto shite iru*]."[26] As one critic put it, "thanks to [*okage de*]" these, Jindaiji became a famed "love nest," while Jukai became a famed suicide spot.[27]

Maps that are included in the 2009 *bunkōbon* version of *Nami no tō* conspicuously point to Yoriko's final destination—her death site inside the forest—even when this requires that they depart from the ostensible explanation for their inclusion at that point in the narrative. For example, the first map in the first chapter is strategically oriented to offer a distant bird's-eye view of the entire region, including the forest located ninety-five kilometers to the southeast, even though this means excluding the trajectory of Wakako's first "small trip" (*chiisa na tabi*), from Nagoya to Kami Suwa, that is recounted in detail here in this chapter of that title (1:13).

Another map marks the spot where Yoriko will ultimately stand and take in the vista in the second-to-last chapter. Again, its placement is off, appearing only about one-quarter of the way through the novel ostensibly to delineate a lovers' getaway taken by Onogi and Yoriko to Shinobe hot springs, about thirty-five kilometers west of the forest. It, too, strains the boundaries of the map and the narrative at that juncture. Significantly, however, it is during this trip that Yoriko first

hears about Jukai from Onogi, who traveled there in his student days, who tells her, "There's a sea of trees that spreads across the plains. It's so dense that if you get lost, you'll never get out alive." And moments later, Yoriko dreamily asks him if he will take her there "as if she were still imagining Jukai in her mind's eye" (1:204–5). The tantalizing placement of these maps anticipate the finale that itself edges toward but never arrives at the tantalizing final destination.

In the end, Yoriko's journey disposes of any cartographic representations of the forest in favor of secondhand narrative accounts offered by her various guides and finally Yoriko's own first-person perspective of the forest from its edges. Along the way, she is reminded of the promise/threat of getting lost in the forest, first recalling Onogi's words and then encountering a taxi driver who reiterates this warning (2:379, 389). In an inadvertently self-reflexive moment for the novel, Yoriko encounters a seductive representation in an area guidebook that she discovers at a youth hostel the evening before she travels there: "In Jukai, beech trees, zelkovas, and yews plant their roots deep in the scattered cracks from lava flows and decayed trees stripped of their white bark lay fallen like snakes. Jukai is a primeval dense forest of ancient moss where no human has trod before. If you get lost in here, not even your corpse can be found" (2:394).[28] We are not privy to her response to this eerie depiction of the site, only offered a tantalizing string of ellipses that lead into the next section where she hikes to the forked path leading to the lake or to Jukai.[29]

For Yoriko, who chooses the forest, its allure is its otherworldliness. Gazing at it for the first time, "she felt like a person already living in a different world. … She realized that she had come to a place where Onogi could no longer reach" (2:382). The site removes her from the pressures of her present reality and transports her to a primordial past. The iconic national symbol of Mount Fuji rounds out this vision, which, as the taxi driver opines, resembles "Japan before any humans lived." In this space, Yoriko feels the presence of the dead, recalling "those she knew who had died" (2:388; see also 2:342).

The final and most in-depth description of the forest is from Yoriko's point of view when she stands on the viewing platform on the edge of Lake Sai, a destination foretold by its earlier mapping:

> It's quiet. Standing there and looking out at the lake, the opposite shore is dark brown lava. The forest stands above, spreading out like an endless sea stretching to the mountain plains. The land beyond the forest hardly rose or fell, just spread out level across a vast expanse. This overwhelmed people. If a rainstorm were to hit this giant dense forest, what would happen? The forest would erupt in angry waves and bellows. That primeval image caused Yoriko to hallucinate. The surface of the lake at this moment had not a single wave. Not a single fish, not a single ripple. Yoriko had never seen such a lonely lake as this. Mount Fuji was reflected on the surface, but it was a completely different mountain than the one she was used to seeing. It was instead a volcano just like in ancient times. The brown lava of the rocky shore and the deep olive green of the forest were reflected in the lake's depths. The primeval mountain,

FIGURE 16. Yoriko's distant perspective of Aokigahara. Aokigahara@Sankodai, *Flickr*, November 13, 2013, Wikimedia Commons. Courtesy Guilhem Vellut, Annecy, France.

> the forest, the lake, all were violently pitted against one another. The elements were entirely at odds. (2:387–88; fig. 16)

This extended description offers first-hand confirmation about the power of this place she has not seen before, only heard and read about. In what appears to be a metacommentary on the novel and its far-reaching effects on readers, the virtues of escapist travel are touted repeatedly in this piece of escapist genre fiction. Readers proper read about Yoriko reading about a place into which we, too, are eventually emplaced.

But like Yoriko, our placement in this site is neither assured nor stable. The novel continually shifts perspectives. It oscillates from a bird's-eye distant view of the "sea of trees" with Mount Fuji as its backdrop and secondhand accounts from afar to a first-person perspective of the tangled terrain up close, only to finally land on a third-person external view from the forest's edge. The reader is offered a mixture of subjective and objective views, textual/oral recreations and first-hand experiences, long shots and close-ups. Each perspective offers a varying degree of embodiment in a character, located at various degrees of proximity to the suicide site. While readers are repeatedly invited to imagine the forest, our access is ultimately foreclosed in the final scene that fades to black.

In that final scene, her suicide is not only not depicted; it is also not entirely explicable, even in the highly melodramatic and coincidence-filled world of the novel. Even though we are entirely with Yoriko for the lengthy *michiyuki*-like journey by train and taxi and then by foot as she hikes to the forest's edge, her reasoning for killing herself at this juncture is far from clear, particularly since the love triangle has been resolved. Her husband is now in prison, she has at long last initiated divorce proceedings, and although her lover, Onogi, has lost his job as a prosecutor because of his scandalous affair that caused a conflict of interest, the two lovers would seem to finally be free. Yoriko fails to articulate the reasoning behind her journey to die in the forest, a move that is, in a sense, echoed by the woman who made this book her death pillow. If this young woman left behind a clue, it is far from as legible as many commentators would have us think.

ISHIHARA SHINTARŌ AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTING AOKIGAHARA

Never one to shy away from controversy, the then-governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintarō, stepped on a political landmine when remaking his 1999 story "Aokigahara" into a film of the same title with his director-friend Shinjō Taku in 2012.[30] Bracketing his 1999–2012 stint as governor, the story heralded the return of Ishihara-the-author, while the film was to mark both his exodus from politics and his brief return to acting. When announcing his cameo appearance in the film (as a player on a golf course with one line), Ishihara joked, "I am a great actor. After all, I've played the whole world already, no? I want to play the role of Ishihara Shintarō. The villain."[31]

The 2012 film caused a much-publicized rift with the Yamanashi governor, who called for "self-restraint" (*jishuku*) in location shooting, worrying that the production would cause "a renewed spark increasing suicides in Jukai, which had at last been on the decline."[32] Although Ishihara was initially conciliatory, he soon turned belligerent. Defending his right to free speech, he claimed that the film "was about respecting human life in this setting of Jukai where myriad life forms reside" and that it was in the interest of suicide prevention for our "contemporary society where annual suicide rates were over 30,000." Alternatively, he claimed that the film would have "no effect on people."[33] The filmmakers were ultimately denied permission to film in the forest after rolling cameras just twice in Yamanashi. Instead, they substituted neighboring Shizuoka prefecture.

While earlier productions, including a 2006 TBS remake of *Tower of Waves*, had attained permission to film in the forest by agreeing to pre- and postproduction censorship by the prefectural authorities, the ban was perhaps inevitable in this case.[34] The film is, after all, titled *Aokigahara*. Like other productions set in the forest, "the leading actor is Jukai."[35] Even Ishihara acknowledged that such films could not help but inconvenience (*meiwaku*) local officials and citizens.[36]

In the midst of the controversy, in September 2012, the Mount Fuji Yamanashi Film Commission established an official policy that disallows filming in the forest for any production deemed to encourage suicide there. The policy is managed by the Tourism and Brand Promotion section, a unit clearly designed to maximize profits by managing its public image. At issue here is the branding of Aokigahara. This same issue is one that the film self-reflexively grapples with in its melodramatic ghost story about suicide and redemption in the forest.

Aokigahara features the doomed love story between Michio, a married man, and Junko, a pregnant woman dying of cancer. Junko's past is equally tragic. Orphaned as a child, sent first to an unsympathetic relative and then to an orphanage, she later suffers a leg injury that leaves her physically disabled. The story begins when her lover appears as a ghost in a yellow rain jacket before the film's protagonist, Matsumura, a well-respected Yamanashi local who reluctantly participates in the annual sweeps for bodies in the forest. Michio's ghost appears in order to lead Matsumura to their bodies so they can be retrieved from the forest and reunited in body and spirit (fig. 17). Her death is not suicide per se but rather the result of parasuicidal behaviors—for example, refusing the chemotherapy treatment that might save her but would harm her baby and undertaking the exhausting journey to the forest alone in her weakened state. His is a prototypical love suicide following his lover in death (*ato-ōi shinjū*).

Through one of the film's many implausible coincidences and ESP moments, Michio miraculously locates Junko inside the tangled forest just before she expires, and he can thereby ensure that she rest in peace. Junko gets a beautiful death, first reunited with her lover and then buried with care, perfectly preserved in an ice cave deep in the forest: "Her white face appeared transparent as if bleached by the cold air, almost as if she would wake again, looking exactly the same."[37] Matsumura, our intrepid detective-like hero, also miraculously manages to locate not just his body but hers, tucked away in this icy cave deep in the dense tangled forest with the help of this friendly if persistent ghost.

Both the film and story versions center on the journey of this local veteran sweeper who is literally and metaphorically haunted by the dead. In the story, Matsumura is in his mid-forties, the same age as the dead man, while in the film, he is an older widow who tends to his wife's spirit at his home Buddhist altar and to this ghost in the yellow raincoat with so much care that his only daughter scolds him at one point, "The dead are not your job. Don't you care about the living?" The film repeatedly stresses the inconvenience (*meiwaku*) and pain caused by the dead to the worlds of the living. As one of Michio's family members puts it, "None of us is resting in peace" (*Watashitachimo, totemo ukabarenai mama ni iru no desu*).[38] This restless ghostly presence is not entirely appreciated by the protagonist, either. "I found his body," he protests. "What more could he want of me?" And the local priest explains, "The dead has something else to ask of you … before he can fully die and attain Nirvana."[39]

FIGURE 17. Friendly ghosts, veteran sweepers, and doomed lovers in *Aokigahara* (dir. Taku Shinjō, 2012). Courtesy Aokigahara Film Partners.

The role of this wise priest is played by Tsugawa Masahiko, an actor who not coincidentally is something of a serial fixture in adaptations of *Tower of Waves*. He played Onogi in the original 1960 Shōchiku film version (see fig. 15, above) and the cuckolded husband in the 2006 TBS version. Other than this, the film resists making explicit connections to origin stories for the suicide forest that link it to Matsumoto Seichō's novel. Instead, with Junko's pristine death scene set in an ice cave, the film obliquely taps into a lesser-known origin story that dates back to 1340, when a Buddhist monk fasted and prayed in a cave in Jukai in an act of ritual asceticism that resulted in his death.[40]

The story, on the other hand, exploits contemporary lore about Aokigahara to offer overt meta-commentary on the controversial role of texts in propagating the site's popularity. It opens with Matsumura explaining that although he has not read it himself, "a long, long time ago, there was an author who heard about that forest and wrote a novel that staged the protagonist's suicide there, and then it became some kind of strange trend and so people think, well if I'm gonna die anyway, it might as well be there."

Skeptical that reading alone could transform the site into a "sacred ground for suicide," the protagonist turns to a second text that might explain the huge twofold rise in suicides from one year to the next: *The Complete Manual of Suicide*. He then recites the hallmarks of this *meisho*—the failure of compasses and the ease of getting lost in the "primordial forest"—before speculating that another reason for its trendiness is its proximity to Tokyo and also its distance, both geographical and psychological, utterly unlike "Atami, a *jisatsu meisho* from the past that lost popularity after highways and giant hotels" took over.[41]

Both story and film grapple with Aokigahara's stubborn popularity and invoke contemporary debates over whether to continue the practice of conducting annual forest sweeps. In one exchange among the resentful locals, after hearing about the pathetic state of recovered corpses, one man asks an elderly veteran sweeper, "If they know that's how they're gonna end up, why go to all the trouble of traveling all the way here to die?," and the older man replies, "It's the brand, the brand I tell you [*Burando desu. Bu-ra-n-do yo*.] Just like dying in a fancy hospital." If Aokigahara is a brand, its selling points are the solitude and anonymity afforded by this dense forest. As the protagonist notes, it is rare for a suicide in the forest to leave behind a suicide note, and the majority remain unidentifiable.[42] But the film acknowledges this mythology only to dispute it. As our sensitive hero concludes, "Even for those who want to die alone, sure enough, in the end, don't they want to be found by someone? Sure enough, they seem to want to maintain some kind of tie [*nanika no en*] to the world."

If this film attempts in part to disrupt one fantasy about the forest—a beautiful solitary death in a beautiful locale—it perpetrates another even wilder one: the fantasy that those who die in the forest can handpick their saviors, to save them not from dying but from being left alone there forever. In the end, thanks to the tireless efforts of our protagonist, the lover's bodies are recovered and their remains

joined together in a nearby temple for "lost souls" (*muenbutsu*). The film imagines that the living can reunite with the dead and moreover that even the dead can be reunited with their own beloved dead.

This work stresses the responsibilities that each of us has to the dead, even when they have willfully chosen to die and even if you are a person with no ties whatsoever to that person during their lifetime. Responsibility here falls not to the police, whose duty it is to attend to missing person's reports, or to the clergy, whose work begins when the dead have been found. Instead, it falls to the locals, whose land inters their bodies and who retain a stubborn connection (*nanika no en*) with the dead.

The divide between the living and the dead is reestablished in the film's closing scenes. In a reversal of the theme of the persistent ghost who haunts the living, now the living stalks the dead. After reuniting the lovers' remains at the local temple, the hero is magically transported to a field of pampas grass–filled plains that are bathed in the setting sunlight. He spots the dead couple walking hand-in-hand across the field and across the River Styx. Although he calls out to them, "Ō-i!," he receives only a slight bow in acknowledgment from the man before the pair continue on without him. As they walk deeper into the field, the camera pans up and the couple disappears, absorbed into the beautiful landscape with only a silhouetted Mount Fuji remaining in view. This film leaves us with the living who must, in the end, let go of the dead.

DISPLAYING THE DEAD: FROM NON-REPRESENTATIONS TO OVERREPRESENTATIONS

In line with national policies established by Japan's Basic Act for Suicide Prevention in 2006, there have been increasing moves toward proactive mental health counseling and increased patrolling to thwart attempts in Aokigahara. There has also been a move away from the more reactive mode that had been practiced for decades; in 2001, the annual October sweeps for bodies overseen by the prefectural police and conducted by volunteers since 1971 were suspended. The logic was that the sweeps were inadvertently publicizing the locale as a suicide hotspot, and as one of the police officials explained, "To put it bluntly, we want the name of Aokigahara to be forgotten by all the people of this nation for the time being." If this official called for no representations of this place where a complete and total self-erasure is said to be possible, another, the mayor of neighboring village of Narusawa, suggested the exact opposite tact, an overrepresentation: "Maybe it'd be better to hang up a sign that says: 'This is a famous suicide spot. Please, come on in by all means'" (*Koko wa jisatsu no meisho desu. Dōzo gojiyū ni ohairikudasai*).[43]

The refusal to collect the bodies of the dead in Aokigahara offers a striking revival of the Edo period practice of refusing burial for double suicides. As noted above, their bodies were tied up and left exposed under bridges for three days.

One Japanese scholar has discovered that at Sen'nichi Cemetery in Osaka there is a mid-eighteenth century record of a graveyard caretaker writing to shogunal officials to ask for permission to steal the clothes off the backs of those who died from suicide. The shogun's response was an enthusiastic yes: "The punishment *is* to display the bodies gruesomely" (*Migurushiku shite sarasu no ga oshiki to iu mono da*).[44]

Such calls for the overt display of the dead are not limited to the premodern past or to Aokigahara. Serious and satirical calls to expose the desecrated corpse of suicides in order to dissuade would-be followers persist. Above, we saw the 2004 psychiatrists' report on "Suicide Prevention and Place/Space" advocating to educate "people about the injured state of the corpse after death … [to] counter the popularized aesthetic image of suicide."[45] In 2005, a self-declared "citizen of the railways" was inspired to write up a four-part detailed plan to combat the high numbers of train suicides on Japan Railway lines that "inconvenience" commuters and JR alike. Part of the proposed twelve-step plan included creating a "homepage presenting the corpses of leaping suicides [*tobikomi itai shōkai hōmupēji*]" to offer gory photographic evidence of train suicides for all to see.[46]

At Aokigahara, in 2001, eleven suicide prevention call boxes were installed so that suicidal individuals could call for help, and inside these, flyers were posted that "spell out just how horrid dying in Jukai is." Not retrieving the bodies in the forest regularly also helps ensure the ugliness of death there, a point that is repeatedly stressed by officials in the media. A police chief notes that he has "seen any number of bodies rotted away or eaten by wild dogs. There's nothing pretty about it," and a local volunteer asserts that "unlike in the pictures, dying in Jukai offers neither a pretty nor quiet death."[47]

Another version of this lifesaving tactic is being implemented in the United States at its most famed suicide site. In April 2017, San Francisco officials announced that they would install giant safety nets under the Golden Gate Bridge in what is being called a physical "suicide deterrent system (SDS)." As the official website explains, the "SDS Net" is actually "a hard metal platform located two stories below the sidewalk. Jumping into the Net will result in significant bruises, sprains and possibly broken bones." After it was finally installed in November 2023, one official explained the project in no uncertain terms that reveal its punitive intents: "We want the message to be that it's going to hurt, and also jumping off the bridge is illegal" (fig. 18).[48] Logistically, planners admit that the net is not the perfect solution, for it would be possible after falling to leap again into the waters below, but it seems to aim to prevent suicides also by disrupting the fantasy of a swift, painless, and even spectacular leap. Instead of merging with the natural elements, leapers would be suspended, visibly dangling like a fish caught in a net.

Texts set in Aokigahara offer their own means by which to disappear, dangle, or discover the dead. All are potentially suspect, even non-representations. Seichō's novel can be accused of giving people what they "want"—a quiet invisible death that is aestheticized in large part because of its invisibility. At the time, Seichō defended his choice of setting by citing just this attraction: "Suicidal people's psychology is

FIGURE 18. Displaying and dangling the dead. Courtesy Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District.

such that they are conscious of not wanting to expose their ugly corpse. Jukai fits a suicide's psychology perfectly as a place where one can rest quietly."[49] As one scholar has astutely charged, it is his failure to represent "the gruesome reality of dying in the middle of a forest [that] makes Yoriko's death much more idealistic. … It is as if she simply disappears into nothing."[50] In other words, it is the non-representation of the suicidal act that is deemed just as, if not more, suspect than overrepresentations.

The battle over representing Aokigahara continues. Prefectural officials aim to rebrand the site with family-friendly events in the "forest that fosters life" and an annual "Yamanashi's Day of Life" (*inochi no hi*) established in March 2016. In August of 2018, the prefecture undertook a public relations campaign that entailed creating a new iconography that would displace any dark image of the suicide forest. A newly designed logo enjoins viewers "Let's discover the real Jukai" in a rosy circular graphic design of flowers, fauna, and Mount Fuji. A color photograph of the lush, green, tree-filled terrain in the foreground with snow-covered Mount Fuji as the distant focal point beneath a perfect blue sky appears with the tagline "I had no clue that it was this beautiful."[51]

The laws of perspective draw our eye past the lakes, past the forest, to the distant promise of Mount Fuji. No human is present. A long shot and slightly overhead view leaves us invisibly hovering over and above, just on the edge of the forest but not in the trees. In other words, it inadvertently replicates the very non-representation of suicide that is said to have started the whole thing.

FIGURE 19. Regarding those who regard the suffering of others in Francisco Goya's *Los desastres de la guerra* (1810), Plate 36 'Not in this case either' (Tampoco). Courtesy Penta Springs Limited/Alamy Stock Photo.

REGARDING THE SELF-INFLICTED PAIN OF OTHERS

In her 2003 book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag tackles the question of what power, if any, representations of suffering and death possess, especially in our media-saturated world. In a revision of her earlier, more pessimistic conclusions about photography's lack of affective power, she concludes that the potency of any such representations depend on their ability to haunt us. They do so by implicating us as spectators who also envision the violent spectacle from a distanced yet proximate position. They can force us to think about how "intrinsic to the perpetration of this evil is the shamelessness of photographing it. The pictures were taken as souvenirs. … The display of these pictures makes us spectators too." As such, in viewing them, we, too, are forcibly and uncomfortably aligned with both the perpetrator of violence and the one who captured that moment on film. All are enemies of the victim; as Sontag puts it, "To display the dead, after all, is what the enemy does."[52]

Sontag's own choice of book cover is illuminating in this respect: an image of a lynching from Goya's 1810–20 series *Los desastres de la guerra* (The disasters of war, fig. 19). This etching shows the profile of a bearded man hanging from

a tree with his head slumped, hands dangling lifeless at his sides, and his pants pulled down below his knees. Beside him, a mustachioed man in military uniform lounges languidly, gazing squarely and even seductively at the spectacle. Although Sontag touts the powers of narrative to "make us understand" in ways that "harrowing photographs" often cannot, she offers no explanation of this particular image.[53] She does not have to. The insertion of an unattractive spectator into an image that depicts human suffering speaks volumes. It offers a check on our baser rubbernecking impulses, a check on how we look at those who do not, cannot, see or speak for themselves by instead forcing us to look at ourselves looking.

In what follows, I turn to examples of texts that entail an added layer of haunting as ones in which their authors regard (and depict) their own self-inflicted pain and suffering, as well as its end. Similar ethical questions pertain, I argue. These texts, which range from suicide notes (part 2) to multimedia fictional productions (part 3), are filled with complicated hauntings for author and audience alike. They demand that we all must figure and reconfigure our relations to the spectacle of death.

PART TWO

Noting Suicide

Isho, *the Writings Left Behind*

WHO LEAVES BEHIND A LAST WORD IN THE END, and to what end? This is the central question of this next section on *isho* (遺書), or "writings left behind." This catch-all term encompasses a wide variety of texts that include but are not limited to suicide notes. It can refer to an official, legal will prepared by someone anticipating natural death or suicide; anything from a formal, numbered note with practical instructions and requests to emotional, personal goodbye messages, or anything in between. If there is great variety in their content, what unites *isho* is their perceived status—legal or otherwise—as the writer's "last word." Or as one writer put it, "It is the lastness of last words that counts."[1]

In the case studies that follow, I focus on self-designated suicide notes (*isho* or *nōto*) left behind by both professional writers and amateurs. If part 1 on *jisatsu meisho* centered on a writer's (or reader's) physical proximity to sites where acts of self-death and self-writing collide, here it is the writer's temporal proximity to death that defines these texts. I ask, What, how, and why do some write in the face of suicide, and what are readers to do with these remains in its wake?

The impulse to leave behind last words (*yuigon*, 遺言) is what distinguishes humans from beasts according to manga artist and writer Okamoto Ippei:

> Neither cows nor fish leave behind last words when they die. Nor do birds or pine trees. Only humans.
>
> Ushi ya sakana wa shinu toki yuigon shinai. Tori ya matsu no ki mo shinu toki yuigon shinai. Yuigon suru no wa ningen dake de aru.[2]

The writings that human subjects leave behind are further divided hierarchically into ones "by the extraordinary and by the ordinary" (*hibonjin to bonjin no isho*), as per

his 1927 short essay title. If there are those who possess "a life and philosophy worthy of writing down to proudly leave behind to guide one's children and grandchildren," others do not. "At the time of death, we ordinary folks will either be totally at a loss or stubbornly put on airs—in either case, utterly unable to speak what is true."

If "we ordinary folks" are exempted from any high expectations, men of letters are not. In 1919, Mark Twain lamented the state of affairs even for this exceptional population, sardonically noting, "I do wish our great men would quit saying these flat things just at the moment they die."[3] Such comments reveal the often elitist and sexist assumptions about last words that revolve around the question of who has the right (or obligation) to leave them behind for posterity and the consensus around what constitutes a desirable last word. Who has the talent to do so is another question.

Given their occupation, we often expect writers *to* write and to write "well," even, or especially, in the face of an anticipated, self-willed death.[4] Unlike death from natural causes, suicide is a deliberate act that can be timed in such a way as to enable the careful composition of one's last words. It is the intentionality behind this act of self-writing in the face of self-death that lends these last writings a sense of especial importance. But this factor can cut both ways, for it can also engender cynicism that these self-styled last words are far too stylized to capture anything true about the moment or the individual writing them.

Writing in 1948, literary critic Nakamura Mitsuo articulated his skepticism on this point. Asking, "What do suicide notes say about that person's life?," he answers, "Usually, nothing at all" (*Jisatsusha no isho wa kono hito no seizen ni tsuite nani o kataru de arō ka? Nani mo kataranu no ga futsū de arō*). To explain his cynicism, he points to yet another hierarchical distinction, this time between professional writers and amateurs: "After all, the psychology of a person who is staring death in the face is not something that can be expressed in regular words. Even wordsmiths know how very difficult it is to express precisely in written language the feelings and thoughts of an average person's everyday life."[5] According to Nakamura, if wordsmiths possess an advantage over nonprofessionals, even what they produce inevitably falls short in the end.

In contrast, author Nosaka Akiyuki self-mockingly notes the literati's tendency to write last notes ad infinitum to explain why amateurs paradoxically write "better" ones, including suicide notes.

> I'm no literary critic of last notes, but after reading quite a few, I realized that they just do not suit novelists in the end. … Men of letters, after all, are writing them all year long.
>
> Boku wa, isho hyōronka jya nai no da keredo, kono tabi hajimete, shoka no sore o yomi, kekkyoku, shōsetsuka ni isho wa niawanai yō na ki ga suru. … Bungakusha wa, nenjū, isho o kaite iru.[6]

If these assessments suggest little consensus over who writes "best" in the face of death, they illustrate how last words were never exempt from becoming the

objects of literary criticism, excoriated as often as they were praised. They also reveal a shared premise about these writings and the criteria for judging them. The logic of many of these pronouncements about last pronouncements hinges on the belief that a final word should—and could—capture the final thoughts and feelings of a person at this critical moment, or as Okamoto puts it, "the truth" (*hontō no koto*).

The notion that the last words of someone who knowingly stands on the ledge, poised between life and death, represent a privileged articulation of this truth is one shared in literary and legal worlds. In the literary context, this view was perhaps most famously expressed by Nobel Prize–winning writer Kawabata Yasunari in his 1968 acceptance speech. There he cited the famous suicide note of fellow author Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (the subject of chapter 5) to endorse this privileged dying vision, or "eyes in their last extremity" (*matsugo no me*).[7] Poems, and poetics more generally, are thought to offer the perfect medium for capturing this last moment of clarity, or what Emily Dickinson has called in one of her poems "A Dying Eye."[8] As one scholar of deathbed poems explains, "The promise of an all-seeing 'dying eye' conveys precisely the kind of privileged vantage point that poets themselves strive to attain in their writing. … Belief in the revelation of life's mysteries on the deathbed, and faith in the unlimited insight of the dying hour, mark poetry's own claim to otherworldly or expanded vision, elevating the deathbed itself to the status of living poem."[9]

In Anglo-American law, the "dying declaration" has traditionally enjoyed special evidentiary status in court based on the theory that a dying person is not presumed to lie (*Nemo moriturus praesumitur mentiri*) given their imminent judgment at the hands of their all-knowing maker.[10] In the Japanese case, this notion is evident in the aphorism *Shinin ni kuchi nashi*, sometimes used to mean that "the dead tell no lies." And yet in Japanese law, *isho* themselves carry no legal weight and nor do any final spoken words captured in audio or audiovisual recordings; only those recorded in officially prepared written wills (*yuigonsho*) are invested with such status.

Legal authorities primarily use suicide notes to capture a more prosaic truth—whether a death is homicide or suicide—and to ascertain motive. Since the mid-1880s, data collected by the Japanese government began marking the presence or absence of a suicide note, and recent annual reports issued by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) include notes as "data to determine cause/motive of suicide" (*jisatsusha no jisatsu no gen'in/dōki-betsu no handan shiryō*).[11] The tendency of the Japanese police and the media to mechanistically isolate motive from these notes has been rightly criticized by medical scholars.[12] And yet medical professionals, too, have been known to probe notes to diagnose the patient posthumously, and often anachronistically. For example, a Japanese researcher used the 2002 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* to label Fujimura Misao as having experienced a depressive episode based on

his writings a century earlier.[13] The media's own tendency to reductively deduce motives, especially surrounding hot-button contemporary issues like bullying (*ijime*) in the case of youth suicide, has been widely criticized by policy advocates, as has their tendency to reproduce suicide notes at all.[14]

In short, sociological, medical, and media discourse often converge to diagnose the pathologies of an individual or a society based on the words left behind. A 2001 article in *Chūō kōron* asks "a 29-character note: Why did this female university graduate student commit suicide?," while a 2005 *Shūkan Asahi* headline—"The note-less suicide that whispers its motive"—suggests that even when a note is nonexistent, motive is deducible from this fact.[15]

ISHO AS SELF-REPRESENTATION: THE ROYAL ROAD TO WHAT?

At most, only a third of all suicides in Japan leave behind notes. This statistic has been found to remain fairly constant, even during periods when suicide rates double, and it is comparable to such occurrences in many other nations.[16] In general, Japanese youths tend to leave notes more often than the elderly, women more often than men, and attempts more often than completed suicides. This has typically been interpreted as evidence that the former demographic "have stronger attachments to this world" (*gensei ni miren ga tsuyoi hito*) or alternatively that those who write a note exhibit greater volition and control over their choice to die.[17] Mental health professionals and policymakers now warn against assuming that the mere fact of writing signals control, calling for a more nuanced reading of the content, style, and context of such notes.

Dr. Edwin Shneidman, the founding father of the discipline of suicidology, began his research in 1949 when he inadvertently discovered a treasure trove of suicide notes in a veteran hospital, "a scientist's dream." They provided him with critical data for diagnosing "the suicidal mind" (to borrow the title of his 1996 monograph) or what he says was the closest thing to an available "patient history."[18] In 2004, a few years before his death, Shneidman reflected on his life's work and the use-value of such notes for mental health professionals: "At the very beginning, we believed (with excessive optimism) that, like Freud's notion about dreams being the royal road to the unconscious, suicide notes might prove to be the royal road to the understanding of suicidal phenomena. Reluctantly, after a decade or so of earnest efforts, I came to recognize that many notes are, in fact, bereft of the profound insights that we had hoped would be there."[19]

A similar sense of deflated optimism about the explanatory power of suicide notes can be found in the writings of Dr. Ōhara Kenshirō, a leading psychiatrist on suicide in Japan and the author of two monographs on suicide notes. In 1978, he reflected on the misconceptions he held about notes when he first began doing research on the subject a couple of decades earlier. While he had initially thought

Fujimura Misao's poem offered a "representative example of an *isho*," he later discovered in the files of his patients who had attempted suicide and in police records many that failed to live up to this lofty example. Instead, the majority were error ridden, illogical, scrawled with and on whatever was at hand—lipstick on a paper scrap, a matchbook cover, a sumo broadsheet. Moreover, most were filled with mundane, practical requests and "even those by famous writers somehow fail to deliver."[20] If both these mental health professionals warn against endowing suicide notes with too much importance, they also point out the danger of presuming the import of *not* writing. When Ōhara "asked [his] patients who survived an attempted suicide, 'Why didn't you write a note?' the majority of them responded: "Oh, now that you mention it, I guess I must've forgot."[21]

Where do all these cautions leave us? If not writing a suicide note tells us nothing more than that the individual forgot, then what, if anything, can the act of writing tell us?

Shneidman's own conclusion suggests the importance of stepping back from a diagnostic, forensic mode, whether medical or sociological, and applying a literary lens to help decipher these writings: "Now, it seems, we have come to rest somewhere in the middle, believing that, as a group, suicide notes are neither always psychodynamically rich nor psychodynamically barren, rather on occasion—when the note can be placed within the context of the known details of a life (of which that note is a penultimate part)—*then* words and phrases can take on special meanings, bearing as they do a special freight within that context."[22]

What is clear here is a shift from an unchecked belief in the transparency of language that might lay bare the writer-subject to a more measured rhetorical analysis. Rather than taking a single suicide note as an unfettered glimpse into the suicidal mind, Shneidman here suggests the need for close readings that are also deeply contextualized. While he rightly points out the need to consider them as part of the writer's biography, I would also stress the need to recognize that they are texts that, like any others, are also part of a larger corpus. As one Japanese psychiatrist writing in the late 1970s noted, "While it is possible to categorize suicide notes based on psychodynamics, since they have their own generic form of expression," they also require their own taxonomy.[23] In other words, suicide notes too are generic texts with their own rules and organizing principles.

GENERIC DISTINCTIONS OF NOTES

There often exists a generic template for last words, for both composing and judging them. For centuries in Japan, composing a last poem (*jisei*, 辞世) was de rigueur. That it came in the form of a thirty-one-syllable tanka or a seventeen-syllable haiku suggests the imposition of a clear structure, if not also its content to a large degree.[24]

Suicide notes also constitute a genre unto themselves. Like any genre, there is much diversity; as seen above, they can include anything from Fujimura Misao's lofty death poem to a note scrawled into the dirt or onto a paper scrap.[25] But also like any genre, they can be quite generic in nature. One famous experiment conducted by US psychiatrists in 1957 found that authentic and faked suicide notes differed so little in terms of content (both the mundane, practical requests and highly emotional ones) that lay readers could not tell the difference.[26]

In the late 1940s, Yamana Shōtarō surveyed suicide notes across early twentieth-century Japan and found striking continuity as well as key differences. He concluded that their content and style evolved over time, often tracking with literary developments. While the Meiji period (1868–1912) had "notes for the sake of notes" that tended to New Romanticism's vanity, self-mockery, and hyperbole, Taishō period (1912–26) ones were bold, concise, and straightforward; early 1930s notes were something of a hybrid of the two, even terser philosophic attempts to capture the pains of life or of the *ero-guru-nansensu* variety. With the onset of war, by the late 1930s, writing was replaced with even briefer, oral farewells, or flippant remarks, if they were remarked at all.[27] Intriguingly, in the 1930s, Japanese police actually used a literary taxonomy to categorize suicide notes into fifteen different genres, from death poems (*jisei*), open versus private letters, and abbreviated notices to aphorisms and manga sketches.[28]

As noted above, we should be skeptical about overgeneralizing any one era's style of suicide, since omissions and exceptions abound. Yet the notion that last words are influenced by generic requirements and by literary styles is worth highlighting here for several reasons. First, it tempers our desire to read these deliberate communications as subconscious slips of the pen that might allow readers "to glimpse the very depths of the human heart," to borrow the words of one Japanese literary critic touting a 1987 collection of famed last writings.[29] The sense that a suicide note offers a privileged unvarnished glimpse of the dead is similarly evident in contemporary media guidelines issued by the World Health Organization that call for self-censorship of suicide notes alongside any photographs of the deceased; the first item on its simple "What Not to Do" checklist is "Don't publish photographs or suicide notes."[30] Second, it usefully disrupts a natural tendency to read these texts with a focus only on motive. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for this study, it recognizes the ways that preexisting discursive modes could influence even these final momentous texts.

In what follows, my materials are broadly divided by genre with a focus on suicide notes in part 2 before turning to consider more fictional multimedia representations in part 3. As we will see, the divide is also never quite so clear-cut. Especially in the case of literary and visual artists who scripted their suicides into a note and/or into their artworks, these materials are not so easily divided into factual versus fictional media. The two were often tightly imbricated, sometimes by the writer's own design and sometimes by the reader's. What these examples

demonstrate are the ways that both writers and readers often situated these last writings vis-à-vis these genres and their own generic expectations.

THREE CASE STUDIES: AKUTAGAWA, KISHIGAMI, AND TSUBURAYA

In part 2, I first offer three in-depth case studies of self-designated "suicide notes" (*isho* or *nōto*). I include professional, aspiring, and amateur writers, both ones who claimed to be writing for and to others—Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's "A Note to a Certain Old Friend" (1927)—as well as those who were writing for themselves—the aspiring poet Kishigami Daisaku's "Note for Myself" (1960). My third example centers on Tsuburaya Kōkichi, an Olympic marathon runner and Self-Defense Forces soldier, who wrote two suicide notes in 1968, one to his superiors and another to his family.

In selecting these, I make no claims at representing the whole of any suicidal population. With just one-third of suicides leaving behind suicide notes, this would be an impossible task in any case. Moreover, many demographics are largely excluded here; most conspicuously missing are any women, as well as the elderly and teenagers, two groups with some of the highest suicide rates in contemporary Japan.[31] My first three examples are all young men; Akutagawa took his life at age thirty-five in 1927, Kishigami died at age twenty-one in 1960, and Tsuburaya at age twenty-seven in 1968 in his barracks.

While the first two were famed or aspiring men of letters living in Tokyo, Tsuburaya was a soldier and athlete from a small rural town. His notes offer an important counterbalance to those written by professional and aspiring writers with a possible eye to their posthumous publication. Yet even this example written by a complete amateur is known by virtue of the fact that it became the object of literary criticism written by leading literary figures of the day. This included two who themselves went on to commit suicide afterward: Mishima Yukio in 1970 and Kawabata Yasunari in 1972. These two authors offer their own intriguing comparison given the fact that Mishima left behind so very many texts anticipating his own suicide, while Kawabata died without leaving a trace.

These three case studies have been chosen to facilitate thinking through the acts of writing and reading in the face and wake of suicide, and as the latter case suggests, also the act of *not* writing too. For each, I resist the impulse to read only to answer the elusive question of motive. This is not out of the same sense often articulated by cynics, such as poet Hagiwara Sakutarō, who claimed that "suicide notes are overwhelmingly all nothing more than 'excuses.' Only the gods truly know the true reason for suicide. Not even the person who commits suicide can possibly know."[32] Rather, my hesitance stems from the sense that this question is not where the textual traces always lead. While subsequent readers may naturally turn to them in order to answer this, it is not necessarily the most pressing question for the

writer. Alternatively, it may be a false lead that obscures the multiple, and not always compatible, explanations offered in a variety of texts and contexts.

Too often, there is a tendency to cite and distill a suicide note down to only its most pithy of phrases, whether Fujimura's "incomprehensible" (*fukakai*) or, as we will see below, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's "vague anxiety" (*bonyari shita fuan*). Eminently quotable lines from notes by eminent individuals inevitably get more attention than other less illustrious examples, especially when they seem to encapsulate the complex motives for suicide in a single catchphrase.

In an effort to displace this singular focus, my first chapter on Akutagawa employs a more comprehensive reading strategy. I analyze his 1927 "A Note to a Certain Old Friend" alongside the host of other works he left behind that have been overshadowed by the fame of this note and its infamous "vague sense of anxiety." I read this note alongside and against its many intertexts and his many other suicide notes, as well as their tangled publication and distribution histories. These include works that he read and referenced in the note—from seventeenth-century playwrights to nineteenth-century philosophers—and other autobiographical and fictional texts that he himself wrote, some dated as late as the eve of his suicide and some from a decade before.

In the case of the aspiring young poet and university student Kishigami Daisaku (chapter 6), I take the opposite tact. I focus on a close reading of just one of the seven notes he left behind and designated as a writing meant only for himself. Titled "Boku no tame no nōto" (A note for myself), it was written during the seven-hour period immediately prior to his suicide. The condensed timeframe for its composition and the delimited audience lead to a different set of questions: What does it mean to designate oneself as the audience for a work that marks one's imminent self-erasure? And what kind of writing is produced with this audience and timing in mind?

In chapter 7, the young marathon runner and Self-Defense Forces lieutenant Tsuburaya offers an especially rich, if complex, case study. As a local and national hero, he was navigating personal and private identities in his last two notes. His pro forma apologies for failing family and country lent themselves to interpreting his suicide as a stereotypically Japanese response to failure. And yet the form of these notes exceeded their content to such a degree that they, along with its author, went on to have a surprising afterlife, prompting writings by both suicidal authors who, like Mishima, wrote "last letters all year long" (to borrow Nosaka Akiyuki's phrasing) and by those who, like Kawabata, chose not to leave behind a suicide note at all.

What this example suggests is that writing about the death of another—and about another's death writings—could also sometimes be a means of writing about one's own. As we will see, the writer Nosaka would write his own piece of literary criticism on *isho* that he published in a collection pointedly titled *Boku no shi no junbi* (My preparations for death, 1988). In the wrap-up to this chapter,

I discuss his blunt appraisal of *isho* by professionals and amateurs alike, ranging from elite kamikaze soldiers to farmer conscripts and from Fujimura and Ōgai to Tsuburaya and Mishima. His essay conveniently offers us an overview of the genre that cites several examples already encountered in earlier chapters. It also offers us the opportunity to reflect more on the ethics of undertaking the act of literary criticism in the case of suicide notes.

EXPANDING THE DIALOGUE AMONG THE DEAD: ETŌ JUN AND YAMADA HANAKO

In the final chapter of part 2, I seek to update and expand the pool by offering two case studies that address two populations underrepresented in both Nosaka's genealogy and my own case studies of *isho* thus far: the elderly and women. I first consider the much publicized suicide and suicide note of one of Japan's most famous literary critics, Etō Jun, in 1999 at age sixty-six and then the case of the young cult manga artist Yamada Hanako at age twenty-four in 1992. If Nosaka's essay offers a useful outsider and overview perspective of the genre from a distance, these two contemporary examples can remind us of the painful proximity and mortal consequences of this body of writings.

At first glance, this pair may seem to offer another study in contrasts, with the older conservative cultural critic at distinct odds with the alternative indie subculture to which Yamada belonged. In the wake of their suicides, however, each was taken as symbolic of a pressing contemporary issue, with Etō's as symptomatic of the ills of Japan's "graying society" and Yamada's representative of bullying (*ijime*). Rather than focus on the ways these suicides have been fit into these respective larger cultural narratives, in chapter 8 I focus on the common rhetorical strategies each writer employs in responding to what has been called "the exorbitant call to write one's own death."[33]

These writings all entail a complicated mode of address that imagines oneself dead but still speaking. It is the uneasy temporality of this act of writing in the face of death—and imagining its reading in its aftermath—that I explore throughout the remaining chapters in this book. In each case, I argue for the importance of considering how this act of writing fulfills a need for the writer, not just for its subsequent readers in retrospect. In other words, I suggest how the writer may also be its most important reader. Recognizing this, in turn, allows us to consider the text as both product and process. It opens up the question of why a person writes (or not) in the face of death.

5

A Note to an Old Friend, or Two

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

On July 24, 1927, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927) left behind a suicide note that he titled "Aru kyūyū e okuru shuki" (A note to a certain old friend). This decision is striking, for it acknowledges the work's status *as* a work. With this title, the note declares its status as a discrete text that can be neatly referred to, if not packaged and published under this name. It invites publication, reading, interpretation, and criticism.

For over a century, readers and critics have acquiesced. Notwithstanding the objections of some of Akutagawa's closest family and friends, the entire text was read aloud by Kume Masao, fellow writer and good friend of Akutagawa's, in a press conference the night of his death and then published in *Tokyo nichi nichi shinbun* the following day.[1] After being published in Akutagawa's collected works in 1968, it regularly appears in his complete works, either in a section of his letters for those organized by genre or seemingly aptly placed at the end for those that are arranged chronologically.

Just three days after his suicide, the first English-language translation appeared in the *Japan Times*. Unlike later heavily abridged, rather loose versions, this one is fairly complete and accurate, although it also omits several of what were presumably the more unfamiliar western texts and authors (an especially ironic situation considering their appearance in the original Japanese).[2] Students of Japanese of a certain generation might remember their own first encounter with excerpts of this text as a reading and translation exercise in Howard Hibbett and Gen Itasaka's *Modern Japanese: A Basic Reader*.[3]

No version elides its most famed phrase—"a vague sense of anxiety" (*bonyari shita fuan*). Early in the first paragraph, after describing the inability of those who

commit suicide and those who write about it to capture the complex motives behind any suicide, Akutagawa offers an explanation (of sorts) for his own:

> But, in my case at least, it is just out of a vague sense of anxiety.
>
> Ga, sukunakutomo boku no baai wa tada bonyari shita fuan de aru.

Without any sense of irony, critics have claimed that "he made clear his motives for suicide" and list the causes of Akutagawa's "vague sense of anxiety," including his fear of going insane like his biological mother, pangs over his affair with a married woman, his adoptive brother's suicide and financial debts, bodily and mental illness, or fellow writer and friend Uno Kōji's recent confinement in a mental asylum. With its vague gesture to a vague emotion, the phrase has offered a malleable and convenient catch-all that can describe any societal or personal crises, from unemployment to the plight of the graying society in the new millennium.[4]

In this chapter, I read this text against and alongside a host of other works left behind by Akutagawa that have been largely overshadowed by the fame of this note and its soundbite. Their tangled publication and distribution histories suggest a deeply entangled relationship between bodies of literature and bodies of artists, between the corpus and the corpse. Seeking out Akutagawa's many other "last" writings, versions often marked and marred by censorship, is not intended to discover some urtext that might better explain his suicide in retrospect. It instead serves to remind us of the ways that texts were also working prospectively for the living author who depicts the dead self. If they reveal the precarious nature of the hunt for textual clues in the wake of a suicide, they also suggest our ethical responsibilities as readers to undertake that hunt nonetheless.

INTENDED AND UNEXPECTED AUDIENCES

Akutagawa was fully aware that his note would be made public eventually and even tacitly approves its future publication. In its final lines, he asks only to "please manage somehow not to publish this letter for some years after my death. There is a chance that I will commit suicide so that it appears that I died from sickness [*byōshi*]." Here he suggests that the need to keep the note private (at least temporarily) stems from its capacity to reveal suicide as the true cause of death. But from whom does he hope to hide this note and his unnatural death? Who are its forbidden readers? Its desired ones? And who desires to read this?

Needless to say, we were not the intended readers of this text. Its title clearly designates a limited readership of one. Its "certain old friend" is both specific and unspecified, suggesting that we readers are invited to imagine ourselves as intimates, while just as easily suggesting that we are trespassers. If we are reading it, we must be the addressee. To think otherwise is to raise the ugly specter that we are unethically reading another's mail—and in a sense, we are. The note was meant

for his friend the writer Kume Masao. The designated audience for this text is not, however, as simple as it first appears. The call out to "a certain old friend" is filled with ambivalence, simultaneously an assertion of a highly circumscribed, closed circle of address and an admission, and even declaration, of the text's status as an open publication.

In the note, Akutagawa acknowledges that the readership for this work will reach far beyond its anonymous solo recipient, and he appears torn between contradictory desires to reveal to, and conceal various things from, his multiple audiences. He writes, "The final thing that I thought out was how to commit suicide in a clever way so as to avoid detection by my family members. After several months of preparation, I attained a certain degree of confidence. (It would not do for me to write about the particulars of this for the benefit of those who are close to me. And even if I were to write about them here, it would not constitute the legal crime of aiding and abetting suicide.)"

His paramount concern before suicide is avoiding detection by his nearest and dearest in order not to be deterred. It is not that he plans to conceal the act from them *after* he is dead. In fact, in another section of the note, he is adamant about his desire "to commit suicide in a way that ensures my corpse would not be seen by anyone other than my family members." His family is to be the privileged post-facto witness to his bodily remains.

For a wider audience, the note is to offer an account of "the long course toward suicide." Even at the risk of hurting his family, he asserts his "duty [*gimu*] to write about everything honestly." This entails close attention to the embodied experience of planning for death. While he includes a brief if spirited moral defense of suicide (citing the Agon Sutra) and a legal defense of the "ridiculously named crime" of aiding and abetting suicide, the bulk of his text addresses his method first and foremost with a lengthy debate on the merits and demerits of various options.[5]

Even as he desires to disclose the specifics of his chosen method, Akutagawa also feels compelled to conceal the "particulars" here. He implicitly contrasts two kinds of future readers: "those who are close to me," or more literally "those who are favorably disposed toward me" (*kōi o motte iru hito-bito*), and those antagonists who would read this text with a legalistic bent in an effort to suss out criminal blame. Although he scorns these crime-sniffing detectives, Akutagawa is not dismissive of the rubber-necking desires of his friendly readers and instead regretfully calls attention to his omissions. By anticipating both kinds of readers, Akutagawa suggests two alternate positions of identification for any future reader of the text: antagonist or intimate.

The title "A Note to a Certain Old Friend" simultaneously invites and refutes intimacy. It is marked by an act of self-censorship—the elision of the recipient's name, a coy non-reference that reveals the expectation of a broader readership from whom the friend's name must be kept secret. At the same time, the title also points out we are not that "certain" old friend Akutagawa had in mind. And yet by

leaving the addressee anonymous, Akutagawa leaves open the possibility that any of us may occupy this position.

When reading the body of the letter, the balance tilts toward invitation. The "certain old friend" of the title quickly disappears in favor of a direct address to an anonymous "you" as early as the note's third line: "In this last letter that I send to you." "You" (*kimi*) appears frequently in this short missive, a total of nine times. We readers can easily collapse ourselves with this "you." "In human-interest stories of the newspapers, [we] can discover any number of motives for suicide—poverty, sickness, or mental anguish." We "cannot but help to label [Akutagawa] Inhuman"[6] when reading that compared to his dying wish "to depict suicide as concretely as possible," "such things as pity toward my family are nothing."

But not everything in the letter suggests that we later readers, too, might imagine ourselves to be the designated reader-recipient. In the postscript, there is one shared private past memory that would apparently foreclose that possibility, a recollection of debating "Empedocles on Etna" under the bodhi tree twenty years earlier. This would seem to close off the circle of address. But Japanese scholars speculate that even this reference is not to Kume at all and instead refers to another of his classmates from the First Higher School, the philosopher Tsunetō Kyō.[7] In 1949, Tsunetō seems to have staked out his own claims for this privileged designation by publishing a book called *Kyūyū Akutagawa* (Old friend Akutagawa).

Anyone can occupy the designated reader's position by virtue of this slippery "you" and the nature of the epistolary form, which highlights a reader's sense of proximity to the author as well as the author's proximity to the subject of narration. As Samuel Richardson, the eighteenth-century English pioneer of the genre, famously noted, "*Much more* lively and affecting … must be the style of those who write in the height of a *present* distress, the mind tortured by the pangs of uncertainty … than the dry, narrative unanimated style of a person relating difficulties and danger surmounted."[8] Any reader can become the addressee of this emotionally charged missive. As Akutagawa himself acknowledges early in the note, it does not particularly matter who this "you" is: "It wouldn't really matter if I didn't convey my motives for committing suicide *to you in particular*" (emphasis mine, *toku ni kimi ni tsutaezu to mo ii*).

Although we are a privileged reader allowed into the inner circle of "old friends," we are also positioned as a potentially hostile one whose skepticism must be dispelled time and again. The majority of the direct addresses in the letter are moments when Akutagawa imagines the reaction of this skeptical reader-recipient. He wonders if "you will not be able to believe these words of mine," if "you will find these words of mine strange," or if "you will laugh at the contradiction that I love the beauty of nature but am planning to commit suicide." The repeating pattern of "you will likely …" (*kimi wa … arō*), which appears five times, anticipates a less-than-friendly reader response. Perhaps it suggests an effort to preemptively dismiss such reactions, but it can just as easily have the opposite

effect of engendering such skepticism. Who, after all, is in a better position to forgive or to criticize than a close friend?

With this highly ambivalent and splintered audience in place, Akutagawa multiplies the designated readership for this text. What I would stress here is that as much as these direct addresses elicit multivalent responses from his readers, they also suggest how the author himself was reading his own suicide note. Like the reader, the author hovers between the poles of intimate and antagonist, insider and outsider. That Akutagawa is doubling as a skeptical reader is particularly obvious when he aligns himself with the "you" in the letter, writing, "You probably think these words of mine a bit odd. *Even I too* now detect the oddness of my words" (emphasis mine).

His choice of title also signals that he is as much the audience for this text as any other person. Although commonly translated as "A Note," the specific word that Akutagawa uses here is instead "memo" (*shuki*). Whereas a "letter" (*tegami*) suggests a communication addressed to another person, a memo is something one might write for oneself.[9] Tellingly, Akutagawa uses both words to characterize this work; he calls it a letter at two points in the body of the text while calling it a memo in the title and postscript. The title, which literally translates as "a memo sent to a certain old friend," straddles the two poles, suggesting that the work is simultaneously an inward-directed communication and an externally directed one. Akutagawa repeatedly gauges the future reception of the note and of his own imminent suicide. In so doing, he himself becomes the audience for both. If we are positioned as a skeptical insider here, then Akutagawa is placed as a critical outside observer of his own missive and of his own suicide.

READING A CORPUS AND VIEWING A CORPSE

The spectacle of his corpse looms large in Akutagawa's imaginings throughout the letter. In a series of striking passages, he recounts his lengthy deliberations over his chosen method in lovingly gruesome detail. One by one, he tackles each component: method, locale, and choice of companion. He exhibits a keen awareness of the fact that each element of his suicide will be evaluated after he is dead, leading him to weigh each choice one by one with that specter in mind. This results in a constant tension between the embodied perspective of one who is about to commit suicide and the disembodied perspective of one who is left behind in its aftermath.

When considering what method to employ, his first concern is a very bodily one: "how to die without pain." But the best choice for this—death by hanging—is foreclosed to him because "when I imagined my hanging figure, albeit an extravagance to do so, I felt an aesthetic revulsion." In a characteristically ironic and detached moment here, Akutagawa acknowledges this "extravagance" only to allow himself another one, a parenthetical remark in which he recalls a lover with whom he "suddenly fell out of love because her penmanship was poor." Aesthetics and

FIGURE 20. Skull-and-bones ratings chart for suicide modus operandi in *The Complete Manual of Suicide*. From right to left: Hanging. Pain (1 out of 5 skulls), Time/Effort (2), Unsightliness (3), Inconvenience (1), Impact (2), Likelihood of Death (5). An ideal mixture that is reliable, simple, and painless, it is overwhelmingly popular among men and women of all ages. Your express ticket to suicide. Tsurumi Wataru (1993), *Kanzen jisatsu manyuaru*, Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 56. Courtesy Ōta Shuppan.

style are paramount. It is no coincidence that Akutagawa links forms of writing and forms of suicide in this suicide note that debates the proper aesthetic for both things. He rejects some methods (drowning, gun, and knife) as impracticable, but more often he rejects ones (hanging, throwing himself in front of a train or auto, and jumping from a building) that "impart an aesthetic revulsion" (*bi-teki ken'o o ataeru*). Ultimately, death by overdose proves to be his method of choice because it suits practical and aesthetic requirements (although he notes that it requires that he take pains to acquire the necessary drugs and pharmaceutical knowledge).

Akutagawa's deliberations of method share an uncanny resemblance to the bestselling 1993 *The Complete Manual of Suicide* by Tsurumi Wataru. As discussed in chapter 3, this how-to book offers chapter-by-chapter descriptions of suicidal methods, such as hanging, leaping, and gassing. Each method includes statistics and anecdotes, as well as a ratings chart that grades it in terms of various categories using a skull-and-crossbones symbol (fig. 20)—for example, in the case of "Leaping in Front of a Train," pain (medium), time/effort (minimal), unsightliness (extremely high), inconvenience to others (also extremely high), impact (fairly high), and finally, likelihood of death (guaranteed).[10] The inclusion of aesthetic criteria such as "unsightliness" (*migurushisa*) and "impact" (*inpakuto*) suggests a preoccupation with the reception of suicide on the part of the would-be suicide. This was an interest clearly shared by Akutagawa in his own deliberations. When he rejects those methods that rate very high on these scales, he invokes this same criterion, noting that such methods were "without a doubt unsightly" (*yahari migurushii no ni sōinai*).

For each method, Akutagawa also debates the "time/effort" and "inconvenience" involved, noting, for example, the high degree of effort required for overdosing and weighing the "convenience" (*bengi*) of dying alone against the hassle of coordinating the timing with a female partner who might otherwise serve as a "most useful springboard." In terms of location, worrying that property values will be adversely affected if he commits suicide in the family home, he "felt jealous of

the bourgeoisie who have the luxury of owning a villa … and in truth felt keenly inconvenienced [*jijitsu-jyō shimijimi fuben o kanjita*]," although he concludes, "There was no possible way to avoid this inconvenience [*fuben*]."[11]

Although he wants to delimit the audience who will view his bodily corpse and restrict it to his family members only, the letter, paradoxically, affords any number of future readers a glimpse at this corpse in textual form, arrayed in any number of tortured and reposeful poses. Akutagawa may have been attempting the impossible here, acting as a spectator and chronicler of his own death. But in figuring his body at such length with such lavish attention to its appearance in the aftermath, he also offers it up as a spectacle for a broader audience. The text becomes the proxy by which we, and he, can "see" the suicide either retrospectively or prospectively. Writing and reading enable an act of time travel whereby both readers and writers can be positioned both before and after the suicide, inside and outside the body of a suicide.

It is a privileged insider's view of suicide that Akutagawa claims to offer his readers. The note's first line declares his intent to compose a work that is unparalleled in the history of writing about suicide: "No one yet has ever written the psychology of a person who commits suicide himself just as it is [*ari no mama*]. … In this last letter that I send to you, I am hoping to clearly convey this psychology." Here Akutagawa invokes the rhetoric of sincerity and transparency that Edward Fowler identifies as the heart of the contemporary genre of *shi-shōsetsu* (autobiographical "I-novel" fiction); its "whole raison d'être rests on the powerful illusion of its textual transparency—its sincerity—which lets the reader view the author's experience 'unmediated' by forms, shapes, structures, or other 'trappings' of fiction."[12]

The final paragraph of Akutagawa's note comes closest to fulfilling this promise of offering a fully immersed point of view that collapses writer and reader and lets us see through his "last eyes" (*matsugo no me*):

> Because we humans are human-beasts, we have an animal-like fear of death. The so-called will-to-live is really just another name for animal strength. I too am nothing more than a human-beast. But with my loss of appetite, it seems I am gradually losing my animal strength. Where I now reside is a world of sick nerves that flow clear like ice. Last night when talking with a prostitute about her wages (!) I felt deeply how pitiful we humans who "live only for the sake of living" are. If only we could contentedly enter into an eternal sleep of our own volition, we would certainly be at peace, if not happy. But I have doubts as to when I will be able to commit suicide bravely. It is just that nature, for me at this point, is all the more beautiful than ever before. The contradiction that I love the beauty of nature but am planning to commit suicide will likely make you laugh. And yet nature is beautiful precisely because it is reflected in these eyes of my final days. More than anyone, I have seen, loved, and also understood. For that alone, even in the midst of my considerable pain, I am more or less satisfied.

I quote this passage at length because it is often excerpted in a way that privileges this final glimpse of the world through his dying eyes, a vision of "a world of sick nerves that flow clear like ice" and of "nature … all the more beautiful than ever before … because it is reflected in these eyes of my final days." In his acceptance speech for the 1968 Nobel Prize for Literature, Kawabata Yasunari famously excerpted just this portion of the note when citing his own earlier 1933 essay about Akutagawa that he titled "Matsugo no me" (Eyes in their last extremity).[13]

While it is true that Akutagawa emplaces us in an embodied point of view that sees nature's beauty crystallized, the passage is far from uninterrupted reverie in the natural world. Even here, Akutagawa allows himself to reflect on the irony of his "talking with a prostitute about her wages (!)" just the previous night. If his proximity to death is what enables him access to visions of unparalleled beauty, he is not yet entirely proximate. He toggles between a state of readiness and resistance to death with many declarations beginning with conjunctions that qualify or contradict his previous point: "But" (*shikashi*, appearing twice), "If only" (*moshi*), "It is just that" (*tada*), "And yet" (*keredomo*). Moreover, it is not altogether clear if we outside readers, too, have access to this world. As he himself indicates, "Nature is beautiful precisely because it is reflected in *my* final eyes" (emphasis mine). His use of a simile to describe "where [he] now resides" as "a world of sick nerves that flow clear like ice" suggests his own remove from the experience with metaphorical language trying to bridge that gap. In the letter's final lines when he bids Kume not to publish it immediately, Akutagawa becomes again removed from any pre-death reverie, returning to his preoccupation with the remains he leaves behind: his letter and his corpse.

If Akutagawa repeatedly anticipates a spectator for his corpse, he also readily anticipates a reader for his corpus, including this text. Perhaps this *is* "the psychology of a person who commits suicide himself just as it is": a highly self-conscious preoccupation with one's bodily and textual remains. But this hyperawareness of the bodies that will be left behind heightens a sense of remove that is far from any embodied, unmediated *ari no mama* ("just as it is"). The sense that Akutagawa was seeing and depicting his suicide through the lens of literature, philosophy, and history rather than as an immediate bodily experience was, in fact, critiqued by some of his contemporaries. One, the writer Chikamatsu Shūkō, noted that his "death was out of shared sympathies with ancient philosophers and literary men" and was an "all-too-bookish death" (*amari ni shokubutsu-teki na shi de aru*); critic Nakamura Shin'ichirō likened it to the dramatic suicide of Petronius who purposely delayed his death by staunching his slit wrists so he could write and entertain until the very end.[14]

It was likely not just his suicide that was being accused of being "literary, all too literary" (*bungei-teki na, amari ni bungei-teki*)—to borrow the title of Akutagawa's own 1927 essay—but his suicide note as well. The note repeatedly dwells on its

own status as a written text that will remain behind, one that is designed to join the ranks of, and even surpass, illustrious texts on suicide from the western canon. In a series of intertextual allusions, Akutagawa cites examples from foreign literature and philosophy that come close to fulfilling the promise of unmediated, direct access to the interiority of a suicidal mind but miss the mark. After dismissing the superficial explanations of suicidal motives offered in newspapers, he points to an unnamed short story by the French symbolist author Henri Régnier (1864–1936) that succeeds in depicting a suicide only insofar as it points out that "most [suicides] probably don't understand for what reason they commit suicide."[15] While the German philosopher Philipp Mainländer (1841–76) "skillfully depicts the long course toward suicide in abstract terms," Akutagawa "wants to write of the same thing much more concretely." In a final postscript, he contrasts himself with Empedocles, the ancient Greek philosopher and statesman whose biography reveals to him just "how ancient is the desire to make oneself into a god." Unlike Empedocles, who was "widely regarded as sharing this tendency with modern artists," in the letter's final line, Akutagawa resists such temptation and instead makes himself "out to be a mere lowly man."[16]

Significantly, these models often not just wrote about suicide but also attempted or committed suicide themselves. According to Greek legend, Empedocles leaped into the crater of Mount Etna to prove that he was an immortal god. His death is one of the most often dramatized accounts of suicide in ancient Greek history. Matthew Arnold's 1852 "Empedocles on Etna" offers an example of a dramatic poem that stages an encounter between the despairing Empedocles when "one of his moods is on him" and two friends, a physician and a harp-playing poet, who in an echo of Papageno conspire to soothe him through music and song. Although at first successful, "How his brow lighten'd as the music rose!" when "Alone!— / On this charr'd, blacken'd, melancholy waste, / Crown'd by the awful peak, Etna's great mouth, / Round which the sullen vapour rolls—alone," Empedocles chooses suicide.[17] This is the poem that Akutagawa recalls debating heatedly with his "old friend" twenty years earlier in the postscript to the note.

As if sifting through foreign examples for potential models, Akutagawa also cites other western writers who attempted suicide. When debating whether to die alone or with a partner, he notes that the French playwright Jean Racine (1639–99) "tried to drown himself in the Seine River with Molière and Boileau." He writes that the German writer Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811) "had solicited his (male) friends any number of times to be his companion in death before he committed suicide." Although Akutagawa does not specify the fate of either author, Racine lived until fifty-nine and became well known for depicting "death and suicide, in particular in his tragic plays," while Kleist killed himself at age thirty-four in a platonic love suicide with a terminally ill woman who had become his confidante, and their farewell letters along with an account of their final night together became part of the literary canon.[18]

Above all these examples, the German poet and philosopher Philipp Mainländer, who committed suicide at age thirty-four, just one year younger than Akutagawa, stands out as the most important to Akutagawa. References to his writings bracket the text. Early on in the note, Akutagawa depicts himself as an avid reader in the years and moments leading up to his suicide: "For the past two years I have thought of nothing but death. It is during this time that I read Mainländer with my usual fervor." Though Akutagawa does not mention any specific titles, he was most likely referring to Mainländer's magnum opus *Die Philosophie der Erlösung* (The philosophy of redemption, 1886), which has been said to offer "perhaps the most radical system of pessimism known to philosophical literature."[19] After completing his lengthy disquisition on suicidal method that makes up the bulk of his note, Akutagawa then writes, "I calmly completed all these preparations and now there is only death to play with. From now on, my heart is very close to the words of Mainländer [*taitei Mainrenderu no kotoba ni chikai*]."

What does Akutagawa seek in these many suicidal authors and texts? And what does he find? He inserts himself into this illustrious genealogy of writers even as he sets himself apart. Importantly, he characterizes himself as both writer and reader in the moments before suicide. As an intimate reader of Mainländer, he discovers an affinity that transcends the half century and oceans that divide them. This is precisely the kind of reader he seeks for his own suicide note, but one that he fears will elude him and his text. He worries, "Perhaps you will be unable to believe my words … unless you are a person who is close to me and who has shared circumstances close to my own [*boku ni chikai hito-bito no boku ni chikai kyōgū ni inai kagiri*] over the past ten years." His desire for proximity, a closeness between writer and reader, is palpable here.

Perhaps there is a more macabre connection with his invocation of these specific writers and texts. In the case of both Empedocles and Mainländer, art fails to save the artist. The poem "Empedocles on Etna" stages the failed intervention of two friends to stop the philosopher from committing suicide by playing him the poem-songs that he no longer himself produces. For Empedocles, neither composing nor listening to music offers salvation. The example of Mainländer in particular offers an example that gruesomely implicates art in an artist's suicide; he died by hanging, using a pile of advance copies of his magnum opus as a platform. For Mainländer, the artistic product even aids and abets the suicide with a piece of writing literally offering the writer a steppingstone for suicide.

The fact that Akutagawa is declaring himself an intimate reader-critic of these many suicidal authors and texts in a note that itself self-consciously tackles the "right" methods for writing and committing suicide suggests the significant degree to which acts of writing and reading are implicated in the act of suicide. But what kind of relationship between writing/reading and dying is being asserted here?

Akutagawa's own references to the failure of art to sustain the suicidal artist may lead us to conclude, as many commentators have, that Akutagawa was defeated as

a writer in the end. This interpretation was most famously advanced by Miyamoto Kenji in his seminal 1929 essay "Haiboku no bungaku: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke-shi no bungaku ni tsuite" (Literature of defeat: Regarding the literature of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke). The Marxist literary critic depicts Akutagawa as an artist who succumbed to literary history, his suicide marking the death knell for petty-bourgeois aestheticism that indulged in self-referential autobiographical works rather than socially and politically engaged literature.[20] For many critics, Akutagawa's last writings offered de facto evidence of an impending literary and literal death. Writing in 1969, Nakamura Mitsuo summed up the conventional view of him as an artist who "in his last years sacrificed himself" to a literary ideal: "Akutagawa, after fully displaying his talents as a precocious narrative writer, was confronted by the crisis in which he himself came to deny his own former works. *Haguruma* (Cogwheels), *Aru ahō no isshō* (The life of a certain fool) and other works of his later years, are the painful monuments of a writer who, with no gift or desire of writing 'I' novels, came to surrender himself to the 'I' novel as the ideal literary form of the age."[21]

In the same year, Yoshida Sei'ichi characterized these two posthumously published works (alongside a third titled "Anchū mondō" [Dialogue in darkness]) as "a record of the bitter defeat of his life," echoing Akutagawa's contemporary Satō Haruo who had seen in these works a "last-ditch effort [*hisshi na doryoku*] to infuse them with life."[22] For these critics, it was as if Akutagawa poured his life into his final works before capitulating to the death that lay before him.

Some of Akutagawa's own last writings certainly encourage these interpretations, especially their final lines which present the poignant image of a failed writer. "Aru ahō no isshō" (A fool's life) ends with section 51, "Haiboku" (Defeat), which eerily anticipates his subsequent suicide by drug overdose: "The hand taking up the pen began to tremble, and before long he was even drooling. The only time his head ever cleared was after a sleep induced by eight-tenths of a gram of Veronal, and even then it never lasted more than thirty minutes or an hour. He barely made it through each day in the gloom, leaning as it were upon a chipped and narrow sword."[23]

His other most famous posthumously published story, "Haguruma" (Cogwheels) ends with a plaintive cry: "—I don't have the strength to keep writing this. To go on living with this feeling is painful beyond description. Isn't there someone kind enough to strangle me in my sleep?"[24]

In these final lines, Akutagawa stages the failed attempt at writing as cure. Yet rather than assuming a simple causality between acts of writing (or the failure to write) and suicide, we need to recall several things. First, Akutagawa is continuing to write here, even if he is writing about the inability to write. Second, interpreting these last works as a death knell—for a literary trend or a literary man—is a necessarily retrospective reading afforded only by the gift of hindsight. Third, these few works were not the only things that Akutagawa was writing in his final days and months, as discussed in greater detail in the next section. Finally, rather than subscribing to a teleological view of his literary creations as inevitably leading to

his literal self-destruction or as an epic battle between life and death, art and life, writing and death, we should recall his own depiction of himself as a writer and reader in a state of suspension until the very end.

As Akutagawa writes in the penultimate paragraph of "A Note to a Certain Old Friend," after completing his preparations for suicide, "I am now only playing with death [*ima wa tada shi to asonde iru*]. From now on, my heart is very close to the words of Mainländer." For Akutagawa, aesthetic creation and appreciation is predicated on this state of being in-between, of lingering in an interminable moment that delays the suicide in the not-too-distant offing. This is not any attempt to claim that he was some masterful Author who somehow managed to be inside and outside the texts that he reads and writes, before and after the life and death that he depicts. If Akutagawa is not a victim of these many texts, neither is he their master. Instead, he offers a highly self-conscious staging of that struggle.

Rather than the image of one who is toying with death from some position on high, the figure of the author that emerges here is one in a state of suspension. He is between life and death, between writing and reading. He immerses himself in death, playing with it as it plays on him, changing how he sees natural beauty. He plays with texts, reading and writing *about* reading and writing them, but is also lost in/with them. The author is not only outside the text but inside it as well; to quote Roland Barthes, "Lost in the middle of the text (not *behind* it like a god of machinery) there is always the other, the author."[25] I would add that authors are not necessarily limited to the role of creator but can also be readers lost amid the texts of their own and others' creation.

With its dizzying array of intertextual allusions, Akutagawa ties his works to other bodies of writing and to other authorial bodies. He also includes a series of self-referential clues that create a tangled web of texts that he himself wrote. In the following section, I analyze the "Note" alongside and against Akutagawa's many other "last" works that implicate the authorial body but defy any linear, literal reading.

A CERTAIN OLD FRIEND AND A CERTAIN FOOL

In "A Note to a Certain Old Friend," Akutagawa explicitly references his semiautobiographical short story "Aru ahō no isshō" (A fool's life) as if the two pieces work together to create a complete picture of his suicide. He writes:

> I have the duty to write about everything honestly. (I have dissected the vague anxiety I feel toward my future. I believe I have fulfilled this for the most part in my 'Fool's Life.')
>
> Boku wa nanigotomo shōjiki ni kakanakereba naranu gimu o motte iru. (Boku wa boku no shōrai ni taisuru bonyari shita fuan mo kaibō shita. Sore wa boku no 'Ahō no isshō' no naka ni daitai wa tsukushite iru tsumori de aru.)

Together, the two works promise to make for two halves of a neat whole that will strip bare the writer for the reader. This promise was echoed in his prefatory note to the story addressed to Kume, which ended with a highly self-conscious invitation to "go ahead and strip off the skin of this urbane sophisticate and laugh away at the fool in this manuscript who is me."[26] His use of the analogy of autopsy in both these pieces is provocative. If the story invites the reader to conduct a metaphorical autopsy on the writer through the act of reading, by "peeling off my skin" (*boku no hada o hagisaesureba*), the note acknowledges writing as the means by which an author might conduct his own postmortem or "dissection" (*kaibō*).

While the note is focused on the "concrete" preparations leading to suicide, the story is designed to tackle the more elusive motives behind it. And yet in the very next sentence, Akutagawa admits that his account in the note is less than "everything" since he "intentionally left out the effect of societal factors" citing his "doubts as to whether societal conditions are ever fully understood by the one who lives amid them." Despite Akutagawa's suggestion that the two works be read as companion pieces, he also repeatedly points to the elisions within them and the gaps that exist between them.

Given the explicit reference to the story in the note, the note would seem to contain the story neatly within it. The dates of composition would also seem to support this, as would their titles. The story is dated June 1927 and the note in July, the month of Akutagawa's suicide. This would seem to suggest that Akutagawa finished writing this last story and then wrote his suicide note just before dying. With their echoing titles that both begin with "A Certain" (*Aru*)—"Aru ahō no isshō" and "Aru kyūyū e okuru shuki"—the two works make for a neat sequential pair.[27]

Oddly, though, in the note, the story is referred to without this echoing title. Akutagawa calls it only "my 'Fool's Life'" (*boku no 'Ahō no isshō'*). His choice of shorthand title here may be just that, an abbreviation. But it also suggests the possibility that the story's title, at least, was not finalized until after the note's own completion and choice of title. Based on extant draft manuscripts, it is clear that Akutagawa revised the story's title at least two other times, initially titling it "Kare no yume—Jiden-teki na esukisū" (His dream—A biographical *esquisse*), the French word for sketch, or alternatively "myth" (*shinwa*).[28] In contrast, in the story itself, Akutagawa refers to the story with its complete title in its second to last section that begins with this line: "Once he finished writing 'The Life of a Certain Fool' he happened to see a stuffed swan in a secondhand shop."[29] Here the title appears in full despite the fact that this is a text that we are still reading and that he is still writing.

The temporality of writing, reading, and dying is anything but clear. Just as texts seem to contain another, each text spills out of that container, sometimes exceeding even its own bounds. In "A Fool's Life," the protagonist is even depicted as having "finished writing" the very text that we hold in our hands and that continues on for two more sections. No text, writer, or reader sits entirely outside the other; instead, all are hopelessly entangled. Or rather, there is a move to be both

inside and outside the text, and even inside and outside the bounds of mortality itself. Death itself offers no finality. To wit, the chapter title "Death" repeats itself twice in the story, first appearing in section 44 and then again in 48, still three chapters shy of the story's end.[30] Moreover, this second excerpt opens with death only to negate that death: "48. Death: He did not die with her."

In the aftermath of Akutagawa's suicide, clues are sought in his "last writings" as if they could illuminate the end. The desire to read the end into endings is particularly pervasive. The final lines of "Cogwheels" and "A Fool's Life"—a plaintive cry for "someone kind enough to strangle me in my sleep" or the forlorn image of a drug-addled writer with pen in hand, "leaning upon a chipped and narrow sword"—are particularly seductive in this respect. They seemingly offer us a glimpse of what Jean Améry has called "the situation before the leap."[31] But rather than a prospective glimpse at an imminent suicide, this act of looking is always necessarily retrospective for readers. We trace and sift through the clues with the benefit of hindsight. This can obscure as much as it reveals by encouraging a selective accounting of only those "last" works that accord with the larger desired explanation.

As Seiji Lippit points out, this reading considerably flattens the diversity of his late productions to accord with an overarching narrative of defeat: "Rather than representing any simple sense of defeat or an uncritical conversion to the I-novel, Akutagawa's output in the final months of his life was an active exploration of different avenues of literary expression and different modes of representation," ranging from the autobiographical to satirical, and including experimental film scenarios, literary criticism, aphorisms, and poetry.[32] Yet it is his manuscripts marking self-death that draw the most attention posthumously. Beongcheon Yu, for example, calls "Cogwheels" a "sepulchral piece," while Donald Keene writes, "After reading 'Cogwheels' we can only marvel that Akutagawa did not kill himself sooner."[33] Even when scholars do acknowledge the gap in time between his writing this story and his eventual death, the timing of its composition is linked to yet another earlier suicide attempt by Akutagawa with close family friend Hiramatsu Masuko.[34]

If we read a text with the knowledge that it was written in the final days, weeks, or even months of the writer's life, we read it one way: retrospectively as marking the last words of this suicidal author.[35] The end of writing leads seamlessly to the end of life. But even the writing of a suicide note can never coincide with the end. And in the note, we should recall that Akutagawa is figured not just as a frustrated writer but as a reader until the very end. Or more accurately, he is figured as both a writing-reader and a reading-writer. He is a dissatisfied reader (of newspapers, Régnier, and even his beloved Mainländer) who must turn to writing in order to satisfy his perceived need for a text that would capture the psychology of a suicide "just as it is." But in the very end of the note, in a postscript no less, he is again a reader-critic, this time of the Empedocles poem that itself depicts the attempts to delay a suicide with art. By their nature, postscripts always delay the end of writing

(and reading). This one even moves back in time, marking a return to his naive youth. It forestalls the end of the text and the end of the life, even as it anticipates it. Reading and writing may be preparatory, but they are also dilatory.

Many of Akutagawa's late writings include similarly recursive moments that rush forward only to circle back. The note addressed to Kume Masao that Akutagawa attached as a preface to his story "A Fool's Life" is dated June 20, 1927, over a month prior to his suicide. If this goodbye note is a bit premature, his goodbye in the note itself also occurs prematurely: in line 7 of this ten-line note, he says "And so it is goodbye" (*De wa sayōnara*).

It is folly to privilege any one of Akutagawa's texts as "The End" as if one could offer *the* final utterance, the final punctuation mark of the author's life and works. Perhaps it is no coincidence that his posthumously published stories end with ellipses ("Three windows" and "Dream"), with a rhetorical question ("Cogwheels"), and with clauses that indicate continuative actions ("A Fool's Life" with *-nagara*). The undated "Dialogue in darkness" ends not with an ending, but with a beginning: "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke! Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, lay your roots down firmly in the ground. You are a reed blown about by the wind. The weather may change any time. Just brace yourself. For your own sake. And for the sake of your children. Do not flatter yourself unduly. Yet avoid becoming sycophantic too. From this point on, you start again [*Kore kara omae wa yarinaosu noda*]."[36] It is also no coincidence that in the aftermath of Akutagawa's suicide, literary scholars have not stressed this work that ends with a call for renewal and rebirth.[37]

In reading Akutagawa's last works, perhaps we should take a cue from his own writings that defy easy linearity and causality. In an earlier story from September 1925 titled "Shigo" (After death), the protagonist dreams of the impossible conversations he might have in the aftermath of his own death. To his wife, who he is distressed to find has already remarried, he complains about his inability to sever his worldly ties: "Even though I'm dead, do you think I can just up and die off? [*Sore jya shindatte shinikireru mono ka*.]" Akutagawa's many posthumous texts with their complex intertextualities and temporalities defy any labeling of "post." Like the proverbial snake eating its own tail, each threatens to swallow itself and the many other tales that proliferate in its wake. And all texts are revealed to have the potential of becoming what are aptly called "ghostly works" in Japanese: *maboroshi no sakuhin*.

TANGLED TEXTUAL REMAINS AND A PRECARIOUS PUBLICATION HISTORY

In his notes to Kume, Akutagawa entrusted posthumous publication plans to his friend. He bid him to bide his time in the case of the note but left "A Fool's Life" "to [him] to decide when and where to publish this manuscript—or whether to publish it at all." This would seem to leave the two companion texts that purport to explain his suicide exclusively in the hands of this certain, dear old friend.

And yet Kume was not the original recipient. Nor was "A Note to a Certain Old Friend" the only suicide note Akutagawa left behind.

Akutagawa left behind no fewer than ten suicide notes: the two to Kume, one to his three children, two to his wife, Fumiko, one note to his artist friend Oana Ryūichi, at least one to his other close writer-friend Kikuchi Kan, and an unspecified number of others to relatives. The notes to Oana and Kikuchi were written earlier than any other of these texts, in the spring of 1927, with Kikuchi's dated April 16, and Oana's believed to have been written around the same time.[38] With the exception of the note to Oana, these others were left for his family to discover at his deathbed, alongside a copy of the Bible that lay open next to his body.[39] The notes to his wife and children were discovered in his yukata sleeve when the family doctor was attempting to revive him. Each contains detailed instructions providing for its distribution, or alternatively, its destruction.

One note addressed to his wife bids its own destruction in a postscript that ironically still remains even though the body of the letter has never been recovered: "P.S. At the time of my death, show this note to the three of them. Once you have fulfilled this condition, do not forget to commit it to flames."[40] In the other note to his wife, a numbered list with six items in total, Akutagawa included the following provision for distributing or destroying yet another note: "4. Consult with Dr. Shimojima about whether to call it a suicide [*jisatsu*] or a death from illness [*byōsatsu*]. If you decide upon suicide, then give Kikuchi the suicide note titled 'To Kikuchi.' If not, incinerate it. As for the other note ('To Fumiko'), read it over and without fail try to follow [my] dying wishes as much as possible." This second note to Fumiko included a provision for its own destruction as well. Item 6 bid her to "Immediately destroy this note." (*Roku, Kono isho o tadachi ni shōki se yo*.)[41]

Akutagawa's clear and repeated instructions for destroying notes might seem to suggest that they included something scandalous. The second note to his wife remains extant in its entirety, however, and the only secret it reveals is that his was a self-willed death. It indicated both that "any resuscitation attempts are absolutely forbidden" and that the family should temporarily obfuscate the cause of death by "announcing to any visitors that he had 'suffered heatstroke' out of fear that it will otherwise stir up the wider public" and especially to protect his best friend Oana Ryūichi.[42] Like the note to Kume, any text that would reveal the real cause of death is to be withheld. While the letters are marked by suicide, his corpse may not be.

Needless to say, his injunctions to destroy the notes were willfully disregarded in the wake of his suicide. "A Note to a Certain Old Friend" was swiftly published in the next day's morning edition of national newspapers. The shorter note to Kume continues to serve as the prologue to "A Fool's Life" to this day (alongside the detailed footnotes that Akutagawa feared would be added to identify the story's real-life counterparts). His other notes to Kume, Oana, Kikuchi, his wife, and his children appear lined up neatly in his complete works in a section for wills and testaments (*Isho*).[43] The handwritten copies of four of these

notes—those to his wife and his children and the one to Kikuchi, long thought to have been destroyed as per his demand—were rediscovered in the family home by Akutagawa's granddaughter Teruko during her 2008 spring cleaning. They have since been bequeathed to the Nihon Kindai Bungakukan and were republished in their entirety in 2009.

The likely explanation for why only "A Note to a Certain Old Friend" and not one of the others was chosen for immediate publicization is its highbrow literary qualities that obscure its rawer autobiographical details. Some editors cite the many revisions made by Akutagawa on the handwritten manuscript as if to attest to his self-awareness of it as a literary creation.[44] Oana somewhat bitterly likened this note to "one's Sunday finest clothing" (*akiraka ni yosoyuki no mono*).[45] In contrast, the note addressed "To my children" contains heart-wrenching fatherly advice bidding his three surviving children to "think of Oana Ryūichi as your father and follow his instructions" (item 3), to "take compassion on your mother" (6), and a final reminder that "Your father loves you" (8). Above all else, he warns them to "avoid becoming high-strung like your father" (7), reminding them to "never forget that life is a battle unto the death" (1) and that "If you get worn out by this battle, commit suicide like your father. But, unlike your father, avoid causing others any unhappiness" (4).[46]

One curious exception was the note to Oana, whose publication was delayed for twenty-four years until 1951 when Oana rediscovered it among his papers. Like "A Note to a Certain Old Friend," this one also appears to have been designed for both private and public consumption. It adopts a more literary form than the other notes to his family members and friends with their numbered and bullet-point provisions that are concerned with practicalities like dispersing keepsakes, returning and retrieving borrowed items, and instructions about his gravestone etching.[47] According to Oana, he chose to deliberately self-censor this note right afterward so as not to stir up a fuss over the adulterous affair that Akutagawa identifies as a key source of his anguish in its opening lines: "We humans do not easily go about committing suicide because of one single incident. I commit suicide in order to settle the final accounts of my past. And yet, what stands out as a significant incident among these is the fact that I committed the crime [of adultery] with the wife of Mr. Hide when I was 29 years old."[48]

Despite his language of criminality here, Akutagawa firmly resists a confessional tone in other parts of the note. He asserts that he "does not feel any remorse over having committed this crime" but does "regret only that [his] life suffered negative consequences because of [his] choice of partner," a woman with "excessive egoism and animal instincts" whose "relentless pursuit constantly caused [him] trouble." He ends the note with a postscript that returns to his extramarital affairs in a tone of ironic self-deprecation: "I feel deep gratitude for the goddesses—(I use the plural here, but only in the sense that there was more than one. I'm not that much of a Don Juan.)—who, even if they loved me, did not torment me."

Although the bulk of this note deals with this "troublesome" affair, some sections touch on other contributing causes that include his obligations as an adopted son, husband, and father, as well as his fears over being the son of a madwoman. He writes:

> Naturally, I do not want to die. But living is too painful. People may laugh at this fool [*ahō*] who commits suicide despite having a father, mother, wife, and children. But, if I were all alone, perhaps I would not commit suicide. As an adopted son, I never once in my life said anything that was even remotely selfish. (Or perhaps I should say instead that I couldn't do so. I regret also this "filial attitude" toward my adoptive parents. But this too was something I could do nothing about.) Committing suicide now may be the single selfish thing I've done in my whole life. Like all youths, there was a time when I had lots of dreams. But when I look back now, perhaps I was just the child of a madwoman after all. At this point in time, I feel only hatred toward all things, myself included of course.

What is notably different about this note to Oana is that Akutagawa identifies himself primarily as a husband, lover, son, and father rather than as a literary man. His sole mention of his artworks is confined to the lyric poetry he wrote subsequent to his disastrous affair in order to sublimate his romantic feelings for other women. The only literature he mentions reading is August Strindberg's autobiographical *Confessions of a Fool* while in China, which causes him to "laugh bitterly realizing that he too wrote about lying to his lovers." Even his affinity with another author here is framed in terms of similarities between their personal lives rather than their shared occupations as literary men.

Given its focus on the more mundane causes of suicide, it is not all that surprising that this note was not immediately published, whether out of a concern for sculpting a desirable posthumous image of their dead artist friend or out of libel considerations (even when it was published in 1951, the name of the cuckolded husband was blanked out to read Mr. □). But perhaps we should not be too quick to try to divide things along the lines of private versus public, familial versus occupational identities, or mundane versus literary concerns. After all, in the final postscript, Akutagawa compares himself to Don Juan, the fictional womanizer par excellence. Significantly, in what appears to be a deliberate echo of his story, he characterizes himself in this note as both a "fool" (*ahō*) of a husband, son, and father who commits suicide despite his many familial ties, and as an author who is a "fool" (*chijin*) confessing his extramarital affairs in the autobiographical mode.

Another much more prosaic reason helps explain the delay. Akutagawa wrote so very many suicide notes during the course of his life that it was hard to keep track of them all. In his memoir *Futatsu no e* (Two drawings), Oana recounts how he initially thought (and mistakenly reported) that he had returned this note to Akutagawa upon his request in 1927, only to rediscover it among his papers when writing up an essay on "In a Grove" after Kurosawa's film adaptation *Rashōmon*

was released in 1950. (Oana also mentions in passing that he had incinerated at least one other note that mentioned the name of their mutual friend, the writer and critic Nanbu Shūtarō, after his death in 1936, presumably because it was libelous.)[49] So prolific was Akutagawa's production of suicide notes and so frequent was his dispersal and retrieval of these notes—sometimes asking for one back before giving another, sometimes returning an earlier one—that Oana claimed not to be sure how many versions he received over the years or how many were in his possession at any one time. He describes how beleaguered Akutagawa's wife was at her husband's propensity to write suicide notes ad nauseam: "His wife had to busily keep her eye on each and every corner of his study for Akutagawa was always writing suicide notes. It seems that since her husband left them scattered here and there, the maids would end up reading them while cleaning the room. He would always be sticking them in the leaves of books or hiding them behind furniture or something. She said it was a real pain."

The sheer number of notes published or suppressed, distributed, delayed, or destroyed illustrates just how precarious textual remains are in the wake of their author's death. As "writings left behind" (*isho*, 遺書), suicide notes may be the author's last word, but they are bequeathed and beholden to a reader, and sometimes also to a publisher. Their posthumous fate depends on the sometimes deliberate and sometimes haphazard ways that these readers read, receive, and circulate these texts. Even in the case of such a heavily scripted and planned death as Akutagawa's, dictating one's own literary legacy was a tricky proposition.

In yet another work titled "Isho" that Akutagawa had written back in 1916, his narrator acknowledges the tenuous nature of writing and distributing one's last word:

> My reasons for writing this note are extremely complicated. I myself don't clearly know why I write this note. … But I couldn't not write this note. Something inside me demands that I do so. Or rather something inside me rejects it, but my anxiety toward that something compels me to write. At any rate, I decided to write this note. I have no idea whether I can finish writing it, or even if I do manage to finish it if I'll have the courage to preserve it until the time comes.[50]

Despite the title and the repetition of the phrase in the above passage, "this note [*kono isho*]" does not appear in the wills and testaments section of his complete works alongside the many other *isho* that Akutagawa left behind. Instead, it appears in the section of his "unfinished fictional works [*Miteikō: Shōsetsu*]." In the afterword to the volume in which this work appears, critic Yoshida Sei'ichi notes his discomfort with publishing such "unfinished manuscripts," especially "in the case of an author who hated half-done works as much as Akutagawa." He nonetheless concludes by suggesting that their value lies in their incompleteness: "And yet, unlike his finished works, they allow us to perceive the motives held deep in his heart and the raw, naked face of the dead."[51]

FIGURE 21. Oana Ryūichi's sketch of Akutagawa's "death face" (*shinigao*). Cover image for Oana Ryūichi (1956), *Futatsu no e: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke no kaisō*, Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha.

Instead, I would suggest that what it offers is akin to a death mask: an impression taken in the immediate aftermath of death. It, too, purports to capture the face of the dead. Like this sketch drawn by Oana that serves as the cover image of his memoir (fig. 21), it offers a proxy for the deceased. It may seem to reveal to those left behind a privileged glimpse of their dead in this final moment, but it is an approximation, and a highly mediated one at that. Perhaps it was the delayed recognition of this that caused Oana to retitle the subheading of his memoir *Futatsu no e* (Two drawings). Initially published in December 1932 with the subtitle "The true face [*shinsō*, 真相] of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's suicide," the 1956 republication more modestly claimed to be a "Reminiscence" (*kaisō*, 回想). Writings left behind are as malleable as our memories. Akutagawa's "face" comes in the forms of texts and images that are as sculpted as the plastic medium of the death mask.

FACING THE DEAD

In an essay titled "Autobiography as De-Facement," literary critic Paul de Man analyzes two literary genres that offer the false promise of unmasking the author: autobiography and epitaphs. He writes that "autobiography always looks slightly disreputable and self-indulgent" because it "seems to belong to a simpler mode of referentiality." Here, he points out how autobiography purports to collapse life

and art, or the author's corporeal and textual bodies. The epitaph, on the other hand, "presents an imaginary or dead person as speaking" and thus risks becoming a "tender fiction of the voice-from–beyond-the-grave."[52] If the former risks eliding the gap between the physical body of the author and their textual creations, the latter risks eliding the temporal gap between the dead and the living. The dangers of these genres are twofold, resembling the challenges involved when a living author offers a textualized version of the dead self. They point to the physical and temporal limitations inherent in the project of writing in the face and wake of death.

When we ourselves turn to read and to write, we, too, face these limitations. I suggest that we need to resist the temptation to offer only retrospective, selective readings colored by hindsight from the safe outside position of a reader, and to instead consider how these texts offered authors an embodied experience of writing and reading their own death. I make a case for close readings that insist on proximity to the texts (and their specific production and distribution histories) and on proximity to the authorial body, even at the risk of getting our hands dirty in this mess of bodies. This is especially important in the case of an author like Akutagawa, who so insistently entwined textual and corporeal bodies. But it is crucial not to collapse all distinctions between these things. Here, we might take our cue from Akutagawa by recalling that he drew an important distinction between the two-dimensional textual body and the flesh-and-blood authorial one. He may have promised to offer the readers of his manuscript a full view of the author stripped bare, but he also denied anyone other than his family members even a glimpse of his actual corpse.

After an author's death, the act of reading can come to resemble a postmortem. It seems to offer a means to dissect the bodily remains by proxy and raises the perennial question of how to interpret the relationship between bodies of works and bodies of authors (*sakka-ron*). The importance of the reader in construing this relationship cannot be underestimated, nor can the work of canonization—the ways that certain texts come to circulate in certain, often highly redacted, forms at the expense of others. Especially in the case of suicide, there emerges a desire for a palatable and coherent narrative about a death that is often anything but neat or palatable.

6

A Note for Oneself

Kishigami Daisaku

Kishigami Daisaku (1939–60), a third-year university student and aspiring poet, left behind seven letters to friends and family alongside one manuscript that he designated as being written for himself. Titled "Boku no tame no nōto" (A note for myself), the fifty-four pages were written after he had completed his preparations for dying on the evening of December 4, 1960.[1] He wrote it over a seven-hour period, continuing to write even after taking the drugs that, as per his plan, would knock him unconscious and result in his death by hanging from the second-floor window of his lodging house. Unlike Akutagawa's note addressed to a certain, if unspecified, addressee, this one is designated solely for the writer. The question it raises is, Why write for oneself knowing that self will soon no longer exist? And what kind of writing is produced with this audience and timeframe in mind?

In the body of the text, Kishigami is adamant that "these notes are ones that I write and leave behind entirely for myself alone" (*mattaku boku dake no tame ni*) (239). At points, though, Kishigami seems to stray from this stated purpose. He directly addresses friends, teachers, and writers he admires with emphatic exclamations, like "K-san yo!," "Takase yo!," or "Yoshimoto [Taka'aki]-san!"[2] He asks that a volume of his poems be published posthumously and dedicated "TO YOSHIKO," the object of his unrequited love (249). He asks that his mother be spared the sight of his dead face fearing she will go mad. He asks friends to forgive him and to live on.

These notes may be written for the self, but they also contain explicit instructions to many others who will survive him. The two things are not necessarily incompatible, however. Kishigami is aware that others will read what he has written "for himself" in the aftermath of his suicide. He notes with some pride that

they are as long, if not longer, than anything he had previously written, including his school thesis on Terayama Shūji. He even self-consciously acknowledges later readers when he blames his fatigue from writing three hours straight for causing "the logic to be all over the place and the handwriting to be a mess *as you see* [*goran no yō ni*]" (249, emphasis mine).

When Kishigami goes on to explain why he nonetheless continues to write, he suggests that these notes are both a product and a process for an artist who writes in the face of death. He explains:

> But if this can serve as splendid proof of my unsightly life until now, I shall continew [*sic*] to write as long as time permits, even if it is riddled with contradictions. I am a writer. Until the end, I fill up the blank squares of the manuscript page.
>
> Kore mo mata boku no buzama na sei o migoto ni shōmei suru hitotsu de aru naraba, mujun sakusō no mama jikan no kagiri kakitsuzukeyō [*sic*]. Boku wa sakka da. Saigo made genkōyōshi no kūhaku o umete iru. (249)

If the notes testify to his dedication to his craft and his identification as an "author" (*sakka*), they are also meant to embody his "unsightly" life and death.

AN UNSIGHTLY CORPSE AND CORPUS

Far from the aesthetically appealing suicide desired by Akutagawa, Kishigami revels in the notion of an "unsightly" (*buzama*) corpse that could embody his sense of mental and physical degradation. In these notes, he repeatedly returns to this figure. He warns himself against any "sentimentalism that would beautify an early death," instead insisting on its ugliness. Imagining his hanged figure stretched outside the window and the bodily excretions that would accompany such a death, he asks, "Can anyone say this is beautiful?" (240).

His self-disgust is palpable in his imaginings of this spectacle. "My hung corpse wettened by the rain will hang from the window until the morning. Let it be eaten by dogs!" He self-mockingly compares himself to wartime kamikaze pilots; like those heroic youths "who went off to die for the emperor in their planes," he too "will fly from the window and hang myself for the sake of love and revolution" (246). He is not, however, to become an object of commemoration. At one point, he asks for a quick and quiet cremation in the hopes of sparing his mother the sight of his corpse and he also wonders with some tenderness, "Who will return home with my ashes and bones clutched to their chest?" (253). But most of the time, he demands that his body be treated as an object. His corpse could be used to advance medical science by one of his doctor friends as research material, or it could be "burned, buried, or thrown into the sea, a river or field. I couldn't care less if you let me rot with the noose around my neck." What he rejects is being decorated with flowers and, most of all, any funeral services ("Buddhist, Christian, or worst of all Shinto") that he dismisses

as "nothing more than masturbatory self-comfort [*ji'i*, 自慰] for those that are left behind" (243).

It is not coincidental that he both repeatedly rejects any burial that would put his body to rest and insistently returns to the image of his hanging body suspended indefinitely in the rain. The writing itself ensures that this hanging and haunting figure remains. At the very end of the piece, he closes with this specter: "Tomorrow morning, when dawn breaks, I will just be an unsightly corpse exposed to the rain" (254).

His chosen method is one that will confirm just how abject his suicide, life, and death are for it will ensure the display of this sorry spectacle. But imagining the gruesome discovery of his body is also at times recounted with a sense of levity and even delight: "Well then, who will be the first to discover it? The milkman? The newspaper delivery boy? Whoever it is will be surprised and ring the landlord's bell. Well now, what a mess. But the sparrows that come chirping noisily to my window every morning, what about them? In any case, this hanged figure is sure to set the area abuzz for a while at least" (242).

Kishigami delights in imagining this spectacle as if it were a scenario for a play. He titles his act "Dying on a rainy evening in Tokyo" (*Ame no asa, Tokyo ni shisu*) borrowing the idea from the 1954 American film *The Last Time I Saw Paris* (1954, directed by Jack Cummings), which in Japanese was titled *Ame no asa Pari ni shisu*. At one point, he begs his imagined audience to lighten up and see the comedy amid the tragedy: "My tears are damp. But I die smiling. Won't a single one of you please just smile along with me? A tiny smile, a guffaw, a derisive snort, anything will do" (241, 253).

At moments like these, Kishigami presents himself as a character—sometimes tragic, sometimes comic, always cynical—in a storied play that borrows heavily from preexisting literary models. While he references some tubercular "poets who died tragically young" (*yōsetsu kajin*), the author that he refers to the most is Dazai Osamu.[3] Kishigami plans out his method meticulously so as to avoid "screwing it up like Dazai in 'Ubasute'" (253), a story that recounts one of Dazai's four failed suicide attempts. His death will be like "Naoji's suicide in *Setting Sun* that was discovered by the pig-like waitress-dancer on a morning in a mountain villa in Izu" (242). He imagines his cousin would laugh if he cited the famous line from *No Longer Human*—"Giving birth to me was a mistake!" (246). Earlier that year, for his holiday greeting in his 1960 New Year's card, Kishigami had even borrowed the first line from Dazai's maiden short story collection *Bannen* (The declining years, 1936): "I planned to die" (*Shinō to omotte ita*).[4]

Dazai, as both author and character, offers a touchstone that provides a model or just as often, an object lesson, against which Kishigami might sculpt and script his own suicide. Dazai's own imitators make an oblique appearance in this vein as well, including Dazai's protégé Tanaka Hidemitsu. As discussed in chapter 3, in a deliberate echo of Dazai's own suicide and his final unfinished manuscript "Guddo・bai" ("Goodbye"), about a year and half later, Tanaka left behind a

manuscript titled "Sayōnara" when dying before Dazai's grave. Tanaka's piece begins with a list of how to say "goodbye" in a variety of languages—"Goodbye" "Au revoir" "Auf Wiedersehen" "Zàijiàn"—only to declare his preference for the uniquely Japanese "Sayōnara" because it marks a definitive, final break.[5] In a clear echo of Tanaka, Kishigami writes: "Ahh! AUF WIEDERSEHEN! … I will no longer be able to say AUF WIEDERSEHEN! Sayōnara. Sayōnara to everything. There shall not be any 'day we meet again'" (254).

Like Akutagawa, Kishigami's highly choreographed death scene is often seen and depicted through and in texts. He, too, eagerly anticipates the act and its future reception. In his many imaginings of his death scene, whether filled with self-disgust or mockery, Kishigami offers a disembodied view of himself from a remove. But he also offers an excruciating account of the embodied experience of awaiting and preparing for death: "My preparations for death proceed along quietly. No one knows. Just me. Until the shock of discovering my hanged corpse tomorrow morning, no one will know. As for me, I can only know just these next two or three hours" (246). Although Kishigami opened his note by claiming in his first line that "preparations were already completed" (239), here he suggests they are ongoing. Writing is part of that preparation.

As a product, the notes offer an outward-directed corpus that can stand in for his corpse, de facto and post facto evidence of his "unsightly" existence.[6] As a process, however, the notes chronicle his experience of time marching slowly and inexorably toward death. If Akutagawa's note offered a means of imagining the aftermath of his suicide as if he too were a spectator, for Kishigami, the notes also embody the experience of waiting and writing for death.

MARKING TIME

Kishigami writes to kill time. He writes while waiting for an opportune moment that will not be interrupted by passersby or neighbors. As he explains about halfway through, "the reason I record these notes is entirely to kill time; it is not a performance. My preparations are already finished. A beautiful green rope and pure white Brovarin pills. Death by poison and hanging. No worries about failure. It will surely be a splendid suicide. But the hour is still early" (246–47). There is a difference to note here between his characterization of the act of killing himself and the act of writing. He does not claim that his suicide lacks performativity. In fact, he sets the scene as if it were a stage with props in place for the "splendid suicide" to come. But that is not the same as the writing, which he insists here is not part of the performance, but rather a means of marking time.

The manuscript feels like a ticking time bomb with its repeated mentions of time moving inexorably toward an end that is already written: "It is now eight o'clock. Only a few hours left. My history will come to an end at a certain hour on the morning of December 5, 1960" (239). The precise hour he will die is less than

certain, but in the interim, he waits and writes, "Wait at least until one or two in the morning. Now it is just before eleven p.m. Still two or three hours;" "I still have manuscript paper. I still have time. Having just filled my belly last night with enough sushi for a lifetime, I won't likely become hungry anytime soon" (247); "At last, it is now December 5, 1960. A bit after twelve. All in the house are asleep. What about the house across from my window? In one or two more hours. Goodbye to everything" (251); "Sitting *seiza*, I wait. AHH! I wait. All my life waiting. For something. And now, shaking from the cold, I wait for my own death by my own hand. That's it. I should smoke a 'Midori'" (252).

His bodily experience of waiting and writing is chronicled in a text that becomes increasingly disordered as it goes on, riddled with spelling errors and illegible handwriting. He bids himself to wait again and again, with his anxiety mounting as time passes—"The light next door remains on. Maybe they fell asleep with it on? Wait until two a.m. Just about forty minutes more. … Will that light next door not just go out quickly?" (253)—and finally berates his night owl neighbor and friend Takase: "Come on! Go to sleep! Come on now. Everything is over. Nothing is beginning anew. No resurrection. … Wait another thirty minutes. It will be two a.m." (254).

Given the looming deadline, Kishigami is vigilant about keeping his writing on track. He berates himself whenever he feels he has strayed off course: "Well, what then? Your life only has four or five hours to go! What the hell are you doing worrying about your funeral, or jealously badmouthing the one woman you believe in and love. … It's already past nine! There is no time. Get back on topic and preach away!" (243).

After this harangue, Kishigami turns to a big-picture explanation for his present predicament. He traces the relevant biographical details from childhood—his father's death after being repatriated in 1946 and extreme childhood poverty in the immediate postwar—to his college years when he "lived for the sake of love and revolution!," embracing the Anpo student protest movement and romantic love only to see both end in failure (244). Time is highly compressed here. Unlike the majority of the note where present time ticks by minute by minute at an excruciatingly slow pace, his past is recounted in mere minutes and a few sentences. Whereas a single hour between eleven p.m. and midnight takes up over three pages, here a single paragraph traces fourteen years of Kishigami's life. It conveniently and neatly encapsulates the multiple causes leading to his suicide that would be cited to explain it in retrospect.

At the time, "the police judged it a simple unrequited love suicide by a youth disenchanted with political movements, in line with the contents of the note [*bunmen dōri*]."[7] Kishigami himself repeatedly points to lost love as the primary cause. Early in the note, he insists twice in rapid succession that "this is nothing more than a failed love suicide [*shitsuren jisatsu*]" (240) and returns to this point in its last paragraph. Notwithstanding these declarations, for many, his catchy phrase

"love and revolution" (*koi to kenmei*) summed up his motive. As with Fujimura Misao, twinned causes—personal and political—could explain not only his own suicide but also those of his generation, offering a new record of disaffected youths.

In retrospect, Kishigami quickly became marked as a "man of his times" (*toki no hito*), where personal and national histories converged and coincided with near perfection.[8] But even Kishigami's own definitive concluding statements regarding his suicide does not coincide with any end, neither that of his life nor his text. In the final paragraph of his note, he writes, "If I am still conscious after taking 150 Brovarin pills, I shall perhaps write a poem, but will end here by capping it off with this one line: This is the unrequited love suicide of a single man. No-thing [*sic*] more" (254). He does not, in fact, "cut off" (*hitokugiri tsukeru*) his writing with this declaration. Instead, he continues for nine more sentences before dating and signing the note, writing an additional postscript, and finally composing a poem. Although he insists on the final word here that explains his reasons for dying in no uncertain terms, he continues to write.

Rather than read his note to discern motive alone, I suggest we pay attention to Kishigami's central preoccupation throughout the text: to mark time by (and with) writing. Even the single sweeping passage that covers such a large swath of his life (fourteen of his short twenty-one years) was written in less than an hour, the time of its composition carefully marked on both ends.

Time is the organizing principle of the entire work. He began by declaring his preparations complete and by anticipating that time will elapse according to expectations: "*Junbi wa sude ni kanryō shita. Mohaya jikan no keika ga, yotei no puroguramu o suikō suru darō*" (239). He ends his note similarly optimistically:

> Everything goes as plannned [*sic*], nothing more. And so then, sayonara. It's finally two a.m.
>
> Manji yotei douri [*sic*] ni suginai. Sore de wa, sayōnara. Yatto ni-ji da.
>
> 1960 • 12 • 5
> Kishigami Daisaku

In concluding here with this definitive date and time stamp, he marks time in both senses of the word. In the end, however, he is betrayed by time, noting in a postscript that the poison has not taken effect as quickly as he had thought: "2:30 a.m., poison. Although I thought I'd soon lose consciousness, no go –. I tried stepping outside but couldn't stand the cold, so I dragged myself back in and took more of the pills scattered about. It is now 2:37 a.m."

This delay does give him the leeway to fulfill his promise that he would write a poem if he were still conscious after taking the pills. He closes his postscript:

Face hidden by a raincoat. Lights turned off in the pitch black, writing. What bullshit!	*Kao wa rēnkōto de kakusu.* *Denki o keshite makkura yami no naka de* *kaite iru. Detarame da!*

With this final poem, Kishigami strives to achieve his goal of writing until death, to know and experience that exceptional and everyday time and to capture it in writing. But there are limits inherent to such a project.[9] These limits are signaled best perhaps by the poem's use of the continuative grammatical form for the verb writ-*ing* (*-te iru*). Kishigami's note must content itself with marking and writing time.

Acts of writing and dying may coincide, but never the state of death itself. This point is nicely captured in one of Proust's favorite phrases—"Plus tard, j'ai compris," or "Later, I understood." As Paul de Man explains, this phrase describes the limits of self-knowledge in the case of our own deaths: "As a writer, Proust is the one that knows that the hour of truth, like the hour of death, never arrives on time, since what we call time is precisely truth's inability to coincide with itself."[10]

In his last poem, Kishigami returns to the figure of the corpse, albeit one quite different from his earlier envisioning. Rather than an overt display of his unsightly hanging figure, here instead is only a cloaked face, a bodyless form. Devoid of pronouns, the subject is erased. And yet amid the darkness emerges the shadowy figure of a writer, or more accurately, a hidden body at work writing away. The act of writing continues even if it is damnable. The poem, the text, and the life conclude with this curse of writing into darkness.

7

A Note to the Nation

Tsuburaya Kōkichi

The tragic story of young Olympic marathoner Tsuburaya Kōkichi (1940–68) is rehearsed with reliable regularity every four years: Tsuburaya, a twenty-seven-year old lieutenant in the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF), was overtaken by British runner Basil Heatley before a crowd of seventy-five thousand spectators at Yoyogi Stadium during the final lap of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics marathon, relegating him to third place (fig. 22).[1] Ichikawa Kon's documentary *Tokyo Olympiad* (1965) captures this moment in its climactic twenty-minute-long sequence of the marathon. The ease with which Heatley overtakes the oblivious Tsuburaya is grueling to watch in retrospect, but the contemporary sports commentators also note with praise that the race marks Tsuburaya's personal best time and the pride of a nation whose "flag will be hoisted in the Olympic stadium for the first time in 28 years."

Although Tsuburaya vowed to "hoist the Hinomaru" four years later in the Mexico games, he was plagued by injuries, and on January 9, 1968, he died by slitting his carotid artery. He died in his SDF dormitory bed clutching his bronze medal. By his bedside, Tsuburaya left behind two suicide notes, one to his family, and another to his teachers and SDF superiors that read:

> To the headmaster, sorry.
>
> Department and Section Chiefs, I was unable to accomplish anything.
>
> Instructor Miyashita, sincere apologies for having caused you trouble.
>
> Planning Section Chief, sorry for not keeping my promise.
>
> I offer prayers for success at the Mexico Olympics.
> January 1968.[2]

FIGURE 22. Tsuburaya's final lap in Yoyogi Stadium, 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Courtesy Smith Archive/Alamy Stock Photo.

Everything about the incident and this note lent itself to an interpretation of his suicide as stereotypically Japanese, a textbook case of an altruistic suicide or "social role narcissism" as per sociologist George De Vos's Durkheimian interpretation of the Japanese case.[3] It appeared to be propelled by a sense of shame in the face of failure to live up to group expectations.

This failure was particularly acute for someone like Tsuburaya, who was charged with representing both the local and the national as a small-town boy from rural Sukagawa in Fukushima prefecture and as a member of the SDF. As reported in the local press, his family returned home to a crowd of five thousand gathered at Sukagawa station, "his ashes clutched to his father's chest, along with the funeral portrait of him in his SDF uniform and his bronze medal from the Tokyo Olympics carried by his tearful brother." His brother told those who gathered, "Kōkichi has returned home now. We are truly sorry that he could not meet your expectations." These expectations were immense, as suggested by his nicknames—"the star of the SDF" (*jieitai no hoshi*) and "the Japanese Zátopek" (after the Czechoslovakian triple gold-medal winning runner from the 1952 Olympics). Tsuburaya's natural "strong sense of responsibility" was said to be intensified all the more given the occasion: the first Olympics held in Asia and one that marked Japan's postwar debut on the international stage.[4]

While some competing explanations for his suicide cited personal problems, even these were thought to offer yet more evidence for the failure of individualism in the face of sports nationalism. His recent broken engagement stemmed from the forced delay of his marriage by his father and coaches until after the Mexico Olympics. Unlike Fujimura Misao, whose pure philosophical suicide was rendered suspect by tabloid reports that a love suicide was the root cause, in Tsuburaya's case, lost love only compounded the tragedy. He had sacrificed love for the sake of running for his country only to find himself incapacitated by physical injuries. If the SDF hadn't "killed him" as some claimed, then his severe upbringing under his strict father that made him incapable of disobedience had.[5] His suicide note filled with apologies to his superiors certainly encouraged this interpretation.

But reconciling this with another note that Tsuburaya left for his family was not so simple. This one foregrounded the private young man whose most cherished desire was instead to live with, and for, his family:

> Father and Mother, the yam rice on the 3rd of January was delicious. The dried persimmon and the rice cakes too were delicious.
>
> Elder brother Toshio and elder sister, the sushi was delicious.
>
> Elder brother Katsumi and elder sister, the wine and apples were delicious.
>
> Elder brother Iwao and elder sister, the shiso rice and spicy pickles were delicious.
>
> Elder brother Kikuzō and elder sister, the grape juice and Yōmei wine sake was delicious. Thank you also for always taking care of the laundry.

> Elder brother Kōzō and elder sister, thank you for all the rides to-and-fro in your car. The cuttlefish was delicious.
>
> Elder brother Masao and elder sister, I am terribly sorry to have worried you.
>
> Yukio-kun, Hideo-kun, Mikio-kun, Toshiko-chan, Hideko-chan, Ryōsuke-kun, Takahisa-kun, Miyoko-chan, Yukie-chan, Mitsue-chan, Akira-kun, Yoshiyuki-kun, Keiko-chan, Kōei-kun, Yū-chan, Kī-chan, Masatsugu-kun, please grow up to be fine, upstanding people.
>
> Father and Mother, Kōkichi is far too tired to keep on running. Please forgive me somehow.
>
> Sorry for all the endless pain and trouble you went to on my behalf. Kōkichi just wanted to live by mother's and father's side.

Spurred by this plaintive cry, in July 1969, the family built a small house on their property that they filled with his things. Among the two thousand items were his SDF and Olympics uniforms, trophies including the bronze medal, and his two suicide notes. His mother explained that their motivation was "to live in this retirement home alongside the things he left behind in keeping with my child's dying wish." Before long, friends and fans came to pay their respects, and the private home, originally named "Saishōan" after Kōkichi's posthumous Buddhist name, gradually became known as the Tsuburaya Kōkichi Commemorative Hall. For over three decades, the family—his parents and his closest elder brother, Kikuzō, and wife—staffed the museum, sharing memories and stories about Kōkichi with visitors. In 1999, the city approached the family with a proposal to establish an official memorial hall in his name. His brother resisted for several years, explaining to reporters his desire "to keep Kōkichi, who was so very tired from it all, removed from all the fuss and let him rest. … Kōkichi just wanted to be by his parents' side. Why must we move him?"[6]

His family members here suggest the comfort they took in living among Kōkichi's remains and the comfort they imagined he derived from this as well. These did not include his literal physical remains that were interred at the local Buddhist temple. Instead, it was the objects he left behind (*ihin*, 遺品) that offered a substitute presence, a memento or *katami* (形見), a "glimpse at the form" of the lost one. When the family eventually relented and donated all of Kōkichi's things to the city for exhibition in their glossier big-scale memorial that was established at the Sukagawa Arena in June 2006, their sense of loss was compounded. It was as if they had lost Kōkichi twice over. As his brother Kikuzō poignantly put it, "Displaying the things he left behind was fated to be and we were fortunate to have many people come to see them. But, if we hadn't displayed them, then we would've been able to keep them forever as our household treasure [*uchi no tama to shite zutto oite oku koto ga dekita*]. … Displaying them was half good, and half bad, I'd say." As his comment suggests, although this transfer marked a definitive

shift, it was also part of a gradual process that transformed private grief and a private home for a family's beloved dead into a public institution.[7]

No object became part of the public domain and discourse more than the suicide note Kōkichi sent to his family. It was quoted in full in the contemporary press and continues to pop up on blogs today. It has been adapted into artworks, from avant-garde plays and a hit song by a female folk band in the late 1960s and early 1970s to a boys' (*shonen*) manga in the late 1980s and as recent as a 2015 musical comedy at the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre.[8] The sheer variety and longevity of these adaptations suggest just how manipulable this note has proven to be, readily extractable from its original context and retrofitted to suit a variety of generic demands.

Each offers a libretto of sorts for his suicide notes. In the Pink Pickles' hit folk song from January 1972, "Hitori no michi" (Solitary road), the protagonist wonders about the purpose of endlessly running:

> One day I ran. After that, I thought quietly to myself. For whose sake do I run? Wearing away at my youth. On rainy days, on windy days, running headlong in a solitary world. For what purpose do I persist? Bearing the pains in my legs. With just one grand dream: the five-colored Olympic rings. Not a medal for the sake of Japan. As nourishment to power the running.
>
> Father, forgive me. Mother, forgive me. Though I received this life from you, I took it with my own hand. I wanted you to see me just one more time, dressed in my finest atop the winner's podium. But my body will not move. Truly, I can run no longer. I can run no more.[9]

In pointing to the familial and national pressures to compete in the Olympics, the lyrics were aligned with interpretations of Tsuburuya's suicide as a last-ditch expression of individualism and anti-authoritarianism. They also fit into the generic conventions of folk songs. Likewise, the 1980s manga adaptation taps into the tropes of *shonen* manga with panels depicting his father haranguing him mercilessly.[10] This one invokes another common explanation for his suicide; his devastating loss in the final lap at the Tokyo Olympics could be traced back to an anecdote when his father scolded him for looking back during a high school race to see if his opponent was close.

What helped propel all these competing interpretations of his suicide was the fact that his notes were largely devoid of them. The fact that Tsuburaya had chosen to leave behind two notes—one to his superiors and another to his family—further encouraged splintered readings. As did their brevity and opacity.

Tsuburaya's deceptively simple suicide and his deceptively simple suicide notes drew the attention of many of his contemporaries whose analyses often depended on a selective citation of one note at the expense of the other. This included the unlikely pair of writers Mishima Yukio and Kawabata Yasunari, who would each die by suicide themselves a few years later, Mishima in November 1970 and Kawabata in April 1972. The two writers make for a study in contrasts; Mishima's suicide at age forty-five

was as loud as Kawabata's at age seventy-two was mute. Mishima left behind a vast number of textual traces in a variety of media before choosing a rather spectacular method and a public spectacle, while Kawabata's noteless and largely traceless suicide by gassing in his study fueled denials that it was in fact a self-willed death.

Before considering what these writers' assessments of the amateur writer and pro-marathoner Tsurubaya might tell us about their own acts of writing (or not) in the face of suicide, I first turn back to Tsuburaya's two notes to offer a closer reading and to ask, What kind of remains do these notes offer for those left behind? For the writer himself? And for its other unanticipated and unintended readers? Finally, what kind of self is represented or absented in these notes?

"I"-LESS SUICIDE NOTES

Each of Tsuburuya's notes was deceptively simple in its own way. The one to his superiors seems so very perfunctory as to not even merit mention. The formulaic lineup of apologies to his SDF squadron leaders, coaches, and teachers for his own failures alongside his prayers for the Japanese team's success in the Mexico Olympics later that year merely confirm the reigning explanation of his suicide as altruistic groupism. His submersion of the self in the service of the larger group and its goals seems obvious. The lack of any signature only confirms this self-abnegation.

Even the longer note to his family, as many commentators have noted, is mundane in the extreme. It, too, is filled with his apologies and thanks to a list of individuals who are arranged hierarchically by title. It contains formulaic (and more formally worded) apologies to one of his elder brothers and wife as well as to his parents, begging their forgiveness and apologizing for "tirelessly causing them pain and worry." It is filled with the many local foods and drinks he enjoyed during his recent New Years' visit home (eleven total) that he declared "delicious" (seven times) and a list of all the members of his extensive family (thirty-one in total). If it denies much insight into Tsuburaya's own emotions and thoughts about his suicide, it supplies an overabundance of factual recounting.

Neither note includes an explicit demand, but the recipients responded to what they perceived to be Tsuburaya's implicit requests. As described above, his family decided to return "him" (in the form of his things) to rest in the ancestral home in response to the note's last lines where the exhausted Kōkichi expresses this belated desire. His teammates answered his final prayer for their success at the next Olympics; fellow marathoner Kimihara would win the silver at the Mexico Olympics in keeping with a promise he made in a consolation message sent to Tsuburaya's family: "Sleep peacefully Tsuburaya-kun. In accordance with your will, I pledge to raise the Hinomaru in Mexico."[11] As these divergent responses suggest, one note is situated in the realm of the personal and familial, while the other lies squarely in the national.

Despite their structural similarities and parallels, the longer letter to the family contains such a curious surplus of detail that it exceeds any perfunctory expression

of apology or thanks. Tsuburaya addresses each and every one of his relatives, thanking his parents and his six elder siblings and their spouses for their many kindnesses to him, and bidding his seventeen nieces and nephews to become "fine, upstanding people" (*rippa na ningen*). One brother and his wife are thanked for always taking care of the laundry and for the Yōmei wine sake, another for chauffeuring him around and for the cuttlefish. To be more precise, he does not thank his relatives for the food and drink. Instead, there is a haunting repetition of the antiquated phrase "… was delicious" (*oishū gozaimashita*). Although these lines are usually translated as "I enjoyed …," significantly here, Tsuburaya is not the subject of the sentence. Instead, there is a conspicuous absence of an "I" throughout the note.

In fact, neither note contains a single use of any first-person subject. I/me/my language is entirely absent from both notes despite my above translations, which required inserting them in the interests of legible and grammatical prose. For example, "[I] was unable to accomplish anything" (*nani mo nashiemasen deshita*) or "sorry for not keeping [my] promise" (*oyakusoku mamorezu aisumimasen*). Given that Japanese grammar does not require an explicit subject, Tsuburaya's elision of any "I" is perhaps less significant than his choice of a subject when he does include one. Here too, instead of any first-person language is a third-person perspective: "Kōkichi." At the end of his letter to his family, he writes:

> Father and Mother, Kōkichi is far too tired to be able to keep on running. Please somehow forgive [me]. Sorry for all the endless pain and trouble [you] have gone to on [my] behalf. Kōkichi just wanted to live by father's and mother's side.
>
> Chichi haha uesama Kōkichi wa, mō sukkari tsukarekitte shimatte hashiremasen. Nanitozo oyurushi kudasai. Ki ga yasumaranaku gokurō, goshinpai o okake itashi mōshi wake arimasen. Kōkichi wa chichi haha uesama no soba de kurashitō gozaimashita.

This is the most personalized moment of the letter where he describes his own physical and mental state. It is therefore especially striking that he uses the distanced third person here. As we will see in the cases of both the elderly literary critic Etō Jun and the young manga artist Yamada Hanako (the subjects of chapter 8), Tsuburaya is not alone in this choice.

There is evident tension between claiming and disavowing an embodied speaking subject here. On the one hand, his bodily sensations are at the fore. Both taste and physical exhaustion presume a bodily subject who is sensing these things. His apologies for causing trouble and his requests to be forgiven also presume a subject who is acting on others and being acted on by them. On the other hand, this "I" subject is nowhere explicitly present. Instead, the speaking self seems to disappear under the weight of the repetitive prose that foregrounds objects, especially the many delectable comestibles. Under the weight of so much repetition, even the long lists of other people's names threaten to become itemizable objects. At the end of the note, his name, too, joins this list. Kōkichi is objectified in both senses of the word. Apprehensible as an exhausted young body yearning to

return to his parents' side, he appears here as a bodily presence albeit one that is external to the writer's own body.

For any subsequent reader of the text, however, that writing body is inescapably present. Copies of both handwritten notes are displayed side by side in a case at the Memorial Museum.[12] Each line of each text concludes with a stark period punctuation mark (. or 。). Oddly, even the line with just the date that concludes the letter to his superiors ends this way:

> January 1968.
> 一九六八　一.

These punctuation marks give the sense of a series of potential finales; each signals the paused pen and hand of the one who wrote it. In this way, even the generic letter to his superiors comes alive from these markers of materiality, or what Markus Nornes has so nicely called "corporeal calligraphy" that "refers us back to the human being behind the brush."[13]

Most haunting is the presence of a speck of Tsuburaya's blood that appears on the letter to his family (fig. 23). It appears on the second line of the first page, poised neatly between two characters. It interrupts, but does not obscure, his praise for the deliciousness of the dried persimmon and the rice cakes. The page is also stained with tears that fell from his elder brother Kōzō's eyes as he read the letter. These bodily excretions of writer and reader alike are inscribed onto and into the text forever; writing and reading bodies become inseverable from the text. The result is a palimpsest that layers acts of writing, dying, and reading all together.

The metaphor of the palimpsest is a most useful one for considering the multilayered texts left behind by someone who chooses self-destruction. As I argued above about Akutagawa's many textual and intertextual traces, rather than see the most recent, proximate text as the authoritative one that displaces earlier ones, it is more productive to consider each one as part of a layered heterogeneous whole. And like a palimpsest, these notes retain the material and bodily traces of their composition evoking a manuscript culture that depends on using the same raw material again and again with new additions and revisions, while never entirely effacing the many versions that came before. I turn now to look at how Tsuburaya's contemporaries regarded this palimpsest, often privileging one layer of the text over another for their own ends.

The note to his family was especially ripe for interpretation with its idiosyncratic combination of being simultaneously terse and taciturn, on the one hand, and verbose, on the other. Its repetition of hackneyed phrases somewhat counterintuitively transformed the note into hauntingly powerful prose. In Kara Jūrō's 1969 play *Koshimaki Osen*, the protagonist, Tsuburaya Hōichi (an amalgam of Kōkichi with the mythical character of Mimi-nashi (earless) Hōichi) invokes the words from the note rather than the Buddhist Heart Sutra as protection against the samurai ghosts that possess him. The full text of the suicide note is even included as an exemplary

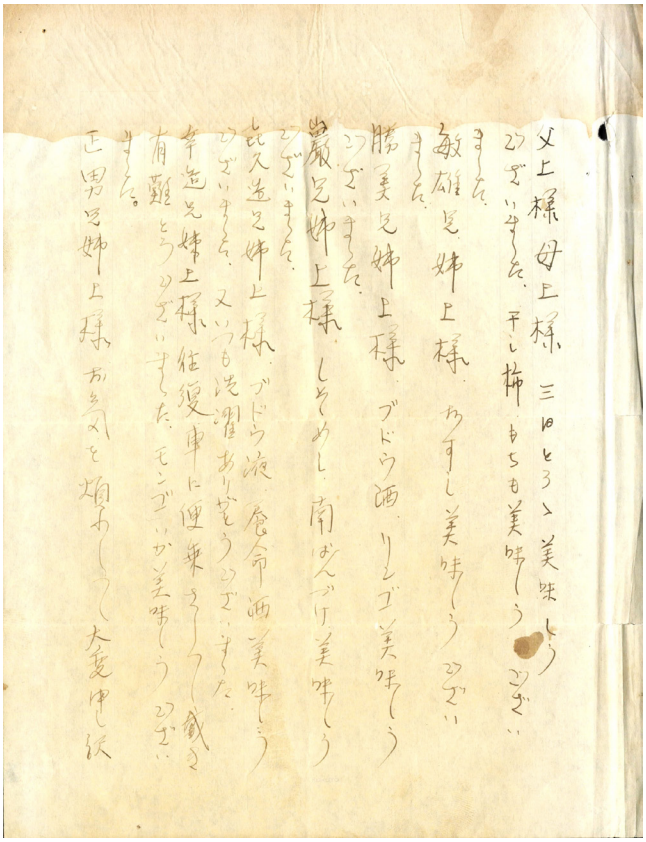

FIGURE 23. Kōkichi's blood- and tear-stained note to his family. Courtesy Sukagawa City Tsuburaya Kōkichi Memorial Hall.

writing sample in a primer aimed at aspiring writers that was published in 1987.[14] As this suggests, its form exceeded its content. Equally important was its context, as the final words of a young man who had chosen a violent self-death. Reading this letter became an exercise in literary criticism that, like any interpretive act, reveals as much about the object under study as the one studying it.

TSUBURAYA, FARMER-POET

In trying to figure out what the suicide note to his family was, commentators often first tackled the question of what it was not. For poet-critic Matsunaga Goichi, "The suicide note was not an explanation of his 'death.' Instead, it was a final sweet look back on 'life.'" For essayist Sawaki Kōtarō, the note was "oddly lacking in self-assertion, … and what remains is only a message to his blood relatives." Implicitly

or explicitly, a contrast was drawn between Tsuburaya's choices and "usual" suicide notes. Kawabata Yasunari offered the most extended and explicit comparison: "All too often, whether consciously or unconsciously, suicide notes tend to smack of attachments, resentments, exaggeration, affectation, self-affirmation or abnegation, self-justification or incrimination. But, in this one, there is not the slightest hint of any of these. It is wholly honest and pure." Even more than the raw glimpse into his pain afforded by its final lines, the detailed listings of his kin and the many local delicacies he enjoyed with them contained, as Kawabata put it, a "pathos unmatched in ten million words."[15]

For Matsunaga, the choice to rehearse his family lineage and to list only native foods was a means by which Tsuburaya was re-rooting himself in the local and rejecting the national. The extensive listings of his family in birth order "affirm family hierarchies for this seventh youngest son." The existence of two notes—one private and one public—suggested Tsuburaya's divided self, fractured between his local rural roots and his national pursuits as an Olympian and SDF soldier. The note to his family offered him a final return to his hometown, a moment when he untangles the two halves of himself and "despairing of his false image enters into his real image" and thereby "is finally able to see himself freed from state power." Redemption lies in this reversion to local kinship structures and away from state power; his "humanity was restored just in the act of writing that note."[16]

While Matsunaga warns against oversimplifying things into "false" and "true" images, insisting that the two halves of local farmer and national runner coexisted in Tsuburaya, he privileges the former identity as the more authentic. His essay begins with the line, "A farmer died."[17] And he concludes with Kōkichi's own concluding lines that depict an exhausted Kōkichi whose sole desire is/was to return to his parents' side. In the end, Matsunaga endows the letter to the family with more importance than the one to his superiors and coaches, thus falling into the very trap he warns against by assuming one identity to be private/authentic and the other, public/false.

TSUBURAYA AND MISHIMA, WARRIOR-SOLDIERS

In contrast, Mishima focuses only on Tsuburaya's public identity. The title of his op-ed that appeared in the conservative newspaper *Sankei shinbun* just four days after the suicide aptly summarizes his position: "Second Lieutenant Tsuburaya's suicide by sword [*jijin*]: A manly self-respect that stands alone."[18] For Mishima, Tsuburaya's identity as an SDF officer supersedes all else, his soldierly identity forged and assured by this final suicidal act. Mishima explains that in "killing off the flesh," Tsuburaya was able to give birth to the "self-respect of a soldier who values a sense of responsibility and honor. In this way, his death became the self-determination [*jiketsu*] of a soldier. That is why I title this article Second Lieutenant Tsuburaya's suicide by sword."

Not only had Tsuburaya chosen a method befitting a military man, but also an appropriate mode of writing. Mishima conspicuously ignores the note Tsuburaya wrote to his family here. Instead, it is the one addressed to his superiors that is praised for being "a truly pure suicide note" (*jitsu ni junsui na isho*). Even if its final line—"offering prayers for success at the Mexico Olympics"—merits his slight complaint that the Olympics lack a "true nobility of cause [*daigi*]," Mishima asserts that this is the closest a man can get to a "taste of glory" in this decadent age.

We can easily imagine how Mishima's defense of Tsuburaya might serve as a preemptive defense of his own suicide by sword at the SDF headquarters just two years later. He even somewhat presciently warned against indulging in critiques of the dead from the perspective of a "spectator" (*bōkansha*), writing that "I cannot forgive the ugly hubris of those people who dismiss the sublime death (*sūkō na shi*) of athlete Tsuburaya by labeling it 'neurosis' or a defeat." Instead, he insisted it was a "most beautiful, splendid death."[19] One of Mishima's own death poems would tap into this very self-image of a stoic sword-wielding warrior:

In the sounds of the	*masurao ga*
katana sheath	*tabasamu tachi no*
worn by the brave man	*saya nari ni*
enduring year after year.	*ikutose taete*
Today the first annual frost.	*kyō no hatsushimo*[20]

The year before Tsuburaya's suicide, in April and May of 1967, Mishima had gained permission to "experience enlistment" (*taiken nyūtai*) as an unofficial, unranked SDF trainee (and would also subsequently train the soldiers of his self-styled army, the Tate no kai or Shield Society, on SDF training grounds as well). He even shared a commanding officer with Tsuburaya.[21]

In the op-ed, Mishima indulges in an imaginary recreation of the setting where Tsuburaya died based on his own training experiences: "Having stayed in two or three of these myself, I can well imagine the room. The most desolate and dreary room in the world, as if from a storybook. The bare concrete floor, desk, locker, metal army-issue bed, towel draped on the bed's iron railing … . And yet, oddly enough, perfectly suited to a man's place of death." As if writing stage directions for a play, Mishima situates himself (and the reader) in that solitary, sparse space. Mishima's nostalgic praise for the stark SDF barracks suggests his own unsurprising identification with Tsuburaya as an embodiment of youthful stoic masculinity.

What is surprising here is Mishima's unqualified endorsement of Tsuburaya's stark last note to his superiors. In another essay published less than two years earlier, Mishima had been highly self-critical of an equally formulaic last will and testament that he himself had written as a young newly recruited soldier back in February 1945 when he received his draft card at age twenty. Mishima was prompted to revisit this testament in July 1966 when at the request of *Bungei shunjū* literary magazine for some "old unpublished materials," he "was surprised

to uncover from a dust-buried box in the recesses of a bookshelf a handwritten testament on a sheet of rice paper written twenty years earlier" when he believed he might die in military service. In the essay, he reproduces the text in full with one gloss to clarify his "real name" for the journal's readers:

> *Testament* [*Yuigon*] Hiraoka Kimitake (my real name)
> • Honorable Father
> Honorable Mother
> To my former Professor Shimizu and
> All the Teachers
> At Peers School and at Tokyo Imperial University
> Who kindly tutored me during my studies
> With gratitude for your considerable benevolence
> • My classmates and seniors at the Peers School
> Your friendship will indeed be hard to forget
> With prayers for your glorious futures
> • Younger sister Mitsuko and younger brother Chiyuki
> In place of your elder brother, devote yourselves to our honorable father and mother
> Chiyuki, you must follow your elder brother as quickly as possible
> To become a panther in the Imperial Army
> And return a fraction of our Imperial debt
> Long Live the Emperor[22]

Looking back, Mishima cringes at his "overly standardized and sanitized" writing (*amari ni mo kata ni hamarisugite iru*; *sappari shisugite iru*), horrified that this single text in an envelope with his hair and fingernail clippings might have represented or embodied him eternally: "To think that if I had died back then, I would've died just as the kind of person in this testament" (*watashi wa mattaku kono isho dōri no ningen toshite shinda wake de aru*).

Whereas Tsuburaya as an amateur nonprofessional writer and soldier has no such conflicts, Mishima points here to his inability to reconcile his soldierly and writerly identities. The divide is marked by distinct names: the testament-writing soldier Hiraoka Kimitake, which he glosses as "my real name," and the essay-writing professional Mishima Yukio. The distance between these two selves is immense. As he puts it in the essay, "The now-me [*ima no watashi*] is incredibly interested in the psychology of the then-me who wrote this [*kore o kaita toki no watashi*]. … I can't quite believe that the psychology of a young man who'd released even one single short story collection could've been so very simple."

Even so, when revisiting this writing twenty years later, Mishima refuses to disavow the text or to retrospectively blame wartime militarism or censorship.[23] He even concludes that for his "whole life this single testament will likely be plenty [*Isshō ni isho wa tabun kore ittsū de jūbun de arō*]," an ironic assertion given the sheer number of "last" texts he would, in fact, produce, as we will see in chapter 10.

In the perfunctory will and testament of the twenty-year-old Hiraoka Kimitake, he detects something lurking deep beneath the surface. His explanation of *what* constitutes that something is not entirely complete or clear, but he gestures at some larger quasi-religious presence: "a separate bigger hand that took that youth's hand and enabled such effortless writing," "something that permeated my heart and gave form to another spirit that already resided within me." While access to this external force that had the power to wake a dormant spirit was possible for the young Hiraoka in wartime, it is no longer available to the forty-year-old writer Mishima. He laments that "no matter what kind of death, such a testament written by an invisible hand can no longer possibly exist in modern-day Japan."

Just a couple of years later, he finds a contemporary exemplar in Tsuburaya's "truly pure suicide note" (*jitsu ni junsui na isho*) to his superiors. Yet as much as Mishima seems to identify himself with Tsuburaya, importantly, he also acknowledges the immense gap between them. This time, the gap is between a living reader and a dead writer. And this is the way it should be, according to Mishima:

> In order to be moved by another's death requires that I myself am alive. It is in being moved like this that life's meaning glitters all the more sharply. In order to grasp someone else's ultimate act of death requires my own complete sense of being alive.
>
> Hito no shi ni kandō suru ni wa, kochira ga ikite iru hitsuyō ga ari, sono kandō jitai ni, sei no imi ga hitokiwa surudoku hirameku. Sono yō na tanin no zen-teki na kōi de aru shi o uketomeru ni wa, kochira no zen-teki na sei o motte shinakute wa naranai kara de aru.

It is not desirable or possible for the living to align themselves too closely with the dead. Nor should the living presume to judge them from across the divide as "a spectator" (*bōkansha*). Instead, Mishima suggests that it is only by fully grasping our own status as living beings that we might understand them, and ourselves. In writing about Tsuburaya, it seems that Mishima was both indulging in a fantasy of identification with the dead, but just as importantly, one in which he could identify himself as alive by contrast.

KAWABATA AND TSUBURAYA: OLD WRITING HACKS AND NOVICE HIGH STYLISTS

If Mishima focused on the public persona embodied in Tsuburaya's more public letter, Kawabata engaged only with the poetics of the personal note to his family. Unlike Mishima, he quickly dispenses with any discussion of Tsuburaya's suicide after the first sentence. And unlike his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Stockholm later that year, Kawabata is here uninterested in the morality of suicide, or even in the act itself.[24] It is only the act of writing that concerns him.

What especially moved Kawabata was the note's rhythmic aurality. As Kawabata had claimed elsewhere, ideal literary prose should be "understood perfectly

when one hears it read aloud."[25] Appraising Tsuburaya's note, he celebrated it for "the hackneyed phrase 'was delicious,' repeated after each and every person and food item, [that] truly breathes pure life. It imbues the entire note with rhythm. A beautiful, sincere, sorrowful echo."[26]

For Kawabata, such raw and simple prose was the purview of amateur writers and largely inaccessible to an old professional like himself. Paradoxically, only amateurs like "runner Tsuburaya" (*senshu Tsuburaya*), the appellation used by Kawabata throughout the essay, have access to such powerful prose. "The runner Tsuburaya is neither a writer nor a high stylist. And yet it is precisely for these reasons that he could give birth to prose like this. … In the face of the runner Tsuburaya's note, a literary hack like myself [*uribun no kakari de aru watashi*] can only feel pained with embarrassment thinking of my own prose. But fortunately, the positives outweigh the negatives; I do not only take myself to task and despair, but rather am comforted and given a sense of hope" (294).

Kawabata's positive evaluation of Tsuburaya's prose here coincides with his own "self-critical" and even self-described "masochistic" reflection about his own writing. His comments appear in the context of a longer article in which he looks back at his most famous work, "Izu no odoriko" ("The Izu Dancer") with fondness and regret in equal measure.[27]

If there is one thread that connects this rather meandering essay written over the course of eighteen months, it is the question of what kind of textual immortality will endure in the face of bodily mortality. The answer is in his title: "One Flower (*Issō ikka*): The Author of 'The Izu Dancer,'" the work that he half-fears and half-hopes will define him forevermore. He notes that other authors have suffered similar fates. In one installment that appeared six months before Tsuburaya's death, Kawabata relates a story about returning from the funeral of his contemporary, the author Tsuboi Sakae, most famous for her novel-turned-film *Nijū-shi no hitomi* (*Twenty-Four Eyes*).[28] A conversation with his taxi driver infuriates him as he realizes that he too "will sure enough end up as the author of 'The Izu Dancer'" (272). Returning to this subject in the penultimate installment of the lengthy essay, Kawabata elaborates on his ambivalence: "Until right now, I haven't had a thought about what place or meaning 'The Izu Dancer' will occupy in my life as a writer, or among my works. Until writing this, I had never even considered that only 'The Izu Dancer' will continue to be read, and that only as its author will I continue to be known for a while after I have died. Even thinking about this now seems unreal, and so I am neither sad nor happy. But it may indeed happen" (314–15).

Despite his chagrin at the many faults he finds in his old story, what redeems it in his eyes are precisely the qualities he praises in Tsuburaya's suicide note: its "expression of honest, simple gratitude" (296–97). Reflecting on this work enables Kawabata a return to the writer and young man he was forty-two years earlier. Like Tsuburaya who died at age twenty-seven, Kawabata was twenty-seven years old when he wrote "Izu Dancer," well before the corruption of age and literary professionalization could mar his prose.

Writing this essay about Tsuburaya at age sixty-nine, Kawabata is now grappling with his own aging body and with the effects of aging on his writing. He recognizes that writing changes along with the aging body, though not necessarily for the better. Technical perfection comes at a cost, and he depicts himself as resisting these natural changes with all his might: "For literary writers, as they age, even if their prose deteriorates, their handwriting [*sho*, 書] … inevitably improves. But I hope to fight against these natural changes in my handwriting and in my prose and instead strive to maintain its pathetic state" (295).[29] The "pathetic" (*asamashii*) imperfect hand of the young amateur is preferable.

What is Kawabata saying here about writing in the face of death? He depicts writing as an embodied act that cannot be severed from the writer's physical body. This helps explain why he discusses both prose and calligraphy in this essay. Writing offers a metonymical substitute for the body of the writer, especially as death approaches. "When a person turns sixty years of age, they invariably become capable of writing. Even if their handwriting (*moji*) is clumsy, it becomes accomplished in its own way. It is at this very point that death comes a-visiting (*shi ga otozurete kuru*). Most people become able to write proper characters adeptly just before dying. This is how we know the terror of writing [*ji no osoroshisa*]" (295).

It is, of course, impossible to know with any certainty about the rationale behind Kawabata's own choices when "death came a-visiting." But if there is some perfection that inevitably comes at the moment of death (and this is a bad thing according to Kawabata), it also might explain why he did not write in those final moments.

Although Kawabata left behind no suicide note when he died on April 16, 1972, he was famous for writing in the wake of other people's deaths.[30] He wrote so many eulogies and obituaries for his fellow writers that his nickname was "the undertaker." What might explain his eagerness to write about another's death given his refusal to do so in the case of his own?

Literary scholar Makoto Ueda helpfully connects Kawabata's own penchant for elegiac writing—both obituaries for his fellow writers and his fiction filled with dying and dead characters—to his preference for the simple unadorned prose of "artless" (*takumanai*) amateurs, like Tsuburaya. He theorizes that Kawabata became a eulogist in order to give voice to the final moments of privileged vision afforded to the "dying eyes" (*matsugo no me*) of a person who lacks the necessary expressive powers: "A dead person reports nothing. … Nearness to death may give a person an extraordinary ability to see, but it takes away from him the ability to express what he sees."[31] Only the exceptional individual might achieve both. For Kawabata, Akutagawa was one such exception among professional writers. Otherwise, he credited this purity of vision as the purview of "artless" amateurs, young "maidens" and children especially.

If this privileged vision and its expression are restricted to youthful amateurs and to those staring death in the face, then Tsuburaya doubly qualifies. Usually, these amateurs required assistance from one who possessed "the literary skill to

articulate what they see. … A little child had to be helped out by a composition teacher; a young woman, by a ghost writer; and a dying man, by a funeral orator."[32] In contrast, the runner Tsuburaya had singlehandedly scripted this most moving maiden, and final, work.

But what about the elderly writer Kawabata's own choices when facing death himself? We might be tempted to conclude that he believed that looming death could return the writer to a childlike state in which a purity of vision and prose returns to these "eyes in their last extremity." But is this possible for an aged professional writer like himself? When Kawabata wrote about this privileged vantage point in 1933, he himself was thirty-one and was discussing the suicide note of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke at age thirty-five. As a sixty-nine-year-old writing about Tsuburaya in 1968, it is seemingly only as a reader and critic of another's deathbed writings that enables his vicarious and nostalgic return.

At this point, writing about the young runner Tsuburaya offers Kawabata an opportunity not only to revisit his past youthful writing self but also to imagine his posthumous literary legacy. "The Izu Dancer" looms large in envisioning both. Just as Kawabata suspected, this single text would survive and serve to represent him. A communal literary grave (*Bungakusha no haka*) in Shizuoka Prefecture, created under the aegis of the Japanese Writers' Association in 1969, memorializes famous authors alongside the title of their most representative work. One grave and one literary title for each.

In the end, Kawabata left behind no single final text to stand as his last word. He refused any final glimpse of the world through his own dying eyes. Instead, we are left with his elegiac prose written about, and for, others. It is through Kawabata's essay on Tsuburaya's suicide note and on his own youthful writings that we can get sidelong glimpses of both men, the young amateur writer-runner and the aged professional writing in the face of death. This is a highly refracted and filtered look that entangles self and other, present and past, writer and reader. It also entangles fiction and a suicide note. We might seek him, as he anticipated, in his "one flower," but it is worth remembering the ways this singular literary title was also, in his mind and in his writings, entangled with the final words of another.

DIALOGUING WITH THE DEAD: THE ETHICS OF THE LITERARY CRITICISM OF SUICIDE NOTES

Kawabata openly acknowledges the tricky ethical implications of treating another's death writings as if it were a literary critical exercise. He prefaces his comments about Tsuburaya with this caveat: "At any rate, since it is a suicide note [*nanishiro isho de aru kara*], I will restrain from lodging disparaging criticisms [*karisome no ronpyō*]." As he notes self-consciously, "I realize it's not pretty to say that a suicide note gives me hope, but it is true that even a literary hack like myself was able to discover truth and possibility in its prose." In the next month's installment,

he worries that "categorizing runner Tsuburaya's suicide note as a representative example of prose" was "indefensible and unscrupulous" (293, 294, 296). Even as Kawabata continues to write, he repeatedly returns to the ethical bind of undertaking these acts of reading, interpreting, and writing in response to another's self-willed death and to their "exemplary" death writings.

In contemplating the "right" way to write one's death, these professional writers were all engaged in an act of literary criticism. As I suggested above, this often reveals more about the critic than the one being analyzed. Matsunaga, a poet and critic best known for his collection of farmers' poems *Nihon nōmin shi shi* (A history of Japan's farmer poems, 1967–70), sees Tsuburaya as a farmer. Mishima sees his double, a warrior soldier whose method of suicide transcends his stated cause. Kawabata sees his antithesis—a young amateur writer whose prose is authentic and pure, rather than the aged, mature professional whose writing inevitably "improves" as death approaches.

In responding to the suicide of another, Mishima and Kawabata were also, by implication, prefiguring their own. Through the figure of this young soldier-marathoner-amateur writer, they also figured their own self-death and its self-writing. What they valued in another's final writing did not, as we have seen, translate into any simplistic imitation. Whereas Mishima focused on Tsuburaya's decisive suicidal method, Kawabata praised only his writing. Paradoxically though, it was Kawabata who would refuse to write any final self-defining text—fictional or otherwise—while Mishima, as we will see in chapter 10, left behind so very many to parse.

It is tempting to see in these long trains of writings a means by which writers were talking *about* and *to* themselves, as well as each other. Each speaks backward and forward in time entangling their own deaths and death writings with those of another. Not only do both Mishima and Kawabata each write about Tsuburaya in 1968, but after Mishima's death two years later, Kawabata would write and speak out as well. In a memorial essay published in January 1971, Kawabata acknowledged the ways that the death of someone close to us forces us to reflect on our relationship with them and on our own impending deaths. Reckoning our relations with the dead is also, he wrote, a means of "preparing for our own deaths [*jibun no shi no kakugo*]." He adds, "I find myself thinking about this every time someone close to me dies. And this has been all too often. It is so very frequent as to make me want to say that the only way to avoid facing this sorrow at another person's death is to die myself."[33]

In a sense, Mishima's death spurs Kawabata to contemplate his own. This is not to imply any simple causality linking the two men's suicides. His pain is palpable at the loss of his young "Mishima-kun," but Kawabata is also speaking more generally about mourning the dead. As he explains, he initially wrote these words back in 1945 in response to the death of another writer—Kataoka Teppei—and revisits them now in the wake of Mishima's. His comments poignantly suggest that

Kawabata felt the cascading implications of another's death on those who survive and the complicated obligations imposed on the living by the dead. As manga artist Okamoto Ippei put it in his 1927 essay on *isho*, "When dying, one looks outside of oneself to another and leaves behind a word laden with responsibility. Therein lies the powerful connection of human beings to all things in the universe."[34] These obligations and complications can be all the more intense when it is a premeditated self-death that severs the connections between oneself and another.

After Mishima's suicide, Kawabata questioned his own right to speak or write in his stead. Modeling the very same self-restraint he asks of his listeners and readers, he concludes his memorial essay with this line, "—Regarding Mishima-kun's act of dying [*shi no kōdō*], at this point, I wish to remain silent."[35]

Similarly, in his brief funeral address on January 24, 1971, Kawabata denied any right "to speak here about Mishima's literature or ideology or actions" or to presume to know anything about death when he "does not yet understand life." Speaking across the divide, he suggests, is mere hubris. He continues: "Much has been said and written about Mishima, but he can no longer respond, not even with a single word. He cannot write a single line. You can think that pitiable, or enviable."

In the wake of a self-willed silence, is silence then the only possible ethical response? Kawabata suggests as much when he wonders in frustration, "What is burial, this act where the living bury the dead?" and proposes that instead we might do better to follow "the saying, let the dead bury the dead."[36] His remarks beg the question, How to respond to—much less engage in literary criticism of—something as raw and personal as a suicide note?

I turn now to one last writer-critic who took up the mantle of being a literary critic of *isho* with gusto. In an essay from 1978, the iconoclastic Nosaka Akiyuki does not hesitate to praise, dissertate, berate, and mock *isho* written by both professional men of letters and amateurs, from Fujimura Misao at the turn of the century to his contemporaries, Tsuburaya and Mishima. As such, his essay offers a useful review and overview of many texts already discussed above. His unfiltered critique also gives a clearer sense of the criteria by which writings left behind are often more implicitly and, without a doubt, less stridently judged.

NOSAKA AKIYUKI AND THE LITERARY CRITICISM OF SUICIDE NOTES

In his 1978 essay, Nosaka Akiyuki half-jokingly notes, "I'm no literary critic of *isho* [*isho hyōronka*]," but proceeds to be just that.[37] Nosaka brings together everyone from Fujimura Misao and Mori Ōgai to Dazai Osamu and his disciple Tanaka Hidemitsu, from elite kamikaze pilot student-soldiers and farmer-soldier conscripts to his own grandmother. Having left no *isho* behind, Kawabata himself is exempt from Nosaka's praise or criticism here. His central focus is articulated in the essay's title: "Isho: Tsuburaya no jitsu, Mishima no uro"

(Isho: Tsuburaya's substance, Mishima's emptiness). Even as his title points to the stark contrast between the taciturn amateur runner and the prolific professional, Nosaka advances a surprisingly flattering reading of both that is based on his own highly selective accounting of these two men's last writings.

Writing at the age of fifty-eight, Nosaka Akiyuki had little to no personal connection with any of the literary men or soldiers whose last writings he evaluates with the eyes of a discerning critic. Nor was he that close to death (he did not die until 2015, at age eighty-five, of natural causes.) And yet he too was spurred to write this essay by the prospect of his own mortality as well as his discomfiting realization that any texts he left behind would be sifted and sorted, published and publicized. He opens by recalling with disgust an anecdote about his publisher requesting "an *isho* to include among his literary letters" just one month after he underwent a serious operation for what he feared was stomach cancer. Although he does not mention the contents of his own *isho* here, he later included this essay in a collection titled *Boku no shi no junbi* (My preparations for death). For Nosaka, too, the death writings of others offer a way to contemplate his own. Like a memento mori, these last writings offer readers this opportunity as well; as the book jacket cover urges us, "At times, think upon your death!" (*Toki ni, shi o kangaetamae*).

Tsuburaya's note to his family is once again judged to be the gold standard of *isho*. Like Kawabata, Nosaka praises its authentic childlike attentiveness to sensory bodily experiences and its prolix repetition that gives it the rhetorical power of "an awesome curse or exorcism" (141). And again, Nosaka dismissively catalogues the efforts of the vast majority of literary professionals like himself. He offers two explanations for why novelists fail at writing last letters whereas amateurs succeed: one, novelists are simply too used to being choosy about their words, dispensing with the kinds of mundane everyday inquiries about health and weather that give nonprofessionals' writings a sense of "truth" and "a concrete affirmation of life"; and two, writers can express or sublimate their feelings of dissatisfaction in their writings. This is what he calls "paying off their resentment in installments." For novelists, literary works offer an outlet so no pent-up anguish can emerge in a final and virginal maiden work. To Nosaka, such a work is "superfluous" for "literary writers write last letters all through the year" (147).

Nosaka launches a ruthless critique of his fellow writers one after the other. Mori Ōgai's terse final instructions to engrave his given name rather than his literary penname (associated with his status as an Imperial army physician) on his tomb "fail to affirm life in the way that Tsuburaya's bean jam cakes do." Literary men whose last writings are means to comfort themselves disappoint like a "bounced check," whether they are Futabatei Shimei's last words penned on his deathbed while abroad, Miyazawa Kenji's earnest Buddhist prayer, or Kikuchi Kan's drunk ramblings. Tanaka Hidemitsu earns his scorn for the "chaotic and dishonest" example he inscribed into Dazai's collected works and for pretentiously

identifying himself as a "novelist" (*shōsetsu-kaki*). Like Fujimura Misao, the young symbolist poet Haraguchi Tōzō (discussed below in chapter 9) produced final works filled with the natural arrogance of youth, but Nosaka speculates that such naive sentiments likely have him "turning over in his grave today." Although Akutagawa's famous last note escapes overt criticism, Nosaka lumps him together with authors who fail where amateurs succeed because they have "paid off their resentment in installments" in their literary works (144–48).

Only when they dispose of their literary pretensions and resort to wholly mundane language do these literati merit Nosaka's half-hearted praise. For example, he semi-approvingly cites Futabatei and Iwano Hōmei, who wrote as if hastily scribbling a terse memo to their wives in the margins of the household account book.[38]

For Nosaka, novelists, who make their living *from* words, paradoxically lack the power to convey true emotions *with* their final words. Like caged parrots who are so used to mimicking humans that they will cry out using human language amid their birdlike cries when facing a cat predator, authors resort to the artificial languages acquired from their many years spent as literary writers, even when facing the crisis of death. Their privileged status as "wordsmiths" (*kotoba no senmonka*) denies them access to authentic expression rooted in sensory bodily experience; as Nosaka puts it, novelists "aren't eatin' bean jam rice cakes" (*bota-mochi o kutte inai*) (147). Such simple last writings are limited to the amateurs: Tsuburaya, WWII farmer-soldier conscripts who merely bid their loved ones "Take care not to catch cold" or "Watch out for fires" (142–43), or Nosaka's own grandmother. She died in excruciating poverty in the immediate postwar with just a few grains of white rice, charcoal, and seven ten-yen bills along with some indecipherable address tucked under her mattress. Nosaka notes her that example might not be categorized as an *isho* per se but are traces that offer a "vivid message" (141).

His praise is reserved for these less literate amateurs with one curious, glaring exception: Mishima Yukio. Nosaka's stance toward Mishima at first appears ambivalent, especially compared to his unqualified praise for Tsuburaya. He calls Mishima's manifesto—the written version of the speech that he delivered orally before the SDF forces after taking a hostage and one that he pre-circulated to Japanese reporters—"mannered" with its "clichéd wording [*kimarikitta kotoba*] constraining and yet condensing its sentiments [*gyaku ni, omoi o tojikomete shimau*]" (146). At the same time, Mishima's manifesto is upheld as one possible, if imperfect, choice for literary men who insist upon writing *isho*.[39]

Among Mishima's many last writings, what merits Nosaka's highest praise on par with the young marathoner is this death poem (*jisei*):

In a world that loathes	*chiru o itou*
petals that would fall	*yo nimo hito nimo*
before all the others,	*sakigakete*
the flower that rushes ahead.	*chiru koso hana to*
A gale blowing in the eve.	*fuku sayokaze*[40]

Unsurprisingly, he ignores Mishima's other death poem with its martial tones that ran contrary to Nosaka's leftist pacifist politics. What is surprising here is his praise for both Mishima's nine-page manifesto filled with political rhetoric alongside this rather conventional *waka* poem. These would seem to be completely antithetical to one another and to Tsuburaya's simple prose.

What they all share, however, is the use of clichéd expressions. If Mishima's taps a familiar political rhetoric, on the one hand, and a high poetic tradition, on the other, Tsuburaya's indulges in "tedious repetition [*kudokudoshii kurikaeshi*] of 'thank you' and '… was delicious'" (141). Nosaka expresses a preference for this kind of simple language that, like farmer-soldiers' last letters, are filled with mundane expressions of concern for those they are leaving behind. They shine, he claims, especially compared to those penned by elite student-soldiers like those collected in *Kike wadatsumi koe* (*Listen to the Voices from the Sea*, 1949) that include lofty Buddhist phrases like "fallen flowers" (*sange*). Of course, Mishima's poem is filled with just such lofty phrases of ephemerality. Why then does it nonetheless escape Nosaka's critique and even merit his praise? Perhaps precisely because its imagery is so very generic to its medium.[41]

It is their empty, and even trite, nature that enables these words to affect a reader in an emotionally powerful way. "For novelists who prattle on with empty words [*utsuro na kotoba*, 虚の言葉], leaving behind a final testament that is truly empty is entirely appropriate. Is this not, in fact, their 'true value'"? (148). His essay title—"Isho: Tsuburaya's substance (実), Mishima's emptiness (虚)"—might seem to suggest an unabashed critique of the latter in favor of the former. But with these terms, Nosaka is evoking a long-lived philosophical and literary debate about sincerity/fictionality, truth/falsehood, substance/emptiness only to dismiss these dichotomies in the end.[42] At the conclusion of his essay, he offers his unqualified endorsement of both writers and of both kinds of writings:

> Both the truth or concreteness of Tsuburaya and the falsehood or emptiness of Mishima overflow with true emotion. Each disappears little by little, leaving those of us left behind with a feeling of the chill fog in the fields of Adashi. (148)

Here he is invoking the famous line from Yoshida Kenkō's 1330 *Tsurezuregusa* (*Essays in Idleness*) that espouses the virtues of ephemerality: "If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino … but lingered on forever in the world, how things would lose their power to move us!"[43] The sensory power of both Tsuburaya's and Mishima's writings derives from their ability to mark absence in language, in the ephemeral words left behind by the people who leave us behind.

8

Autothanatography, or the Exorbitant Call to Write One's Own Death

Etō Jun and Yamada Hanako

As we have seen thus far, the writings left behind were often addressed to another person whose identity was made explicit to varying degrees: Akutagawa's anonymous "old friend," wife, or friends Oana and Kikuchi; Tsuburaya's mostly unnamed SDF superiors and coaches or his thirty-one family members specified by name or relationship. Even with such targeted recipients, delimiting that audience often became impossible after its writer's death. Equally important to remember is how the writer, too, was a potential reader-audience for the text before their suicide. Nowhere was this doubled role for the author more explicitly signaled than in Kishigami's "Note for myself," although this one too contained many explicit call-outs to many others.

To summarize this point, notes addressed to others can also be (or become) ones for many others and/or for oneself; conversely, even a "note for oneself" can be for another, or even for many others. Depicting a figure of oneself sometime before that self is to be killed can simultaneously be for oneself writing (and reading) before dying as well as for others who will undertake an act of reading in the wake of that death. As such, this entails an especially complicated relationship between self and other, one that is often acknowledged in these texts with their expressions of thanks, apologies, and indebtedness, on the one hand, or lingering resentments and demands. Texts left behind necessarily straddle multiple poles, audiences, and temporalities. As much as there is a reckoning between self and other in these texts, there is often also the sense that the self *is* the other whom one is addressing and regarding in these last writings.

As a genre that foretells one's death, the suicide note might be considered the counterpart of an autobiography that records one's life. In *Regard for the*

Other: Autothanatography in Rousseau, De Quincey, Baudelaire, & Wilde, E. S. Burt argues that autobiography, writing the living self, is intimately concerned with the writing of one's own death, or what has been called autothanatography: "Autobiography is aporetic, not or not only a matter of a subject strategizing with language to produce an exemplary identity but a matter also of its responding to an exorbitant call to write its death."[1] Both genres are rife with logical contradictions and pervaded by a shared sense of alterity, or the inevitable estrangement of the writing self and the written self. Even as this act of representation might seek to collapse these two states of being, the gaps remain between the text and the life—or death—of its author.

If representing something from one's past (or present) is tricky, something that will happen in the future is even trickier. It is still all the more so when that something is our own deaths, "the only one of our possessions that is temporally inalienable," as André Bazin has so nicely put it.[2] In the case of the self-writing/reading of self-death, the complications multiply. To adapt Mishima's phrasing upon rereading his own youthful testament, there is a "now-me writing" (*kore o kaite iru ima no watashi*) who regards both this past writing self (*kore o kaita toki no watashi*), as well as a future dying or dead one (*shinu/shinda/shinde iru toki no watashi*). Autobiography is said to possess a "specular structure … in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding."[3] If so, what happens when the dying author declares their own dead self the subject of that understanding and when the living (and writing) self pronounces on a soon-to-be dead self? What kind of exemplary identities are produced, and what kinds of strategizing with language does this necessitate?

What emerges is often a doubled voice and vision, a first-person embodied subjectivity (that is not necessarily articulated in the first-person) and a third-person other.[4] We saw this above in the moments when Tsuburaya Kōkichi refers to himself in the third person with his final plaintive cry of exhaustion and desire to return to his parents' side, or when the narrator of Akutagawa's posthumously published "Dialogue in darkness" urges "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke! Akutagawa Ryūnosuke … you start again," or when Akutagawa and Kishigami regard their own dying form with anticipatory horror and delight. Multiple sets of eyes "regard the other" here, and that other is none other than the self. But that self is presented here only to mark its prospective absence.

The complicated ambivalence this engenders is perhaps best exemplified in Kishigami's last poem. In darkness, it submerges its speaker-writer, who appears simultaneously as the (unstated) subject and object of this depiction:

Face hidden by a raincoat.	*Kao wa rēnkōto de kakusu.*
Lights turned off in the pitch black,	*Denki o keshite makkura yami no naka de*
writing. What bullshit!	*kaite iru. Detarame da!*

A hidden writing-self cloaked and enclosed in darkness is both depicted and erased in a final writing marking this moment.[5]

The moment of self-death itself, however, is always in the offing. For the writer, it is necessarily a textualized, imagined event in the future rather than an embodied experience from the past. It is worth stressing that for the reader, too, even in retrospect, the suicide of another comes in the form of a mediating text. As such, fiction comes to bear even in these writings that so uncomfortably come to replicate their writer's own self-death. Perhaps this explains why Terayama Shūji claimed that suicide is always "storified," whether "one's own or another's" and "whether fictional or factual."[6]

In the next and last section of this book, part 3, "Mourning in Multimedia," I turn to discuss more overtly fictionalized self-representations of suicide, including the self-eulogizing poetry of Nagasawa Nobuko and Haraguchi Tōzō (in chapter 9) and Mishima's penchant for textualizing, visualizing, enacting, and modeling his own eventual suicide by seppuku in photographs, stories, and films (in chapter 10). Before moving on to these examples, I examine two more recent cases of *isho* here: Etō Jun (1932–99), one of Japan's foremost literary critics and postwar conservative intellectuals, and the young indie manga artist Yamada Hanako (1967–92).

As I hope to show, this unlikely pair demonstrates considerable continuity in their strategies for writing self-death. Etō's clipped and solicitous prose in his suicide note is a far cry from Yamada's own prolix and dense prose, much less her manga panels filled with dark, scathing remarks and sentiments. Yet both kill off the self in their writings in a harbinger of their own suicides, figuring a splintered "self" who is alternatively a speaking, writing, seeing, and/or dying subject or object, or sometimes even simultaneously all at once.

THE SUICIDE NOTE OF A LITERARY CRITIC: ETŌ JUN

On July 21, 1999, the literary and cultural critic Etō Jun left behind one short note before taking his life. He responded to the exorbitant call to write his own death with an exorbitant demand of his own in his short three-line suicide note left on his desk:

> The crippling of mind and body progresses, the torments of sickness hard to bear. Etō Jun after an attack of cerebral infraction this past June 10th is no more than a shell, and this is why I resolved on my own to put an end to this shell. I beg you, ladies and gentlemen, please be able to understand!
>
> Heisei 11 [1999] July 21
>
> Etō Jun

> 心身の不自由は進み、病苦が堪え難し。去る六月十日、脳梗塞の発作に遭いし以来の江藤淳は形骸に過ぎず、自ら処決して形骸を断ずる所以なり。乞う、諸君よ、これを諒とせられよ。
>
> 平成十一年七月二十一日
>
> 江藤　淳[7]

Etō's suicide note possesses a complex narrative perspective that suggests strategizing mightily with language. It echoes some strategies we have already seen while forging some new ones of its own.

The note posits Etō Jun as both speaking/acting subject and object. Albeit on an entirely different register than the young marathoner Tsuburaya's with its neoclassical literary verb endings and precise medical terminology, Etō's note lacks any "I" language, even for sensorial descriptions of bodily and mental pain and suffering (although again, I have inserted them above in my translation for readability). The choice to elide the self here is especially conspicuous for a writer who had repetitively inscribed an "I" into his literary criticism—*Amerika to watashi* (1965), *Inu to watashi* (1966), *Bungaku to watashi, Sengo to watashi* (1974), and *Hihyō to watashi* (1987)—and in his memoir about caretaking for his ill wife in her final months and days, *Tsuma to watashi* (May 1999).

The publication of this memoir just months before his death led most commentators to interpret his act as a love suicide after the loss of his beloved wife (*ato-ōi shinjū*). Ishihara Shintarō, for example, commented, "It was a double love suicide following after her. Once you see it like that, there is nothing to do but simply accept it. He was able to do it because he is a Japanese. Is it not beautiful? There's nothing more to say."[8] In fact, there is a good deal more that we might say (and much more that *was* said), especially since his wife is nowhere explicitly mentioned in his last note despite widespread reports to the contrary.[9] Instead, there is a concentrated focus on a self, but a complicated one that toggles between being a third-person object and a first-person subject. His penname becomes especially key to this oscillation.

Etō uses his third-person proper (pen)name at the moment when he is describing being reduced to "no more than a shell," offering an apt description of his utter self-evacuation. The speaking subject only emerges after this point with the self-determined resolution (*onozura shoketsu shite*, 自ら処決して) to act on this shell. Although the direct address in the final lines is devoid of any first-person pronouns, the speaking subject comes to the fore here in his pleading, doubly emphatic demand for his readers' acceptance:

> [I] beg you, ladies and gentlemen, please be able to understand!
>
> 乞う、諸君よ、これを諒とせられよ。
>
> Kō, shokun yo, kore o ryō to serareyo.

There is a clear call here to the reader to participate in the day of reckoning that Etō, as a high-profile public intellectual, surely knew would follow upon his suicide. Indeed, his suicide and his suicide note would be published, read, and judged extensively.[10] The note was reproduced and cited in the press ad infinitum with fetishistic attention to its handwritten materiality (the number of boxes of the *genkōyōshi* paper he had taken up, the color of ink, etc.). It was frequently

republished complete with a *rubi* gloss for the less literate contemporary audience, an especially ironic situation considering Etō's vocal critique of the impoverished state of national language education in the postwar.[11]

His colleagues and friends answered his call with equal urgency and produced volumes of commentary, most notably a September 1999 special issue of *Bungakukai* that included memorials by luminaries such as the philosopher Yoshimoto Taka'aki, literary critic Karatani Kōjin, author Ōba Minako, then-Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarō, as well as Japanese literature scholars Edwin McClellan and Paul Anderer. Like the premodern death rituals described by Gary Ebersole in his *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan*, here were "public performances following the death of a high-ranking figure" that have political and emotional meaning for the participants.[12] Again, ritual mourning activity is associated with patrons and poets; whereas once the needs of imperial poetry collections dictated the selections, here contemporary publishing houses ensure the obligatory participation of the elites. As many of the *Bungakukai* essays attest, within hours of the news of Etō's suicide, writers were besieged with phone calls and faxes demanding their immediate response.

His childhood friend, the radio announcer Kobayashi Kango, most explicitly responded to Etō's call in his memorial essay, titled "Egashira Atsuo-kun, Kimi no shi o ryō to suru" (Egashira Atsuo, I forgive you). Its final lines read, "Egashira-kun, and so, I tell you here and now that I forgive you. Ega-chan, Egashira Atsuo-kun. Sa—yo—na—ra."[13] The insistent use of Etō's birthname here is conspicuous, especially given the fact that all the other respondents refer to him by his penname, as does Etō himself.

What makes Etō's own choice especially striking is the fact that he had explicitly rejected the idea of having his penname etched onto his gravestone. In a roundtable discussion in March 1998, he explained, "I write using the penname Etō Jun because I have not the slightest intention of putting my bones in a grave marked Etō Jun."[14] Why then mark his last writing by that very same penname? Why might the same nomenclature not serve both his gravestone and his suicide note? If, as De Man claims, the authority of the autobiographical genre stems from its being "rooted in a single subject whose identity is defined by the uncontested readability of his proper name," how to interpret Etō's use of his proper (pen)name here in this autothanatography?[15]

One possible explanation was to signal the death of that public figure. This was the explanation offered by Yoshimoto Taka'aki in his memorial essay for Etō. He argues that Etō was insisting on dying as a private man rather than a public intellectual, like Mori Ōgai before him. In Ōgai's final testament dated just three days before his death in 1922, the author and Imperial Army surgeon general had famously called for a posthumous repudiation of his public identity as Meiji statesman. He expressed a "wish to die Mori Rintarō of Iwami" and to be buried as such: "All I want written on my grave are the words 'The Grave of Mori Rintarō'; not a

single word more."[16] As noted in chapter 3, his tombstone is positioned catty-corner from Dazai Osamu's in Zenrinji Temple in Mitaka and is engraved as per his request. In a similar fashion, Etō's own note was a willful obliteration of the "ornamented" public self, or what Yoshimoto called "self-delimitation" (*jiko gentei*).[17]

Etō had suggested as much in that earlier March 1998 roundtable discussion when he railed against the prospect of erecting any posthumous literary memorial stones, museums, or prizes in his name. He explained that the literary establishment will have to make do with "a single writing brush" placed into the communal grave for literary writers in Shizuoka. Rather than the remains of Egashira Atsuo, which were to be housed in his family grave in Aoyama Cemetery, there will lie "only a single writing brush that [I] used until the very end, which itself will decay so that only the smallest bit of metal will remain in the end."[18] Etō here offers a semi-permanent material substitute for his writing body (and his body of writings) but denies the body of the writer in this literary gravesite.

In Etō's suicide note, too, there is little private self in evidence. Instead of Egashira, there is only the writer, as signaled by the penname Etō Jun. As he explained in that earlier roundtable discussion, a penname marks "the definitive gap between the real-life 'I' and the literary 'I.'"[19] In the note, it is exclusively this literary self that appears to participate in the public reckoning of this public persona.

Significantly, though, Etō signs his note by the very name whose identity is being obliterated. Unlike Ōgai, who signed his testament Mori Rintarō when insisting that this nomenclature alone remain, Etō signs off with the (pen)name he declares is being disposed. Instead of a singular identity being killed off, there are two Etō Juns: the Etō Jun who, ever since his stroke, is already "no more than a shell" and another Etō Jun who writes of his decision to put an end to this shell. Etō's ending with a reiteration of his proper (pen)name is both a declamation of that identity and its decimation. In the end, the authorial identity is shored up even as it is being pronounced dead.

The author is dead; long live the author.

THE SUICIDE DIARIES AND DIARY-MANGA OF THE YOUNG INDIE MANGA ARTIST YAMADA HANAKO

The twenty-four-year-old manga artist Yamada Hanako (1967–92) left behind no suicide note before leaping to her death from the eleventh-story roof of the Tokyo suburban apartment complex where she and her family had lived when she was growing up. Her family was left to sift through over twenty volumes of her diaries, manga sketchbooks, and story ideas crammed onto the pages of her notebooks. In these, her entries are often marked with numbered bullet points that are filled with nonlinear thinking and writing, as well as parenthetical snide, and even hateful, remarks aimed at herself and others. Deciphering any final messages, if there were any to be found, fell mostly to her father, a car salesman by trade.

FIGURE 24. Yamada's cramped handwritten scrawls and dense drawings neatly repackaged as *A Diary Just before Suicide*. Cover image of Yamada Hanako, *Jisatsu chokuzen nikki: Kanzenban* (Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 1998). Courtesy Ōta Shuppan.

He would publish them under the title *Jisatsu chokuzen nikki*, or *A Diary Just before Suicide*, in 1996 through Ōta Shuppan, the same publisher of Tsurumi's *The Complete Manual of Suicide* (fig. 24). This work, too, achieved bestseller status that summer, propelling her father to try his own hand at being a writer afterward. As he explained in the book's preface, the job required some heavy editing, deleting, and reordering to make it legible in order "to convey what Yumi・Yamada Hanako wanted to say to her family, her lovers, and her editors by publishing the diary in her stead." What he claims justifies his project is that Yamada herself acknowledged (in her diary) that "'my works are documentaries, diary manga [*nikki manga*].' Since she published her own diaries bit by bit turning them into her works, her diary itself should be called her 'magnum opus.'"[20]

What are we to make of this kind of posthumous publication and the stated rationale for undertaking such work? Is reproducing her words there—and here too—an important act of recovery or is it inevitably ethically compromised?

When reflecting on his involvement in a similar project publishing the excerpted diaries and draft poems of the young aspiring poet Saeki Masako, who drowned herself in Kiyomizu Park pond at age twenty-two on March 12, 1948, the novelist Fujiguchi Tōgo reassured himself, writing, "Her body has perished, but I felt the responsibility to make her live on, and so I organized her records. I believe the only path to her living on is to make her pains widely known, or even known just to another single young person." Seven handwritten volumes of her diaries, poems, songs, and impressions were collated and edited into a single thirty-four-page chapter in a volume titled *Ai wa kanashikariki* (The sorrows of love) and released in a small, six-thousand-copy print run.

For Fujiguchi, Saeki's choice to destroy her body was what compelled him to preserve her body of works—but as he admits here, not without his own editorial interventions as an amanuensis. With her parents' permission, Fujiguchi excerpted and edited the text "to omit redundancies and to compensate with his editorial brush the parts that were confused and not put as they should be, either due to her excitable emotions or lack of literary skill." Marveling at the resulting product, he imagines "Saeki-kun rejoicing underground" (*Saeki-kun mo chika de yorokonde kurete iru to omou*).[21] Saeki's suicide note, if it can be called that, appeared in her final diary entry written on the day before her death. It ends with a plaintive plea to her closest friend and her mother for their forgiveness. In response, this friend was sympathetic if less than completely forgiving in a short memorial piece she penned and titled "Saeki-san no baka" (Saeki's stupidity).[22]

Those left behind are left with the complicated task in the aftermath of a suicide of sifting through the remains. As we saw above with the case of Akutagawa (and as we will see with Mishima in part 3), these complications are exacerbated when there is no single self-designated text left behind but instead so very many competing versions, especially when they uneasily intermix fictional and nonfictional

mediums. In the case of female writers, there are often added gender politics involved with such posthumous publication projects.

The example of the manga artist Nekojiru, a contemporary of Yamada's who also died by suicide in May 1998, further illustrates this point. Nekojiru, or "Cat Soup," is the penname for this indie manga artist famed for her twin cats Nyako and Nyata, whose innocent wide-eyed expressions, modeled after *maneki-neko*, the good luck cats often found in Japanese shops, belie their ultraviolent temperaments. In the pages of her manga, the twin cats travel contemporary urban landscapes witnessing and enacting all sorts of cruelties. Like Yamada, Nekojiru's works appeared in the underground magazine *Garo* in the early 1990s but only gained popularity after her husband Yamano Hajime took over the illustrations. After her suicide, Yamano would take on her penname and as the sole executor of her literary estate control the posthumous distribution of her works.[23]

At first, Nekojiru's suicide was figured as a copycat of sorts. In the press and among her fanbase, speculation arose that she had imitated the heavy metal rocker named "hide" (in lowercase and pronounced "he-day") of X Japan, who had died by the same method of hanging from a doorknob just eight days earlier on May 2, 1998.[24] At the time, the media identified hide's suicide and his anguish-filled music as one major cause of the huge spike in youth suicides, especially among his predominantly young female fanbase.[25] Within a week of his suicide, five teenage fans had attempted suicide, and three of them died while playing his music and/or wearing X Japan merchandise. Even in the cases of these youths, the links were seemingly a bit more tenuous than the copycat label ascribed to them might suggest. One middle schooler was said to have watched an X Japan video the night before his suicide, and another had written in letters to friends both that she "longed for hide to return" but also explained that her suicide was "no suicide following him in death, but out of a desire to die" (*ato-ōi jisatsu de wa naku, shinitai kibun*).[26]

Notwithstanding the fact that Nekojiru's husband publicly disputed any connection to X Japan or to hide that might explain her suicide, another source linked it not only to hide's but also to the later June 2001 suicide of Aoyama Masa'aki, the subculture writer on drugs, *lolicon*, and music who had become a shut-in (*hikikomori*). The links here were again tenuous, based solely on the coincidence that hide had written promotional blurbs praising Nekojiru's works while Nekojiru had written manga for Aoyama's manga zines and some blurbs praising his books.[27] Again, chains of writing and reading are implicated in copycat suicides to link disparate individuals who shared little besides, in this case, all being born in the 1960s and part of underground subcultures.

A friend and colleague of Nekojiru's, the editor and subculture writer Yoshinaga Yoshiaki, would offer a tribute of sorts that claimed her as part of his own personal genealogy. After his wife died by suicide in 2003, he penned a book in which he treats the self-deaths of his wife, Aoyama Masa'aki, and Nekojiru as parallel events

that rendered him a suicide survivor. His focus is "less the reasons that caused these individuals to commit suicide than on those left behind," as he makes clear in the book's preface. This point is also abundantly clear in the book's grammatically awkward and conspicuously gendered title, *Jisatsu sarechatta boku* (The [male] I who was suicided upon, 2004).[28]

For her part, Nekojiru had refused to self-narrate the causes for her suicide, at least publicly. According to one source, she had left behind multiple suicide notes dated from previous attempts years before, but none were published after her death except for a single line where she rejected "completely any talk about her motives for dying."[29] Her evil twinned cats living in an evil world naturally fueled assumptions about her worldview that might have led her there, nonetheless. Posthumous publications released by her husband helped fuel these assumptions. In July 1998, he published her sketch diaries in a volume called *Jiru-jiru nikki*, a series of one-panel cat drawings with handwritten text explanations of the "bizarre things she encountered on a day-to-day basis" from 1994 until April 1998, the month before she died. Using her dream notebooks as fodder, he also continued drawing his own tamer version of these cat comics under the commemorative penname of "NekojiruY."[30]

We cannot, of course, know what any of these young women writers would think about these posthumously published works or the stated motivations behind them—to enable the women who wrote them to speak from beyond the grave, in a sense. Saeki Masako, however, offered a clue. In her diaries, she commented on a work published during her lifetime that claimed to capture her in prose. In her diary entry from a month before she died, she reproduces an article titled "Bakuzen to shita shōsō: Saeki Masako no baai" (A vague sense of restless irritation: The case of Saeki Masako) that had appeared in a special issue of a young women's journal under the title of "Seishun no kiki" (The youth crisis). The article describes her trials and tribulations as a young woman working in the immediate postwar to help her family make ends meet. After a thwarted love affair, she realizes that relying on a man is what causes her a "vague sense of anxiety and restless irritation" and that "a woman must stand firmly on her own as a woman, or there is no hope of being saved." Despite the many direct quotes from her interview with the journalist, after replicating them (and the article) in her diary, she nonetheless wonders, "Seeing my own feelings so plainly displayed made me wonder if I really felt this way. This might be the usual qualifying remark, but I felt that my true feelings were hidden behind those words. There is not a single soul who could penetrate my truth."[31]

Saeki's words of caution against assuming that the words left behind reveal her "truth" are useful reminders not to collapse representations with realities, even when it is a self-representation. The hazards of doing so multiply in cases where there are no single final self-designated texts to speak for the dead or, conversely, when there are so very many to choose from.

With this caution in mind, I turn now to the manga artist Yamada Hanako. Her example offers a segue from this section's focus on *isho* and other more factual-based "writings left behind" to the more fictional multimedia texts discussed in part 3. In her case, they range from her diary entries and manga panels that declare the births and deaths of her many successive artistic identities. As we will see, her dizzying series of pseudonyms and characters' suicides and rebirths appear in textual and visual forms that would come to uncomfortably replicate Yamada's own.

A DIARY JUST BEFORE SUICIDE

In Yamada's case, although there was no single designated last note, again there was a text handwritten "just before" suicide that was reproduced and published in its aftermath to explain it and to speak in its writer's stead. *Jisatsu chokuzen nikki* is a sprawling work, even in her father's heavily edited version. Although he neatly divvies up her diary entries chronologically into subsections by theme—personal relationships (family, friends, and lovers), bullying, work pressures with manga editors and publishers, her thoughts about living and dying, her psychiatric diagnoses and treatments—what suffuses its pages is a painful entangled mess of feelings of hatred and despair for herself and others.[32]

For her father, it was crucial to displace the sole narrative that had come to stand as the shorthand by which her suicide was most widely known and explained—bullying (*ijime*), a hot topic in the media at the time amid an alarming rise in youth suicides. "I got upset and fed up with the way the media was reporting her exclusively as a 'manga artist who committed suicide as a victim of bullying.' More than anything else, I wanted to capture the artist Yamada Hanako, who eventually took her own life in deep despair after wearing down her body, continuing to write manga while coldly and calmly regarding her own internal sense of the ugly, dirty, and disgusting nature of human beings."[33]

Although her father's edited version downplays the theme of bullying, it is omnipresent in her works. Her manga typically feature school children bullied by their classmates and at the hands of unrelentingly evil female teachers who were often depicted with a menacing rising sun flag pattern behind them (fig. 25).[34]

In her diary entry for February 26, 1992, Yamada writes, "Bullied kids are flowers. I would become a flower for the sake of everyone. … I am a flower. If it were for everyone's sake, I'd be fine being smashed to pieces."[35] Incorporating these words from her diary, Yamada created one of her last manga on March 3, 1992, the day before her three-month institutionalization at a psychiatric hospital. "Tamashii no asoko" (The other realm of the spirit) is atypical of her usual style with a single large format manga panel with its pensive big-eyed attractive female character and neat, legible calligraphic style. Thematically, however, it is on point. This manga, too, figures bullying as its central theme and this character is figured as a martyr for bullied children everywhere.[36]

FIGURE 25. Bullied protagonists in Yamada's "Yotsuba no kurōbā" (1992) and "Wasuremono" (August 1988–June 1990). Yamada Hanako, *Karappo no sekai* (Tokyo: Seirin Kōgeisha, 1988), 30, 8.

As her father noted, bullying was far from the only motive for suicide identified in her writings. In a list of reasons for dying, it appears as just one of the seven numbered "Reasons [I] want to be summoned"(*Meisaretai riyū*) on May 22, just two days before she died:

1. at a certain age will be the family housemaid. Disreputable, dependent, good for nothin'.
2. an inability to make a single friend (because too gloomy).
3. future prospects dim. Won't find a place to work (will be bullied).
4. can no longer write manga = no reason to live [*ikigai ga nai*].
5. my family will make me eat meals. Don't wanna get fat.
6. no desire to do anything. Everything and anything is exhausting (helpless, listless).
7. 'anxiety disorder' attacks are painful.[37]

In the diary, bullying more often figures as an impediment to her creativity because it is featured too repetitively in her artistic works. In an entry from May 1991, Yamada recounts her publisher's berating her for submitting "yet another work in the same pattern as all the previous ones. And really, enough already with the bullied kid topic." She, too, berates herself for being a one-trick pony. In her father's edited version, this entry is juxtaposed with her drawing that depicts a beleaguered manga artist tagged as "me, three years after debuting," harangued by her editor in a toxic work environment. At the top is a note that "all manga artists put up with this painful experience in the beginning in the hopes they will eventually succeed (but that is not necessarily the case)."[38]

As with this example, her "diary" edited by her father intersperses her manga—often undated, untitled—with her dated diary entries that are arranged chronologically but also divided into multiple thematized sections. This makes it especially difficult to reconstruct any semblance of a coherent picture of the manga artist Yamada Hanako from this account, although the pains of the young woman Takaichi Yumi (her birthname) and of her father attempting to make sense of her life and her self-willed death come to the fore. In the hopes of doing so, I suggest we turn to her manga themselves to look at moments in which she figured her own self-death—and sometimes also her rebirth—in art.

YAMADA HANAKO, A.K.A. TAKAICHI YUMI, URAMOCHI KAMOME, YAMADA YŪKO, SUZUKI HARUYO

Before turning to her art, let us consider one last excerpt in her diary in which Yamada declares herself dead in a move that bears an uncanny resemblance to the strategies employed by Etō Jun, even if it employs a different register. Both writers decimate one artistic identity while declaring another. As we saw above, in his terse suicide note from July 1999 that he also signed using his penname "Etō Jun," he wrote:

> Etō Jun … is no more than a shell and this is why I resolved on my own to put an end to this shell [*keigai*, 形骸].

In a late March 1992 diary entry, Yamada invokes a similar metaphor of herself as an emptied out shell, also speaking of herself using a third person penname: "Yamada Hanako is an empty cicada shell [*semi no nukegara*, 蝉の抜け殻]. Will reappear as poet Suzuki Haruyo. (Suzuki Haruyo. Born in Niigata. April 12, 1971, 20 years old, B blood type. Address, Nakano East. … Sugiyama-villa Room D. No telephone. A very chatty and cheery girl. Catchphrase 'Oft-called a wandering Techno-boy!' Why? Just cuz')."[39] Here she declares the death of the manga artist Yamada Hanako but promises a rebirth of a new artist, the poet Suzuki Haruyo.

By this point in her career, Yamada had already cast off two prior pennames:

Uramochi Kamome (裏町かもめ), January 1979 at age twelve (debuts in *Nakayoshi Deluxe*)

Yamada Yūko (山田ゆう子), February 1984, at age seventeen

Yamada Hanako (山田花子), 1987, at age twenty (breakthrough success after praise from famed manga artist Nemoto Takashi; starts serializing in *Young Magazine, Garo, Reed Comics*)

Suzuki Haruyo (鈴木ハルヨ), March 1992 (two months before her suicide)

As many noted, her choices for pennames (excluding her first, which loosely translates into Down-'n'-out Duck) were eclectic in that they were utterly ordinary. Why, as one manga artist asked, did she "play with a name that is more common than her real one?" It defied the "usual reason folks with common names like Suzuki … or Yamada used a penname."[40]

Only one of her works was published posthumously under her final new penname of Suzuki: "Aamen, Sōmen, Hiyashi sōmen." The title plays on the Japanese phrase "*Ah-sō*" and the word for a type of noodles (*sōmen*) often served cold (*hiyashi*), but here is invoked as the prelude to a prayer of sorts. Like "Tamashii no asoko," its style, with its atypical use of large, neat calligraphy, departs radically from the vast majority of Yamada's previous works. Moreover, this one exclusively uses text with no images at all and contains an unusually cheery poetic message:

> The small brook in spring burbles on by
> Whispering to the perfectly formed and beautifully colored violets
> and lotus flowers on the banks
> Bloom! Bloom!
> The small brook in spring burbles on by
> Whispering to the groups of shrimp and killifish and kelp
> Swim the whole day away in the sun,
> Play, Play![41]

This one was penned on March 30, 1992, while she was in the hospital, whose recuperative interventions she referred to in her diaries with derision: "'The Land of Rest' [*yasumi no kuni*], naps and strolls. In this 'Land of Rest,' no freedom and no privacy & unable to go at my pace. Yamada Hanako is an empty cicada shell."[42]

If Yamada here figures one kind of possible escape in the beautiful, natural world, elsewhere she suggests only suicide offers that escape. In a story written in 1987 with the deceptive title of "Ikite itemo daijyōbu" (It'll be okay even if I live), Yamada depicts her typical protagonist—a victim of bullying. This story chronicles the travails of an "ugly, unpopular, and unhappy" middle school girl, ironically named Sachiko (幸子), or "child of happiness." In self-reflexive artistic prose that rivals Akutagawa's description of the merits of his method of choice for suicide in his final note, Yamada depicts a character debating the possible methods for

suicide as a menu of choices that stretch out before her almost lovingly. Scorned and bullied by her classmates and her love interest,

> Sachiko eventually hits upon the idea of suicide. Sounds of applause (*pachi pachi pachi*). But the problem was how to commit suicide. For the narcissist Sachiko, dying beautifully using something like sleeping pills was truly the way she wanted to die, but she didn't know how to get her hands on the pills. Jumping in front of a train or jumping off a building would mean limbs scattered everywhere, guts spilling out, and brain matter SPLAT! Although that kind of thing wouldn't matter once dead, for a young girl in her teens, it was an unbearable disgrace. Suicide by gas would cause problems for her family if there were an explosion; death by drowning and becoming a bloated corpse that floats to the surface and looks like [the eighteenth-century sumo wrestler] Dozaemon was just gross; and slitting her wrists would hurt. All these excuses, but in the end, she was really just afraid of dying.[43]

While this story concludes before any denouement that would make clear what the young protagonist chooses in the end, in another work, she finishes off her character with a gruesome self-death that is nonetheless depicted as a happy end of sorts.

In the ninth installation of "Maria no kōmon" (Maria's anus, August 1990), Yamada eerily anticipated her own suicidal leap from an eleventh story rooftop just two years later. She intersperses many clues about the work's autobiographical ties. She depicts a character named Tamami, a name she also used for her "good girl" alter ego in her diary.[44] In this panel (fig. 26), which includes Yamada's publishers' signs (Reed and Seirindō) in the right foreground, the girl leaps from a building with a joyous *PYON!*, the onomatopoeic expression for leaping that appears in a prominent thought bubble in flowery and girlish lettering with an elongated curlicue.

In this panel, we get not just the character's suicidal impulse but also, importantly, its imagined reception. In another echo of Akutagawa and also *The Complete Manual of Suicide* in which this manga panel is featured as a laudable example under the method of "leaping" (*tobikomi*), reception is paramount. In fact, it appears in three iterations; the uppermost right box that floats up from the foot of the leaping protagonist narrates the suicide in an omniscient voice using past tense, "But, just this one time in the very end, [she] broke the 'rules' and did what she wanted to in her heart." The thought bubble floating from her head anticipates the act in the first person: "I know that suicide is bad, but I just don't want to live anymore!" And in the lower left, an inset panel of her bloodied face and the whispering *zawa zawas* of bystanders who cry out, "Look! (*Miro yo!*) There's a satisfied smile on her face."[45]

With this uncanny prefiguration of her own suicide here, Yamada responds to the exorbitant call to write one's own death. Hers, too, mightily strategizes with language and image to produce multiple temporalities and multiple selves looking at other selves dying and dead.

Yet unlike Etō Jun, who depicted a writing self who could be both inside and outside texts of his own making, Yamada, the authoress, makes no appearance outside of this circle. Instead, she appears forever entrapped therein by characters

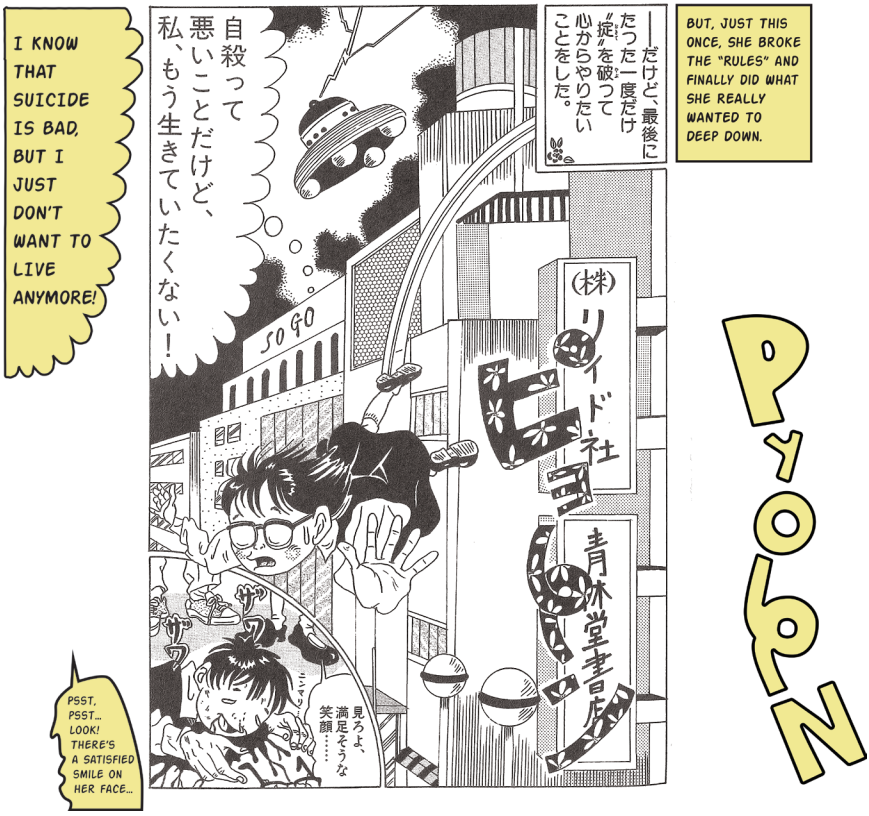

FIGURE 26. Tamami's leap in "Maria's anus" (Maria no kōmon), *Der Bleu Angel* (August 1990). Yamada Hanako, *Nageki no tenshi* (Tokyo: Seirin Kōgeisha, 1999). (My translations added here in margins.)

of her own making. It is this characterization of her and her art that dominated after her suicide. In a June 1996 article in *Garo*, her father unfavorably contrasted her manga with those of Nemoto Takashi, her patron who had helped launch her debut as a professional manga artist, writing that "Whereas Nemoto made others the object of his observations, for Yamada Hanako, the object of observation was always herself."[46] If Nemoto escaped any trap of self-representation, Yamada had inadvertently entrapped herself.

In an afterword to early editions of her diary, her father explains that it was only after her death when talking with a psychiatrist who had treated her when she was institutionalized that he came to understand the severity and intractability of the issue for Yamada. He summarizes the doctor's diagnosis as follows:

> Usually a writer does not make a character appear in their works that coldly exposes portions of themselves. Instead, writers preserve that part in their interior [*naimen*].

> But in Yamada's case, exposing parts of herself coldly in this way made it difficult for her to maintain her mental balance. In other words, the problem is embodying [*gushōka*, 具象化] these parts of oneself in one's works. … When it reaches this point, there are no effective medical treatments. Medicine only exacerbates the illness. To keep it in check, the only possible solution is to not turn one's attention to the self, to not write oneself [*jibun jishin no koto o kakasenai*]. But then this would mean killing off her genius as an artist. For me, as someone who is both a psychiatrist and someone who loves art, this poses a dilemma. … In Yamada Hanako's case where she is an artist who writes herself into her works just as she is [*sono mama*], it usually in the end results in mental illness [*kokoro no byō*]. This is sadly often the truth of the matter.[47]

Intriguingly, in updated print runs of Yamada's diary, none of this medical diagnosis appears. It seems to have been censored, whether out of fears of libel or liability.

I quote this summary of this doctor's diagnosis at length here since it encapsulates a common and fairly commonsensical presumption about the relationship between writing and suicide. Self-writing is linked to suicide when writing a self-negating view of the self. This is one that as we have already seen was lodged in the case of Akutagawa whose late semi-autobiographical turn in his works were blamed for his "defeat" at the hands of literature, and as we will see below, one that is frequently invoked to explain Mishima's suicide and his many suicidal characters.

For her part, Yamada claimed that what bothered her were not any negative self-depictions but prettified versions that could not help but be mere self-justifying exercises. In a diary entry from July 1991, Yamada lamented that her manga "inevitably (if subconsciously) turn into just that kind of self-justifying move, no matter how much I might try to write disposing of myself. (*Donna ni jibun o sutete kaitemo, dokka de [muishiki ni] jiko seitōka shite shimau*)." But, as she put it, the equation that linked her "protagonists = pitiable humans = author" was unavoidable because "it is impossible to draw manga utterly lacking in self-assertion (since drawing manga itself is self-assertion)."[48]

With this tautological equation, the author is bound to tragic characters inside and outside the text. What, if anything, might remove authors from this binding equation?

A creative solution is proffered by manga artist Nemoto Takashi in his own memorial work "offered in praise of the late Yamada Hanako" (*Kojin・Yamada Hanako sanshi e sasageru*). He titles it "The woman who saw Maria's anus," in a reference to Yamada's most popular manga, "Maria's anus," and offers a rewrite of Yamada's own most visceral anticipation of her suicidal leap in her manga (see fig. 26).[49] Nemoto's manga creatively suggests the ways that seeing oneself in one's own manga might just offer the artist one way out.

Like many of Yamada's own protagonists, Nemoto's Sayuri fails to articulate her true feelings in her spoken dialogue, although thought bubbles are filled with her unvarnished vitriol. In this short, three-page sketch, "Sayuri (a plain, introverted girl)" is reluctantly dating the pushy and unattractive "Masa, who has no clue that he is totally hated," but she cannot bring herself to break it off even after

FIGURE 27. Yamada Hanako, seeing herself reflected in manga of her own and other's making. Nemoto Takashi, "Maria no kōmon o mita onna," *Garo Kinkyū tokushū: Tsuitō Yamada Hanako* (August 1992). Courtesy Nemoto Takashi.

he insists upon buying her a tight *body-con* dress much to her public humiliation. In despair after this incident, she finds a comic book by Yamada Hanako titled *Nageki tenshi* (*Der Bleu Engel*) and sees herself in the many panels of the overeager, bullied schoolgirl "Tamami" (fig. 27). Declaring "Th-this is about me!," she decides to commit suicide following the despairing advice in one panel that promises it's better "to die in a blaze rather than stupidly live on." Before she can do so, however, news comes that her unattractive suitor Masa has suddenly died, and she feels cornered into adopting the pose of a bereft mournful girlfriend.

Two years later, she dies having leaped from the roof of a tall building, her angel figure ascending to heaven and declaring "Ahh, finally! I could die" (fig. 27). In an "elementary class for the dead" in heaven, she gets seated next to "Yamada," a clear analogue for the manga artist Yamada Hanako with her signature pigtails and beret. Here, "Yamada" reveals Sayuri's hidden motivations for waiting the two years. She claims to know the real reason that Sayuri waited two years to die, even if the gods do not: "It was only because you were afraid everyone would think you followed him in death." In Nemoto's final panel, Yamada sketches manga while observing those around her even up in heaven (fig. 28).

We might recall here that Yamada, too, could be said to have waited for a two-year period of delay that mirrors Sayuri's. The manga panel depicting Tamami's

FIGURE 28. Meeting Yamada Hanako in heaven and in memorial manga by Nemoto Takashi. Nemoto Takashi, "Maria no kōmon o mita onna," *Garo Kinkyū tokushū: Tsuitō Yamada Hanako* (August 1992). Courtesy Nemoto Takashi.

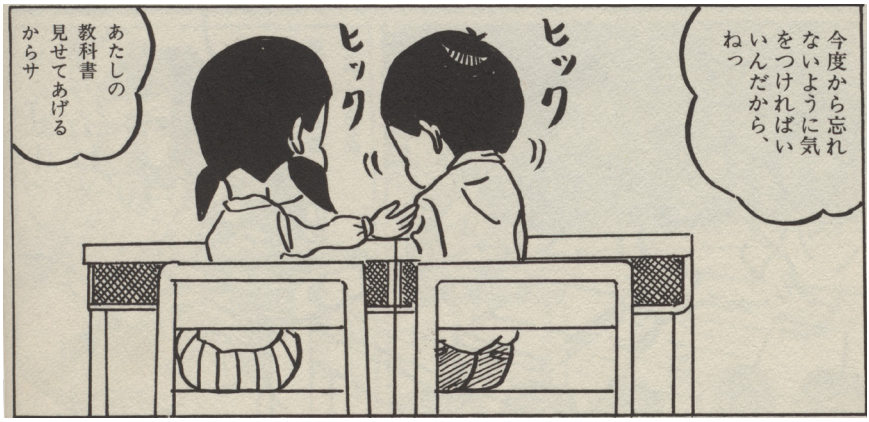

FIGURE 29. "Four-leaf clover" ("Yotsuba no kurōbā"), written sometime in May 1992. Yamada Hanako, *Karappo no seka* (Tokyo: Seirin Kōgeisha, 1998), 30.

leap from her publishers' building rooftop originally appeared in August 1990, two years before Yamada's own suicidal leap in May 1992.

I cite this manga tribute because it seems to offer an escape for the artist Yamada Hanako and for those trying to understand and mourn her entangled acts of writing and dying in retrospect. Far from offering any clear explanation or claiming simple cause and effect here, Nemoto's rendition suggests the complicated entanglements between acts of writing and reading, as well as among manga artists, characters, texts, and readers. The titular "woman who saw Maria's anus," after all, is simultaneously the character *in* and the reader *of* that very manga. Even if the manga artist "Yamada" has insight into the character-reader, she is not entirely collapsed with them. Instead, she appears distinctly as the authoress Yamada Hanako who, like an omniscient god in heaven, keenly observes and depicts these entangled acts of reading and dying. Ever the artist, she sketches and lives on.

In what is said to be her last manga, "Four-leaf clover" (fig. 29), Yamada returns to her perennial theme of the bullied child and to using her penname Yamada Hanako despite having declared her dead and shed two months earlier. Here, there is at last a reprieve for her protagonist, in this case a young boy who is subjected to the usual merciless bullying by his pig-faced teacher. But this time, it ends with him back home happily listening to his favorite band's new album late into the night after being comforted by a kind classmate at school.

At last, the character lives on too, like the artist Yamada Hanako in manga of her own and others' making.

PART THREE

Mourning in Multimedia

The responsibility of the living to the dead is not simple. It is we who let them go, for we do not accompany them. It is we who hold them here—deny them their nothingness—by naming their names. Out of these two wrongs comes the writing of epitaphs.

ANNE CARSON, "EPITAPHS," 1999

THE WAKE OF ANOTHER'S DEATH is often when we paradoxically feel and seek their presence most keenly. As we seek their trace in the words or objects they left behind, our own words in response seek to close the gap. The word for mourning in Japanese, *tsuitō* (追悼) or "follow in grief," suggests the nature of this pursuit. It can be undertaken in elegiac prose or poems (*tsuitōbun* or *tsuitōka*) or sometimes, as we have seen, sought in gravestones, memorial statues, death masks, or manga. These various writings in memoriam offer a means for those left behind to encounter and mourn their dead.

When the writer themselves is aging as well, these moments of pursuit can be especially poignant as they confront their own mortality. In Etō Jun's case, the majority of respondents were older men born in the early decades of the twentieth century, like Yoshimoto Taka'aki (b. 1924), who, as he put it, "breathed air of the same generation," or Ōba Minako (b. 1930), the only woman represented in the vast number of memorial essays in *Bungakukai*. In pursuing Etō, these writers were perhaps also pursuing their own deaths.[1]

Yoshimoto, for example, sympathetically notes how the closed circle of illness renders the elderly unable to convey anything of their spiritual existential angst (or what he calls "aging pains," *rōku*, 老苦) and instead consigns them to reciting their bodily woes "like a pharmacy advertisement." Because his own physical ailments keep him from fulfilling his promise to offer incense at Etō's memorial service, Yoshimoto concludes his essay with his hope that "this piece of writing could suffice to lament the self-death of Etō Jun as much as a single stick of incense" (*Kono bunshō ga ippon no senkō hodo ni, Etō Jun no jishi o itamu koto ni natte itara saiwai kore ni sugiru koto wa nai*).[2] Ōba similarly recalls Etō's asking

her to take part in his cremation ceremony and to collect some of his bones, but she, too, is bedridden and unable to attend. Instead, she closes her short piece with these lines:

> I cradle Etō-san's bones in the palm of my hand while lying on my sickbed in the complete darkness . … With a feeling as if the entire landscape slowly recedes in the distance.
>
> Byōtoko de yokotawatta mama yami no naka de Etō-san no hone o tenohira de kakonde . … Zūn to mawari-chū no fūkei ga tōnoite yuku yō na kibun de aru.[3]

Here, both Ōba and Yoshimoto encounter the body of the dead in writing and offer their own writings as substitutes for their own bodily presence at the memorial ceremony. Again, writings speak out to, and from, the darkness to dialogue with the dead.

In this final section, "Mourning in Multimedia," I turn to examples of artists who memorialized themselves and others in a host of media, moving from the self-eulogizing poetry and aphoristic prose of the young poets Haraguchi Tōzō and Nagasawa Nobuko in the mid- to late 1940s to the canonized and underground stories, films, and photographs of Mishima Yukio that continue to appear to this day.

9

Copycat Poets and Suicides

Nagasawa Nobuko and Haraguchi Tōzō

Haraguchi Tōzō gave his life calling out my very own cry. … Ever since spring break, this is my conclusion: idealists who go on living are cowards. I have been Haraguchi ever since I was born. And now too, I am Haraguchi. But I will free myself from this two-month long Haraguchi-disease and live on (or at least not die). … In search of purity, Haraguchi turned toward death. In search of purity in life, I … turn toward materialist philosophy.

—NAGASAWA NOBUKO AT AGE SIXTEEN, IN A MAY 1949 LETTER TO A FRIEND

The parallels between Haraguchi Tōzō (1927–46) and Nagasawa Nobuko (1932–49) would be obvious even without her many overt nods to his influence and counterinfluence on her life, writings, and death. Both were youths who chose to die rather than live amid the turbulent conditions of the immediate postwar; Haraguchi died by drowning in Zushi on October 25, 1946, at the age of nineteen, and Nagasawa overdosed with poison in her native hometown of Gunma on June 1, 1949, at the age of sixteen. Both were aspiring poets whose maiden works were published only posthumously thanks to the good grace of friends. Each averred skepticism about the efficacy of written expression, and yet both left behind a substantial collection of writings that speak directly both to their suicidal struggles and to the postwar condition in highly intellectualized terms that draw largely from western poets and philosophers. Stylistically, both favored poems and aphorisms, employing terse fragmentary prose that run from as little as a single phrase or sentence to dozens. And finally, prior to their suicide attempts, each bequeathed multiple volumes of their writings to a close friend who would eventually undertake publication.

Where the two examples depart is in the divergence in the timing and receptions of their work. Haraguchi's major work was published within eight months of his death to great critical acclaim, becoming a postwar best- and long-seller with dozens of print runs for over half a century.[1] *Études à Vingt Ans* is a three-volume collection of his thoughts on everything from French poetry and Nietzschean moral philosophy to the colonial experience.[2] So pervasive is Haraguchi's influence that some credit him with giving birth to postwar poetry. In contrast, Nagasawa's poems took sixteen years to see print at all, at first in a small privately published edition of just five hundred copies. Although her works eventually achieved something of a long-seller status for a poetry collection (with one hundred thousand copies sold between 1965 and 1983), she remains little known.[3]

In part, the discrepancy is due to the resources that were available to Haraguchi's friends, who also would go on to become famous poets and critics themselves. These include French literary scholar Hashimoto Ichimei and Kiyo'oka Takayuki, who won the Akutagawa Prize in 1969 for his stories set in colonial Dalian (Port Arthur), where both he and Haraguchi were schooled. As fellow students at the prestigious First Higher School in Tokyo, the friends managed to publish both *Études*, which Haraguchi had left behind at the time of his first suicide attempt at Mount Akagi in Gunma, and a companion volume that included his final last writings—his self-scripted death notice ("Shinin oboegaki") and the suicide notes addressed to his elder brother and to Hashimoto—alongside a series of memorial essays by prominent literary critics and philosophers.[4]

What propelled interest in Haraguchi was the fact that like Fujimura Misao almost half a century earlier, he was also a First Higher School student who had committed suicide out of ostensibly philosophical reasons. As his friends put it at the time, his choice was "not out of pessimism or ideological confusion, but instead one of the philosophical 'deaths of a youth' that are reminiscent of *senpai* like Fujimura Misao."[5] As a *senpai*, or literally "one who comes before," Fujimura offered something of a model for imitation. One classmate recounts friends who tried to dissuade Haraguchi by warning, "If you die, suicide will become a trend at First Higher so you really ought to give up on the idea."[6] After he died, in a clear echo of Fujimura's "Thoughts on the Precipice," his friends even chose to inscribe a line from *Études* into a birch tree located at the site of Haraguchi's first attempt. The savvy publisher Date Tokuo anticipated that Haraguchi's work would sell well based on the fact that it satisfied "three conditions: First Higher School, suicide, and a posthumous manuscript."[7]

Writing in 1948, literary critic Nakamura Mitsuo aligned Haraguchi with the likes of Fujimura and other "youth sacrifices" that were "sad symbols of Japanese modernity." For Nakamura, the specter of Fujimura remained just as relevant in the politicized context of the immediate postwar, especially for leftist youths experiencing a resurgent class-consciousness; Fujimura was "not merely something belonging to the past"; instead, his "dead spirit haunts the hearts of countless

earnest, sensitive youths all the more today." In his mind, however, Haraguchi's poetry did not quite live up to his model. He wrote that "even if this is a record of youth, we would be hard pressed to call it literature of youth. … Even if the author of *Études* is a martyr to poetry, he is no poet."[8] In the Marxist cultural critic Karaki Junzō's 1950 *Jisatsu ni tsuite* (On suicide), Haraguchi appears as the last in the now familiar long line of literati suicides—after Kitamura Tōkoku, Fujimura Misao, Arishima Takeo, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, and Dazai Osamu—whose "traces enable [him] to consider the special state of contemporary Japan."[9]

Nagasawa Nobuko has occasionally been folded into this lineup as another example of a youth whose struggles were emblematic of the times. As a high school sophomore at the time of Japan's defeat in the war, the book-loving Nagasawa soon became engaged in philosophy and politics. Her above-noted active turn to materialist philosophy (*yuibutsuron*) as a means of warding off her death wish was also a brief turn to communism, which she renounced just days before her suicide.[10] Many of her poems and prose excerpts chronicle her rapidly shifting thoughts toward contemporary philosophical and political trends, ranging from nihilism, deconstructionism (*hakai-shugi*), the historical necessity of communism, and the limits and possibilities of postwar democracy. After her poetry was belatedly published in the mid-1960s, renewed interest in her works at this juncture was fueled by a sense that it could illuminate the immediate postwar conditions, especially for contemporary students in the aftermath of the failed Anpo mass protests of 1968.

United by their shared engagements with poetry, philosophy, and politics and by their suicides at a young age, Fujimura, Haraguchi, and Nagasawa (and also sometimes Kishigami Daisaku, the subject of chapter 6) are discussed in tandem as examples whose last writings offer a "record of youth," to borrow the title from a 1968 volume, *Seishun no kiroku*, in politically turbulent times.[11] In a 2009 study, her image appears in a place of prominence, as the book cover and her most famous poem as its subtitle.

Even in this volume where Nagasawa appears with a dedicated chapter of her writings after one on Haraguchi, however, she is easily forgotten. This was apparent in the following exchange between the volume editor and writer Endō Shūsaku that appears as a preface:

> *Ed.:* I think that today's students are really to be pitied. In addition to the new mass production education, there are really no longer any great men [*gurēto • man*], not even a few, whom they might worship or even scorn. This is changing the subject a bit, but in this volume there certainly are a lot of suicides.
>
> *Endō:* Well, there's Haraguchi-kun and Fujimura Misao.
>
> *Ed.:* And also Nagasawa Nobuko who committed suicide at age seventeen. Speaking of suicide, although they didn't make it into this book, there are also, of course, ones like Dazai and Akutagawa and Arishima who very much influenced youths.[12]

When Nagasawa Nobuko is remembered, her legacy is most often tied to Haraguchi as her most immediate and relevant predecessor and *senpai*. A 2009 article in *Asahi shinbun* touting the belated critical reappraisal of her works sixty years after her suicide encapsulates the most commonly noted features of her biography: "Nagasawa was born to a prominent family of weavers in Kiryū [Gunma] in 1932. She began writing poetry as a first-year student at the local Kiryū Girls' High School. She was a devoted reader of Haraguchi Tōzō's *Études à Vingt Ans*. After graduating, she died by suicide from poisoning."[13] She dies as an aspiring writer of poetry, but more proximately, as a reader of Haraguchi's. One critic dubbed her "Japan's Rimbaud," while noting that it begs "the question of what it means for a woman to 'know' Rimbaud," and even her friend Takakura Eiko added that Nagasawa only "knew Rimbaud through the author of *Études*, Haraguchi Tōzō."[14]

Female self-writing and self-death is again figured here vis-à-vis more famous male examples. We might recall the Okayama student and avid reader of philosophy who cited Fujimura's poem in her own note before dying by poison and is known today only by the sobriquet of "the female Fujimura Misao." Or the aspiring poetess and unrequited love interest of Kishigami Daisaku, who appears under the pseudonym "Yoshiko" in his manuscript where she is figured as a reader to whom he bequeaths all his "pathetic" (*buzama*) writings, rather than as a writer in her own right.[15] Or the assumption that the manga artist Nekojiru was a diehard fan who imitated the suicide of X Japan rocker hide. As Anne Carson suggests about the ancient Greek lyric poet Simonides's epitaph for a woman named Archedike "whose functions are indicated exclusively by her grammatical dependence on the nouns father, husband, brother, children," there "are a number of (by now familiar) things one could say at this point about masculine discourse and patriarchal codes and the suppression of female voice."[16]

If recovering female voices from oblivion is often fraught, in Nagasawa's case it is especially so. The connections drawn between Nagasawa and Haraguchi were in large part by her own design. As the passages cited in this chapter's epigraph attest, in her diaries and letters to friends, she acknowledged her indebtedness to Haraguchi in carving out her own paths of writing, living, and dying. Moreover, as we will see below, her most famous poem begins with a direct citation of Haraguchi's own poems. Yet it is important to note that she resisted this connection as well. In one of her notebooks that she left behind, Nagasawa pointedly rejected any inevitable comparisons with Haraguchi or Fujimura: "I'm not such a deluded person as to die for the sake of purifying my ego [*junketsu na jiga o eru tame ni toka*] or because of the incomprehensibility of life or anything [*jinsei fukakai toka*]. That's just too sick. It's poor form. The last wager: I spun the roulette with a somber face. And when it stopped upon death, for the first time, I was cheered."[17]

In rejecting such explanations for her own suicide, she is resisting what these two men themselves had written about their own deaths beforehand and the conventional interpretations that would be invoked to explain them afterwards. As we saw above, Fujimura Misao had provided an eminently quotable explanation for dying in his "Thoughts at the Precipice," distilling it to a single word in quotes: "Incomprehensible" (*fukakai*). In *Études*, Haraguchi had celebrated "Purity. –This most brutal egoism." He often put these buzz words themselves in quotes, for example declaring "my axiom is the single word 'purity' ['*junketsu*']" or "Pure 'ego' ['*jiga*'] lacks the stench of life."

In citing and tweaking the words of her deceased male predecessors, Nagasawa is not only rejecting them, however. This is an act that both disavows and claims. Citation can simultaneously be in the service of shoring up *and* severing connections, of remembering *and* forgetting.

For both Nagasawa and Haraguchi, imagining the gravesite—one's own or another's—as a site of memory and oblivion was central. In their writings, graves offered sites for imagining a continued point of contact between the dead and the living. Crucially, this relationship was not just one that was imagined to exist between the dying self and the surviving others whom they would leave behind. It also extended to the many other dead who came and went before them.

In what follows, I examine the writings of both Nagasawa and Haraguchi to consider how they speak both to those they left behind and to one other. I ask, How might Haraguchi and Nagasawa be said to speak for, and to, each other? This would seem to be an odd question; after all, Haraguchi's suicide preceded Nagasawa's, which would seem to suggest a one-way street by which "those who come after" (*kōhai*) can only speak or act in response to their *senpai*. But Nagasawa suggests the complexity of this call and response when she writes:

> Haraguchi Tōzō gave his life calling out my very own cry.
>
> Watashi no sakebi o Haraguchi Tōzō ga seimei kakete sakende kuremashita.[18]

Self-diagnosed as suffering from "Haraguchi-disease" (*Haraguchi-byō*), as if he has infected her, Nagasawa suggests here that she has also infected him. As much as she perceived herself to be a copy of Haraguchi, she sensed in him a copy of herself. The echo goes both ways.

Taking my cue from her own writings that skew the chronology, I begin with Nagasawa rather than Haraguchi. Reading in this fashion can help free not only Nagasawa from a place of derivation but also Haraguchi. As we saw above, his poetic abilities were sometimes maligned by critics like Nakamura Mitsuo and also by those like Nosaka Akiyuki, who imagined a mortified Haraguchi himself "turning over in his grave today."[19] By recovering Nagasawa's writings to consider how she figured her own self-death and its mourning, we can hopefully recover Haraguchi as well. Like Simonides's epitaphic rhetoric that treated "time

as a two-way corridor" and thus managed "to pull open the door at this end and reverse the natural direction of mortal traffic," it is my hope that in so doing, we too might productively open up a dialogue among the dead.[20]

NAGASAWA NOBUKO: H-BYŌ AND FORGET-ME-(NOTS)

What Nagasawa's case demonstrates is that even a so-called copycat suicide is not so simple as following any preordained script. Even when she directly cites Haraguchi in her poems and writings, she significantly alters the script by willing the living to forget *and* remember the dead.

Nagasawa's most famous poem written in July 1948 at age sixteen is titled "Betsuri" (Parting). It opens with an epigraph, a citation from the closing lines of Haraguchi's suicide note to his friend, which serves as the preface to his *Études*:

"The time to part truly has come …… When the morning comes, my friends, you'll depart having forgotten my name."	*"Betsuri no toki to wa makoto ni aru ……* *Asa ga kitara tomo yo* *kimira wa boku no na o wasurete tachisaru* *darō."*[21]

—Haraguchi Tōzō—

Taking up Haraguchi's call to his friends here, in the remainder of the poem, Nagasawa repeatedly bids her friends to forget and remember, and finally to forget her again.

She begins half of the poem's stanzas with this insistent, and even imperious, phrase, *Tomo yo* (My friends!).

My friends!
When I die, do not come visiting my grave or anything.
Do not disturb my slumber by offering flowers or shedding tears.

Place my unadorned grave atop a hill.
At the most, I'd ask for the purifying breeze.
On top of a tall, tall mountain
where traveler's visits are few and far between.

My lone grave standing
surrounded by obscure alpine flowers
and only in winters on the rare occasion
of a deep snowfall shall I open my eyes.

My roused spirit wandering the high plains
called forth by the slapping winds
that rage as if they will break.

My friends!
When I die,
sorrow and pity are useless.
If you were to favor me by enwrapping me
in something that resembles friendship in the slightest,
it would be only to forget me and take your leave.

For me, who has said my goodbyes to this world,
I cannot stand the thought of remaining even as an image
among the living.

Might one hear cries of joy
from my grave,
after the passing of so very many autumns and springs,
finally
forgotten?

My friends!
It will be then that my spirit is filled with joy.
It will be only then that I die.
My spirit awakening in spring inside my grave
to say once more goodbye
to the grave.

My friends!
It will be then, in that oblivion,
that you should wave
a giant flag in the sky.
Wave it with all your might
turning toward me.

My friends!
The time to part truly has come.
When the morning comes,
you'll depart having forgotten my name.[22]

Her poem evinces a simultaneous sense of dread and desire to be remembered. The majority of the lines ask her friends to abandon her to her "lone grave standing / surrounded by obscure alpine flowers" with the peaceful, and sometimes unruly, natural elements (the purifying breezes and slapping winds) as her only companion. She wills her self-erasure from the world of fellow humans, reluctant to be memorialized even in the form of an "image" (*eizō*). Being forgotten will enable her awakening as she "opens [her] eyes," her "spirit awakening" (*me ga sameru*, *tamashii mezameru*). At that point, she too will then part, not from her friends, but from the grave itself: "To say once more goodbye / to the grave."

And yet enlightenment does not mean her erasure from the world of the living. Instead, in this moment of awakening, she initiates yet another dialogue with her surviving friends whom she bids to "wave / a giant flag in the sky. / Wave it with all your might / turning toward me." If in death she has turned away from them and turned them away, she now demands to be seen and acknowledged once more. She even imagines someone present at her graveside who might hear her cries of joy at having been forgotten. It is only "when the morning comes" that, borrowing again from Haraguchi's note that opens and closes her own, "the time to part truly has come." Death binds her friends to her even as it frees them.

For the repeating line "When I die," Nagasawa uses a grammatical construction that implies that her friends will think (or speak) back after her death. A more literal translation would read, "My friends! Thinking because I have died, you … (*Tomo yo / Watashi ga shinda kara tote* …)." Her death will be the impetus for their thoughts, words, and actions, whether they forget or remember her. Although she titled the poem "Betsuri" (Parting) in a clear echo of Haraguchi's phrasing, this original title, too, has been largely forgotten in favor of this more catchy refrain by which her poetry and she herself is most remembered: *Tomo yo watashi ga shinda kara tote*.[23]

If in this poem Nagasawa declares an ambivalent relationship to the friends she imagines will survive her, what kind of relationship is she constructing between herself, as a living poet, and the dead poet Haraguchi? By bookending the piece with citations of his last writings, she too is remembering *and* forgetting the dead.

In the poem, she begins by setting off Haraguchi's lines, conspicuously using quotes in the English-language style and crediting them to him by name:

"The time to part truly has come …… When the morning comes, my friends, you'll depart having forgotten my name."	*"Betsuri no toki to wa makoto ni aru ……* *Asa ga kitara tomo yo* *kimira wa boku no na o wasurete tachisaru* *darō."*

—Haraguchi Tōzō—

This citation appears to defy his very request "to depart having forgotten my name (*boku no na*)." By Nagasawa's final stanza, however, his name *is* forgotten:

My friends! The time to part truly has come. When the morning comes— you'll depart having forgotten my name.	*Tomo yo* *Betsuri no toki to wa makoto ni aru* *Asa ga kitara—* *kimira wa watashi no na o wasurete* *tachisaru darō*

In one sense, this act of forgetting is equally an act of remembrance since it accords with his stated wishes. But no attribution to Haraguchi appears this time around. Instead, she merges their two voices by not setting them off as the words of another in any way. In her closing, Haraguchi's parting words to his friends

remain, repeated almost verbatim, but with two strategic adjustments: first, her creative rearrangement so that her own repeated refrain—*Tomo yo*—heads this final stanza, and second, her substitution of the masculine pronoun for "my" name (*boku no na*) from the opening stanza here replaced with the gender neutral *watashi*. In this final line, when she reiterates the opening that bids friends to forget the dead once more, this time she allows for the possibility of a female subject as the one whose name is to be forgotten.

Is appropriating Haraguchi's lines here an act of reclamation or disavowal? Homage or critique?

It is tempting to interpret her final twist as a pointed gender critique. Such a critique would seem to anticipate and resist any imposition of the label "the female Haraguchi Tōzō" or "Japan's Rimbaud" insofar as Rimbaud was filtered through her readings of Haraguchi. One critic, Kurihara Sai, argues that Nagasawa cites Haraguchi only "to turn his words on their head." In her interpretation, parting is no longer a goodbye to one's friends, but instead the birth of a new female subjectivity. This reading enables her to construct an alternative genealogy for female poets that links Nagasawa to "the foremother of modern Japanese female poets" Yosano Akiko and that decouples her from Haraguchi.[24]

But is this a rejection of Haraguchi? What is being turned on its head here? There is no denying that Nagasawa *was* situating her suicide and her writings vis-à-vis Haraguchi's. She deliberately parrots him back with difference. By expanding the pronoun so it encompasses them both, there is less disavowal than claiming, a merge that acknowledges the coexistence of the two without erasing difference. What Nagasawa's poem seems to stress is the interchangeability of self and other, the ways that one might substitute for the other without completely swallowing each other up. Or, as she put it, the ways one might give one's own life calling out another's cry.

Nagasawa memorializes Haraguchi here, and herself. Her creative citational strategy is crucial to navigating the many dangers associated with speaking in the wake of another's death or, I would add, in the face of one's own. As Jacques Derrida points out in his reflections about how to speak and write ethically after the death of his friends, one is faced with "two infidelities, an impossible choice:"

> Out of zealous devotion or gratitude, out of approbation as well, to be content with just quoting, with just accompanying …, to let him speak, to efface oneself … and to follow his speech. … But this excess of fidelity would end up saying and exchanging nothing. It returns to death. It points to death, sending death back to death. On the other hand, by avoiding all quotation, all identification, all rapprochement even, so that what is addressed to or spoken of … truly comes from the other, from the living friend, one risks making him disappear again. … We are left then having to do and not do both at once, with having to correct one infidelity by the other.[25]

If not quoting at all risks making the dead disappear entirely, "just quoting" enshrines them in a tomb of their own making, one with their words carved

upon it for eternity. Since Derrida here writes about his closest friends who also happen to be key intellectuals of the twentieth century—Roland Barthes in the above passage, and about Foucault, Deleuze, Levinas, and so on in the thirteen other eulogies and memorial essays included in this volume—the latter is surely the greater risk.

In Nagasawa's case, it is by quoting and incorporating the final lines from Haraguchi's suicide note into her own poetry two times over that she too manages "to correct one infidelity by the other." If she begins with a citation of his words verbatim, she closes by creatively adapting them into her own. She both fixes and unfixes his words. This is an act of homage as much as any subversion, for in so doing, she mirrors Haraguchi's own preferred forms of writing, as we will see more of below. She speaks for him, to him, and with him simultaneously.

In one of her final notes addressed to her friends, Nagasawa envisions a simpler act of substitution, whereby her suicide will forestall theirs. (Elsewhere, she notes that four of her closest friends have attempted suicide already.) She bids them to "live on in good health," "to live on stalwartly," and "to allow me to shoulder the entire burden of everyone's unhealthy aspects. It is more than enough for me alone to stake a grave marked by defeat and separation [*Haiboku to danzetsu no bohyō o uchikomu mono wa watashi hitori de takusan desu.*]"[26]

In the end, Nagasawa was buried in two separate plots, her ashes divided between the grave of her biological mother, who died when she was four years old, and that of her adoptive family.[27] In one of her earliest extant notebooks, Nagasawa acknowledged her own lasting hopes for her grave site:

> My poetry collections are a history of chaos, defeat, war wounds. That restless grave marker.
>
> Watashi no shishū wa konran to haiboku to senshō. Zawameku sono bohyō da.[28]

For Nagasawa, too, her self-eulogizing poems and aphoristic prose were to serve as an epitaph for both herself and for Haraguchi, but a restless one at that.

HARAGUCHI TŌZŌ: MOURNING IN MEMORIAL STONES, MEMORANDUMS, AND MUSIC

When Haraguchi's friends were burying him, they followed his suggestion for his own epitaph from early on in *Études*:

> A suggestion for my gravestone.
>
> "Here / sleeps a simple, pure youth / who departed this world praying for the happiness of the untroubled maidens."
>
> Bohimei no ikkōan.
>
> "Koko ni / nayami naki otome-ra no saiwai o inoritsutsu yo o sarishi / sobokunaru wakamono nemuru."

This is the line that his friends inscribed into a birch tree that they fashioned into Haraguchi's grave marker and placed in the northern foothills of Mount Akagi in Gunma. This site was both a favorite beautiful natural refuge for Haraguchi during his lifetime and the site of his first suicide attempt when he left behind *Études* and the suicide notes to friends that would serve as its preface.[29] The choice of this location for his memorial led one scholar to posit, without any apparent irony, that the young Nagasawa, a Gunma native herself, may have been one of these "untroubled maidens" who was "deeply susceptible to the spirit of this epitaph."[30]

In retrospect, Haraguchi's friend, the later poet and critic Nakamura Minoru, expressed his regret about their choice, wondering if they should have let *Études* stand as his memorial marker instead: "When we chose that one line from the first volume of his *Études* as an epitaph, I shuddered with a vague premonition. Weren't the three volumes of *Études* the grave of Haraguchi Tōzō? Was not this the intention of the dead?"[31] Conversely, his brother expressed regret that Haraguchi had left *Études* behind at all. Citing a Confucian proverb, his brother scorned the act of writing for being an attempt to be understood by others and lamented the fact that this "man who knew that men among men were to depart in silence bearing their loneliness" had instead chosen "to dump works bathed in his blood."[32]

The question of what traces were to remain and stand in for the dead after they are gone was one that preoccupied Haraguchi as much as those he left behind. At the time of his first suicide attempt at Mount Akagi, he had willfully destroyed all his other poetic writings besides *Études*, leaving only those three volumes behind. At both this first attempt and his second, fatal one later that month at Zushi, he left behind crisply titled "memoranda of the dead" (titled "Shisha oboegaki" and "Shinin oboegaki"), containing only factual identificatory information including his family's address, his own name, birthdate, residence, and school affiliation. Bundled in a *furoshiki* cloth and left alongside his First Higher School cap on the seashore, his second death notice consisted of a single line: "On the eve of October 25, Shōwa 21 [1946], drowned at Zushi beach."[33] This, too, offered a representation of the dead self, something to substitute for the disappeared physical form, albeit a vast departure from the poetry and verbosity of *Études*.

In his prefatory letter to his friend, Haraguchi apologizes for the manuscript's unpolished quality, having written the entire work feverishly in less than eight days.[34] Although he denigrates *Études* as the "ramblings of an old, senile fool" (despite being only nineteen years old at the time of its writing), he also clearly willed it for posterity. In another letter, in anticipation of its publication and at least some commercial success, he asks for a piano to be purchased for a good friend's sister with the proceeds.[35]

Haraguchi is highly self-conscious about participating in his own memorialization through these act of writing. In one of the rare tragicomic excerpts of *Études*,

he anticipates and preempts all the competing explanations and critiques that will be lodged after his death (elision and emphases in original):

> My guess as to what other people will think when they find out about my death:
>
> 1. Stupid folks, especially the aspiring cynics among them, will say: "Haraguchi died, ya' say? Seems like he musta got tired of living, ay?"
> 2. Solemn faced know-it-alls will say: "This is truly the defeat of human existence."
> 3. Biologists who speak mechanistically (*this is really a rather good one*):
>
> "People possess many means to die, but occasionally among them one can discover an odd way. Out of excessive hunger, they gobble down cyanide; in a fit of motor control loss, they point the sharp end of a knife at their own heart; or in a strange attack of lovesick weeping, they leap into a river. … To phrase it differently, death is based on the ceasing of the movement of brain cells and …"
>
> 4. "He just couldn't find any peace in life, huh?"
> "Nah, it's more like he couldn't find peace in peace because it's so very flawed."
> "Hunh – What an extreme contrarian!"
> 5. Poets will say: "From the start, Haraguchi was a man born broken-hearted by life."

Even here when reconstructing this imaginary posthumous reckoning, Haraguchi offers a series of monologic pronouncements. Tellingly, it is the poet Haraguchi who gets the last word here.

Throughout *Études*, Haraguchi repeatedly inscribes a definitive word that might mark his own demise. At the head of his prefatory note to his friends, he includes some fragmentary prose offered "In lieu of a farewell memorial address [*Ketsubetsu no ji ni kaete*]." It is an excerpted citation from one of his own elliptical excerpts in *Études*. Another excerpt reads like a eulogy in the third person: "Haraguchi Tōzō. —At the age of twenty lost ambition; at the age of twenty lost youth; at the age of twenty lost powers of memory; at the age of twenty lost every single thing. Finally, at the age of twenty, a man who lost his life."

Following his cue again, his friends titled this work *Études à Vingt Ans* in reference to his own many references to his tender age and his division of the work into three movements. At his funeral service, Chopin's Études played, enshrining his name and his text alongside those of this Romantic era genius composer-pianist who died young.[36]

Études is, in fact, filled with citations of famous poets, writers, and thinkers that appear in quotes alongside Haraguchi's own words. Nietzsche appears over thirty times, while Valéry and Rimbaud each make over twenty appearances. The work begins with an untranslated quote in classical Chinese from Laozi that appears before Haraguchi's prefatory notes to friends, while *Études I* and *II*

both open with Rimbaud.[37] The third movement opens with a citation of one of Haraguchi's own poems that gestures to Nietzsche. His many intertextual citations appear to be a means of inserting himself into this genealogy of famed male writers. But alongside these appear another citational strategy that deflates his own self-inflating rhetoric. Nothing so clearly evinces the depth of his faith *and* his skepticism in the word than his penchant for quotation marks. For Haraguchi, citation takes two forms: verbatim quotations of great writers (himself included) and scare quotes. If the former type strives to enshrine these bons mots for eternity, the latter suggests the utter unreliability of all forms of "expression."

As early as the sixth entry, Haraguchi asserts the need to "resist all kinds of expression in order to be absolutely sincere to myself." In number fourteen, he writes, "All I can believe in any longer is the sensation of my own skin." Just five excerpts later, he advocates for "the need to harden ourselves to all expression—that which resides inside us and that which resides outside us—images, words, logic, and mathematics." By excerpt eighty-five, expression is so untrustworthy that the word itself requires scare quotes: "'Expression' is an eternally untrustworthy, whimsical, spiritual lover." At times, his distrust stems from a recognition of its inherently commercial aspects: "Expression is a business, a transaction." The majority of the time, however, his skepticism stems from a recognition that "being faithful to the ego, in the end, is ceasing all expressivity." Despite this definitive statement, expression does not cease here but instead continues on for sixty-plus more excerpts. The word *expression* (*hyōgen*) occurs forty-six times, even if it appears most often in the context of denying its power.

The sheer repetition of this sentiment makes for a frustrating experience for the reader, as does the way Haraguchi revels in forms of expression that undo themselves, or as he put it, "Torture devices for expression—paradox, nonsense, ignorance, deletions. All fine things." What to make of Haraguchi's repeated denials of the powers of self-expression while continuing to express himself nonetheless? How to square those claims with the other moments inside and outside the text when he readily acknowledges the lasting power of his writings?

As with Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, the most common explanation is that in the end, he was defeated by literature. Haraguchi was alternately diagnosed as overly attached to literature or overly skeptical about its powers. Contemporary news reports diagnosed the "likely cause of death as literary passion [*bungaku-teki na jyōnetsu*]" in a brilliant high-ranking First Higher student "absorbed in French literature and with something of the poet in him [*shijin hada no tokoro ga ari*]."[38] Literary critic Nakamura Mitsuo diagnosed Haraguchi, along with other like-minded youths of his time, as possessing "a passionate attachment toward literature while also seething with deep skepticism toward contemporary writers and writing. This is their misfortune and the misfortune of Japanese culture today."[39]

In his own last writings, Haraguchi suggests an alternate explanation that is much less black or white. Instead, until the day of his death, he seemed to be exploring

the potential of a variety of mediums—from fact-filled memorandums, eulogistic pronouncements, and gravestone etchings to elliptical poetry and songs. For each mode of expression, he actively questioned its potential to capture the "self."

At multiple points in *Études*, Haraguchi pointedly compares self-expression to memorial stones. "The chasm between expression and self. / The moment that expression is birthed, it separates from the self and stands on its own. / … / 'Expression' that has already been birthed is nothing more than a memorial stone of the past."

In the excerpt that follows, he stresses his disgust for these remnants: "Whether it's my own or someone else's, the idea of worshipping a memorial stone sickened me." This image of a fossilized stone artifact that is fixed and permanent is one he returns to with disdain repeatedly, writing, "Those who look back on the path that they themselves have traveled are deluded. They are already dead. The past they believe themselves to still be living in even now is nothing more than the remains of a faded memorial stone [*iroaseta kinenhi no zangai*]. … . I turn toward memorial stones and bid each one adieu."

His choice of the word *zangai* (残骸) suggests that the bodily remains of the dead get replaced with a poor substitute: a faded memorial stone. What he seems to resist here is any fixing or calcification of a narrative into stone that purports to offer a fossilized trace of the former self. In the second to last excerpt, he accusingly likens his own poetry to just such a monument.

> Oh, life —This lonely poem, this unfathomable memorial stone! On this cold-hearted stone of yours, finished carving twenty years of springs and autumns, I now take my leave.
>
> Ō, jinsei, —Kono kodoku naru shi, kono shirarezaru kinenhi yo! Omae no hiyayaka na ishi no ue ni, nijyū no shunjū o kizamioete, boku wa ima, tachisaru no da.

But Haraguchi at times also holds out hope that poetry might offer an alternative to this cold, hard fixity of prose etched onto a memorial stone. He ends *Études I* with an offering: "Fate.—My first youthful poem offered up to the fleeting solar orb, to the end of the sun." Although his poetry is associated with death (his own fated end and the sun's), it also soars to meet that sun. In another early section, he imagines a dialogue with an angel who admits that death may entail his bodily destruction but who consoles and reassures him that his presence will endure:

> "For me, suicide is a new leaping point."
> When I say this out of a refusal to accept defeat gracefully, my angel consoles me saying, "Even if your figure disappears after death, who is to say that the beating of your wings do not remain in the breeze?"

The fleeting forms of poetry ensure that he might remain in some form. Unlike an earlier failed poetic composition that failed to embody his "figure"

(*sugata*) while "tediously asserting itself [*tsumaranai ware o haru*]," with this last writing, he aims for song. He asks, "What is poetry? —Dreams dissected made into a rhythmic construction. The analysis of ideas turned into a musical composition."

Titling his piece *Études* is central to his conception of poetry, as is his organization. In this work broken into three movements, Haraguchi offers a series of over four hundred fragmented poems, aphorisms, and excerpts divided by asterisks. They do not cohere into any larger whole but flow past the reader one after the other in rapid succession. It is not just their organization that ensures there is little fixity to the prose or its messaging but also the ways the entries repeatedly double back on themselves.

Nothing more definitively reverses his many definitive proclamations than his closing lines after bidding his final adieu to memorial stones:

> I stop this *étude* here and abandon it.
> And then I peel the labels off of others and myself too.
> I will no longer say that I was sincere.
> Before setting off for the land of silence, I should express deep gratitude.
> And say: "Until the end, I remained insincere."[40]

His final and most famous line undoes everything that has come before it. Rather than revealing that he lost faith in expression in the end (or from the beginning), it points to his own predilection for fixing and unfixing prose.

ELEGIES FOR THE DEAD

When memorializing Haraguchi, his friends followed his dictates to the letter. They enshrined his words for eternity by fashioning a birch tree gravestone with his self-designed epitaphic verse carved into it and placed it at the locale of his first suicide attempt. This act shored up the associations not only between him and his magnum opus *Études* but also between him and his long-gone *senpai* Fujimura Misao. Haraguchi had, in a sense, achieved his stated goal of mourning himself preemptively, enclosing himself in a tomb of his own making. Or, as he declared in his suicide note, "On this night I too buried one of my own" (*Boku mo mata, kono yo, hitori no nakama o hōmutta*).

Conspicuously, it is this one line that Nagasawa elides, even when she twice cites from Haraguchi's note verbatim in her poem "Parting" at its start and its conclusion. The first time she marks the elision with "……" while the second time, even the erasure is erased. Here again she quietly merges their voices. She inserts herself into his self-enclosed world, and him into hers, with her creative refashioning of the words from his suicide note in her own poetry. The fixity of his prose is loosed yet again in favor of echoing refrains that bring the living and dead back into dialogue.

Anne Carson describes an ancient Greek memorial carved into stone for an otherwise unknown man named Spinther that uses a syntax suggesting that the dead has conferred a "tomb upon his own dead self." But, she stresses, it is the epigrapher and poet "Simonides [who] has not just saved Spinther's life, he has doubled it." He fulfills the "poet's task … to carry the transaction forward, from those who can no longer speak to those who may yet read (and must yet die)."[41]

Nagasawa fulfills that role for Haraguchi. Not as a susceptible reader of his epitaph, an "untroubled maiden" for whose happiness he prayed. As a poet in her own right. One who acknowledges that she, too, cannot undertake the work of burying herself any more than he could. As a poet, she doubles Haraguchi's afterlife, both for him and for those like us, "who may yet read."

10

Death in Mixed Media

Mishima Yukio

Perhaps no artist more relentlessly entangled his art with his suicide than Mishima Yukio (1925–70). According to one critic's count, thirty-five characters commit or attempt suicide in twenty-six of his literary works. Several die by seppuku in an uncomfortable echo with Mishima's own suicide on November 25, 1970.[1] In the last years and even weeks of his life, Mishima arranged to have himself photographed again and again in an array of dying poses. Those taken by Shinoyama Kishin are at last belatedly available in a photo collection released on the fiftieth anniversary of his death to offer another haunting series of images depicting *The Death of a Man* (*Otoko no shi*).[2] In that collection alone, he dies by seppuku twice (once as a fishmonger, once as a samurai). As an actor, he commits seppuku twice in films—the first, a soldier's grueling, prolonged disembowelment in his 1965 film adaptation *Yūkoku* (based on a short story also of his own making), and the other, a samurai's swift, decisive seppuku in the 1969 period-piece *Hitokiri*. In his essays and interviews, he repeatedly wrote and spoke about death, dying, and suicide as well as about suicidal artists and art.

In *The Savage God*, A. Alvarez has noted the impermeability of suicidal logic to outsiders, calling it "the closed world of suicide."[3] In the case of Mishima Yukio, it is not that this world is closed at all, but rather that it is all too open—in multimedia, from both before and after his suicide, scripted by a variety of parties that include himself, his intimates, and outsiders from decades and worlds apart.

This overabundance of materials from which to choose presents a different set of difficulties for the critic and reader of Mishima. There is the sense that the author is either way ahead of us, or far behind, somehow both on top of and at the mercy of his materials and his audiences. In reading and viewing these texts

in retrospect that so uncomfortably foretell Mishima's own future suicide, at least there is little danger of becoming the inviolable and distant "spectator" (*bōkansha*) that Mishima had warned against in the case of the young marathoner Tsuburaya Kōkichi. We too are implicated with these sets of texts that so tightly imbricate art and suicide.

In this chapter, I focus on a multimedia production into which Mishima inserted himself quite literally: his 1965 film adaptation of his own short story from four years before. As one for which Mishima played so many roles (original storywriter, screenwriter, producer, director, and lead actor), *Yūkoku* offers a relatively compact case study for considering how and why one artist scripted his suicide into a variety of media. It entails not just writing, acting, and directing; literature and cinema, noh theater and opera music; but also a host of other loose adaptations that include his underground short story "gay version," his aborted plans for a kabuki production, and what Mishima called "a seppuku ballet." Before turning to these multimedia texts to consider how they may have worked on and for Mishima, I first consider Mishima's avowed disdain for suicidal artists and arts in theory.

MISHIMA ON DAZAI AND OTHER SICKLY SUICIDAL ARTISTS AND ARTS

Mishima hated writers who committed suicide. His disdain for Dazai Osamu, in particular, is legendary. In January 1947, he attended a party in order to confront the veteran writer with the damning pronouncement "I hate your writing," or as he dramatically put it in retrospect, "with a dagger hidden in the folds of my robes, like a terrorist."[4] In *Shōsetsuka no kyūka* (A novelist's holiday), a series of published diary-like entries written in the summer of 1955, Mishima enumerated Dazai's many flaws: "The hatred I feel toward Dazai Osamu's literature has a peculiar intensity. First of all, I don't like his face. Secondly, I hate his countrified bourgeois ways. Thirdly, I hate that he enacted a role that didn't suit him. A novelist who goes and commits a love suicide with a woman should have a bit more of a solemn mien." He closes this day's entry by asserting that "Don Quixote is nothing more than a fictional character. Cervantes was not Don Quixote. Why do a certain set of Japan's novelists get carried away with the strange doings of their fictional characters?" The very same question, of course, might be asked of Mishima himself. Before doing so, let us first consider what he was objecting to when it came to other artists and other arts.

In Dazai's case, Mishima objected less to any I-novelistic tendency to naval gaze than with the flaccid state of the belly under inspection. Dazai's weak prose and weak body were, in his eyes, one and the same. As he put it, "I don't think that the values for literature and actual life are any different. Strong prose is more beautiful than weak prose. Just like in the animal world, where strong lions are more beautiful than weak ones."[5]

Mishima was consistent in articulating his anti-Dazai stance for over two decades. In an August 1966 short piece for *Heibon punch*, Mishima ranted, "Even though it's not my own affair, I'm concerned when I see youths influenced by that pale-faced Dazai Osamu—poisoned by literature, gasping for air drowning in the morass and prattling on about being 'sorry for having been born.'" In the summer of 1967 during his forty-six-day training experience with the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), he detected the baleful influence of "my arch rival Dazai Osamu" even among the graduates from sci-tech universities. Surprised to find himself debating literature with a recruit, Mishima explained that he "hated Dazai for emphasizing only human weakness" only to be pained by the soldier's retort: "Rather than capitalizing on strength, is not emphasizing weakness more fitting of a true literary writer?" "Selling strength" (*yatara ni tsuyosa o urimono ni suru*)—bodily, spiritual, and literary—was Mishima's credo after all.[6]

In a 1954 essay, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke ni tsuite" (On Akutagawa Ryūnosuke), he had lodged a similar critique. Even as this attack feels less personally directed (Dazai oddly goes unmentioned here, but so does Akutagawa for the most part notwithstanding the article's title), it seethes with hatred for any weak literati who turn to suicide. He opens with an unequivocal declaration: "I hate weak people. … I hate people who commit suicide. … I just cannot respect literary writers who commit suicide."[7] In a later piece, even the hypermasculine Ernest Hemingway (after whom Mishima was flatteringly dubbed "the Japanese Hemingway") cannot escape his criticism, or at least a lament: "Although he longed for an adventurous, heroic death even into old age, in the end, he committed a suicide that was completely contrary to these wishes for all such desires were shunned by death. I don't want to follow his path, but I understand the feeling all too well."[8]

A "strong" method alone does not guarantee his approval. Hemingway died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, but it occurred at the belated age of sixty-one. For Mishima, timing is also crucial, ideally dying in one's twenties, or mid-forties at the latest. But this, too, is not a hard-and-fast rule. The drowning death of retired kabuki performer Ichikawa Danzō at age eighty-four is deemed on par with the "splendid" death "by sword" (*jijin*) of the young SDF Olympian Tsuburaya.[9] Despite a tendency to assume that Mishima only endorsed warrior-like decisive seppuku that could be categorized as *jiketsu* (self-determined death), he also allowed for exceptional suicides (*jisatsu*, or self-killing). The reason behind the suicide matters much less than we might expect. Mishima repeatedly deflates any such discussion of motive, for example asserting flatly, "I will not repeat myself again: Akutagawa committed suicide because Akutagawa liked suicide."[10]

Rare is the literary writer who can achieve an admirable suicide in Mishima's eyes, although ones like his teenage mentor Hasuda Zenmei (1904–45) and French Nazi sympathizer Pierre Drieu La Rochelle (1893–1945) who committed suicide for overtly political reasons draw his sympathy and admiration. But it is the decisive deaths of the "last samurai" warriors Saigō Takemori (1828–77) and Kaya

Harukata (1836–76) that he unequivocally celebrates. Even at the advanced ages of fifty and forty-two respectively, these warriors managed "to die heroically" and "to accomplish a brave end" (*sōretsu na saigo*).[11] Mishima extols "brave, beautiful deaths," which he designates as the exclusive purview of warriors of old and, by association, soldiers today, like the young SDF lieutenant Tsuburaya. As he put it, "It is not the shopkeeper who not fearing death makes death into a beautiful thing."[12] Nor is it the writer.

What is it about literary writers, in particular, that merit Mishima's scorn? In principle, he did not recognize the suicide of a literary man; "Because literature has no ultimate responsibility, a man of letters cannot find a truly *moralisch* [moral] trigger for suicide. I do not recognize anything other than a *moralisch* suicide. That is to say, I do not recognize anything other than a samurai's killing himself with his own sword [*jijin*]."[13] (We should again note how quickly his preoccupation here shifts from motive to a discussion of form.) As he explained in his essay on Akutagawa, the problem is that the act of suicide is incompatible with the act of literary composition. A writer's "day-to-day joys and pains of literary creation" belong to an "entirely different category than suicide [*jisatsu*]" while a "warrior who commits seppuku or some other form of self-determination [*jiketsu*]" is working within the bounds of the warrior moral code on the battlefield.

According to Mishima, writers who commit suicide "in both east and west" share an unusually strong sense of themselves as artists. In an ideal world, this affiliation should position them on the side of strength and health, but instead often leaves them siding with the sickly patient. He elaborates on the medical analogy:

> Suicide and art are as antithetical as sickness and medicine. If the medicine is ineffective and the illness cannot be cured, then the medicine is no good. Even if the patient does not subscribe to this belief, the doctor firmly should. When we embrace the dual propositions of suicide and art, naturally, we are simultaneously both the patient and the doctor. But the problem is on which side do we place our convictions? Should a doctor recognize an incurable illness?[14]

Mishima offers a curious analogy here. Medicine/art offers a potential cure for sickness/suicide, but a problematic one for the doctor/artist whose cure fails. Artists who simultaneously embrace art and suicide (or cure and disease) are stranded between the incompatible roles of doctor and patient, active healer and passive sufferer at the mercy of the very same medicine: art. In sum, suicide is an occupational hazard for artists and yet also an incompatible and imperfect proposition.

The natural question is how to square all these rather definitive pronouncements with Mishima's own suicide. Especially given his own penchant for embracing the dual propositions of suicide and art throughout his career. And especially since he acknowledged that his negative assessments of these literary men and their chosen ends were as much about himself, as they were about them.

On the surface, Mishima's stark rhetoric and actions provide easy answers to resolve many of the apparent contradictions. Suicide was easily divisible into two types, he claimed: "There are two kinds of suicide. One is suicide from weakness and defeat. One is suicide from strength and courage. I despise the former and praise the latter."[15] He chose a method that displayed strength and courage in abundance. Moreover, in the end, he died not as a literary man, but a military one. He had signaled this break with literature in many ways: by requesting that his posthumous Buddhist name contain the character for martial (*bu*, as in bushidō), but not *bun* for literature (although his parents ignored this request and included both characters); by signing a blood oath in which he pledged his life to the Shield Society on February 26, 1968, in his birthname of Hiraoka Kimitake, which was also the name under which he enlisted as a SDF trainee in June the previous year; and finally, by signaling his retirement from the literary world with the submission of his magnum opus tetralogy signed with the day of his death on November 25, 1970. Both dates resonated with symbolic finality, declaring the symbolic death of the literary author.[16]

If we follow Mishima's own writings in *Taiyō to tetsu* (*Sun and Steel*, 1965–68), the fundamental problem is that novelists tarry in the world of impotent, abstract words rather than engage in the powerful, concrete actions of the warrior. This line of reasoning feeds into the conventional understanding of his death as a rejection of art in favor of action, an acknowledgment of the failure of words in the end. Alternatively, his final act itself is turned into its own form of performance art with the artistic representations that preceded it offering rehearsals. The act of suicide is either the antithesis of art, or its apotheosis.[17]

Although either interpretation is plausible, each has its limitations. One is the lack of nuance. Both seem to buy into Mishima's own stark rhetoric all too eagerly while ignoring his other equally definitive statements that point to the exact opposite conclusion. It embraces his self-identified "either/or proposition" where he can choose to pursue either literary glory (*bungō no eikō*) or a hero's glory, either the inefficacious words of passive literature or "active heroism" (*kōdō-teki eikō*).[18] At the same time, it ignores statements he made even late in his career that acknowledge literary creation to be an active, physical act as well. For example, in his June 1967 interview in the *Sunday Mainichi* after his forty-six-day stint as an SDF trainee, Mishima clarified that soldiers represent the most extreme form of "action" (*jikkō*), but "I believe that literary writers too, in the end, are also 'incarnations of action' [*jikkō no gonge*]."[19]

Moreover, any assertion of a clean divide between word and action is belied by his final action that entailed quite a few words—a speech initially planned to be over twenty minutes long, a lengthy manifesto painstakingly handwritten on a sheet hung from the SDF headquarters' balcony and also printed in dozens of mimeographs dispersed to the onlooking crowds (and to two journalists in case police tried to suppress it), several suicide notes (in both his penname and his

birthname), two death poems (*jisei*), the final manuscript of his tetralogy, and a final quote left on his desk that read, "Human life is limited, but I would like to live forever" (*Kagiri aru inochi naraba, eien ni ikitai*).[20]

Finally, the most serious limitation is that the focus becomes his spectacular suicide rather than the art he generated in the face of that suicide. This interpretation was starkly encapsulated in a comment by filmmaker and critic Iwasaki Akira in March 1971 about Mishima's film *Yūkoku*: "It is not a film with a seppuku *in* it. It is a film made *for the purpose of* seppuku. There has never, in any place or era, been a person who before enacting suicide—much less by such an abnormal method—rehearsed, practiced, and displayed in such detail the bloodthirst, pain, and final death throes on a public screen."[21]

Conceiving of Mishima's art as "rehearsals" for the eventual "final act" suggests that texts are not important in their own right, or only insofar as they can be retrospectively linked to his spectacular suicidal act. It also seems to suggest that suicide *is* easily rehearse-able—something that one practices in one's mind, one's word (written and oral), and finally, one's actions (first fictional then real). In pitting the literary artist against the warrior in such stark terms, "art" becomes a monolithic entity where important distinctions among genres and mediums are erased. Such an approach is particularly unhelpful for this book, which seeks to understand the nature and function of scripting suicide in a variety of media. It is also unhelpful to understand an artist like Mishima who so relentlessly entangled his suicide with art in mixed media, from literature and poetry to theater, film, and photography. For Mishima, all "art" was rarely treated equally, each medium entailing its own advantages, disadvantages, and even hazards.

Over the course of his far-ranging career as a novelist, playwright, photography model, film screenwriter, actor, and one-time film director, Mishima developed an eclectic, and often paradoxical, theory of media. He tackled the powers and limitations of various media, from one of his earlier essays "Eiga to shōsetsu wa raibaru desu ne" (The rivalry of films and novels," March 1951) through his last serialized piece *Shōsetsu to wa nanika?* (What are novels?, May 1968—November 12, 1970). As he was remaking his story "Yūkoku" into a film, he revisited this theory that he had developed first from the perspective of a novelist and avid filmgoer in the 1950s and later revised as a film actor in the 1960s. The distinctions he draws among media suggest not just an abstract, theoretical media hierarchy but a highly self-conscious consideration of what certain media afforded him personally as creator and as an audience member. Art offered nothing less than the prospect of losing oneself entirely, and depending on the medium of choice, this quasi-suicidal experience was either an entirely desirable pleasure or utter peril. At least, in theory.

Below, I first consider two of the most relevant examples of his media theory before turning to his multimedia experiments in practice. Given Mishima's penchant for provocative soundbites, interweaving his theory and practice

offers an important check on some of his starker rhetorical claims. The two essays I discuss—his 1955 "A novelist's holiday" and "Bōga" (Self-oblivion) from August 1970—conveniently bracket the time period of his most entangled multimedia production in which he embraced the dual propositions of suicide and art while playing the role of doctor and patient: his January 1961 short story "Yūkoku" turned short silent film *The Rite of Love and Death* (1965), which he directed and starred in as a young lieutenant committing a seppuku that would presage his own five years later.

MEDIUM MATTERS: MASOCHISTIC MUSIC AND MOVIES

In his 1955 "A novelist's holiday," Mishima's rant against his fellow suicidal author Dazai Osamu comes in the middle of another diatribe against another equally formidable enemy: music. Although he does not explicitly note the ties between the two topics, the juxtaposition is suggestive of the ways that Mishima implicates certain media for the suicidal impulses of the artist and audience. Both were poison.

Music is likened to a "poisonous gas that brings certain death. The sound overflows and in the formless darkness surrounds the listeners' spirits thick and fast, and, without their knowing it, plunges them into the abyss. … As someone who is always tired from the act of artistic creation, I do not seek such pleasures of facing the abyss in music."[22]

As a literary writer, Mishima distinguishes himself from those music lovers who applaud only because they believe fully in the musician's control and mastery over the material. They are like circus spectators whose appreciation would crumble should the animal's cage break. To illustrate, he cites Aubrey Beardsley's 1894 drawing *The Wagnerites*, which depicts the blithe ignorance of such music lovers who, not surprisingly, are depicted almost exclusively as female opera audience members in low-cut dresses. (In an intriguing tie-in, the opera they listen to in this print is *Tristan und Isolde*, the very Wagner score that Mishima later chose for his film adaptation *Yūkoku*, as discussed below.)

In the next day's entry, Mishima turns abruptly to his above-noted aversion to Dazai for, among other things, his tendency to "get carried away with the strange doings of [his] fictional characters." The following day, he returns just as abruptly to music out of a feeling that he has not done justice to the topic. He has not adequately explained why, when plays and novels also "play on the abyss of the human spirit, it is only music that makes me feel unease and danger." His answer is "the strange terror I feel toward the formlessness of music." This time, he remains on the side of the audience rather than the creator, explaining, "With other arts, my aim is to get sucked up right into the work [*sakuhin no naka e nomerikomō to suru*]. This is true of plays, novels, paintings, sculpture, all of them. But with music, it comes at me from another place and tries to surround me. That is what makes me uneasy, and I cannot help but resist. Music aficionados can probably clearly see

the constructed nature of music and so they feel no such anxiety. But for me, *it is impossible to detect the sound*" (19, emphasis in original).

He claims sonic impotence yet visual mastery here. Whereas his body retreats from the formlessness of sound, when he is faced with beauty in "clear visual form," even though it first appears to resist him, he can "calmly melt into it and become one" (*anshin shite sore ni tokekomi, sore to gōitsu suru*) (20). His ability to merge into the work as an audience member is predicated on his ability to "see" its form and actively choose self-erasure.

Mishima concludes by dividing the reception of the arts into two types: sadistic and masochistic, placing himself firmly in the former camp and music lovers in the latter. He asks, "Are not the pleasures of listening to music the pure delight of being encircled, embraced, and dominated?" (20). Employing such deliberately sexualized language enables him to implicate the bodies of the audience and of the artist who fail to demonstrate adequate mastery over the materials. If mapped onto the rant against Dazai that he sandwiches between this media critique, Dazai is being unflatteringly likened to a masochistic, feminized, passive music lover, whereas Mishima is depicted as a sadistic literary man on top of his materials and his audience, even when he *is* the audience. Except there is one important exception to this rule. Film, Mishima tells us, offers him the one medium "among the passive entertainments" in which he can comfortably be a masochist. What about film, in particular, appeals to the self-described masochism of Mishima? He does not explain further in this 1955 essay what makes film an exceptional media beyond writing:

> Of all the temporary images made by mankind, the ghostly images passing by on the film screen are the most reassuring and the most delimited to the occasion.
>
> Kono firumu no ue o utsuroiyuku kazō wa, ningen no hatsumei shita kazō no uchi de, mottomo anzen na, mottomo ba-kagiri no mono. (20)[23]

In "Bōga," one of his last essays, Mishima returns to this topic to describe the sensation he seeks upon entering a movie theater as "self-oblivion" (as per the title). Here, Mishima explains his idea of disappearing into art in language that is provocatively similar to suicide. He opens by explaining that since long ago, when overcome with worry, his drug of choice was not alcohol but film. Far from the mere escapism that the label "entertainment" (*goraku*) might connote, watching a film transports him so effectively as to "completely eliminate [*kanzen ni jyokyo shite kureru*] my surrounding reality for the moment." It offers a masochist's delight, in which pleasure rests in the spectator's willing *and* unwilling surrender; its appeal lies in the "inescapable collective effects" on the film spectator, its multimedia (sights, sounds, and colors) "appeal to the senses, even if they do not want it [*iya demo kannō ni uttae*]." For Mishima, no other medium can compare with the immersive effects of cinema, which "unlike television, with its big screen and stereophonic sound, surrounds us in the darkness and for a period, whether

one likes it or not, drags us into a second reality [*iyaōnashi ni dai-ni no genjitsu e hikizurikomu*]. Not even great literature can compare with an art built upon so many tacit promises."[24]

Anticipating the turn to apparatus theory in cinema studies in the 1970s, Mishima identifies the theater architecture as crucial to its powerful effects (albeit with little concern over any ideological repercussions). As in Roland Barthes's short essay "Leaving the Movie Theater" (1975), the appeal lies in the erotics of the dark enclosed theater space "as a dim, anonymous, indifferent cube, … as a site of availability (even more than cruising), the inoccupation of bodies."[25] For both writers, the bodily effects of the cinema are not only a consequence of going to the movies, but rather a precondition. Mishima goes to the theater already seeking "self-oblivion" (*bōga*), or more literally "forgetting oneself" (忘我).

For both writers, losing oneself at the cinema depends on the power of the "lure" and the tacit promise of its possession by the spectator. For Mishima, the relation is explained in terms of sexual desire and conquest. He complains that recent films no longer offer the promise of the star system: "a beautiful person" (*utsukushii ningen*) appearing on-screen, whose presence guarantees the spectator both a "sexual monopoly" and "sexual anonymity" (*sei-teki dokusen*; *sei no mumeisei*). Mishima's logic here is a bit hard to follow, but at the root of his discontent is big budget studio mass-marketed films that deny the possibility of "entering into a sexual relationship with the film image based on a one-to-one relationship between spectator and actor."[26] The problem seems to be the lack of this singular "other" in whom he might forget himself.

For Barthes, this possessive relation between the spectator and the film image is more explicitly identified as one of narcissistic identification: "The image is there, in front of me, for me: coalescent (its signified and its signifier melted together), analogical, total, pregnant: it is a perfect lure: I fling myself upon it like an animal upon the scrap of the 'lifelike' rag held out to him; and, of course, it sustains in me the misreading attached to Ego and to image-repertoire."[27] Importantly, the desire to lose oneself in the film image is not just self-obliterating; it is also self-sustaining.

And yet, as Barthes's language suggests, this absorptive identification is not entirely desirable. Instead, Barthes proposes a model for spectatorship that would enable him to have it both ways: simultaneously to be inside *and* outside the story, to be beneath *and* on top of the image-repertoire in a way that enables sensual and critical pleasures to coexist. "Another way of going to the movies is … by letting oneself be fascinated *twice over*, by the image and by its surroundings—as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost, into the engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize not the image but precisely what exceeds it: the texture of the sound, the hall, the darkness, the obscure mass of the other bodies, the rays of light, entering the theater, leaving the hall."[28]

Barthes's proposal offers an intriguing possibility for considering Mishima's own bodily and critical investments as an avid film spectator cum novelist turned

filmmaker and actor and amateur film critic, too. It is a similar doubling (or quadrupling) of bodies that I propose was central to Mishima's own multimedia experimentation *Yūkoku*, where he was simultaneously a director and critic on top of his creation and an actor and spectator beneath it. The metaphor of tops and bottoms is an apt one for an artist like Mishima, who so explicitly phrased his theory of artistic creation and consumption in terms of sexual conquest and surrender. It is especially apt for an artist who delighted in straddling so many positions and for the queer set of texts I discuss below.

THE ALMIGHTY ARTIST: *YŪKOKU*, A QUEER SET OF MULTIMEDIA TEXTS

Many commentators have noted that Mishima's penchant for multimedia experimentation was atypical of literary writers of the time. Graphic design artist Yokoo Tadanori, a close friend and artistic collaborator, wrote that "Unlike other literati, Mishima Yukio displayed his polysemous nature by not distinguishing between major and minor, and by mixing together media." British film critic Tony Rayns similarly notes the rarity of novelists-turned-film directors worldwide: "For many years the French had the syndrome almost to themselves: Cocteau, Genet, Robbe-Grillet, Duras. … But very few novelists from other cultures followed suit."[29] Mishima would have appreciated the comparison. In a discussion with filmmakers and critics back in March 1951, well before his own forays into film, he had identified Cocteau as an exceptionally versatile artist while bemoaning the absence of anyone in Japan who could tackle screenwriting and filmmaking as well as novels and plays. "It doesn't seem like any almighty artist [*bannō sakka*] is going to appear anytime soon," he claimed.[30]

With his 1965 film *Yūkoku*, a production for which Mishima occupied no less than five roles—original storywriter, screenwriter, producer, director, and lead actor—it would seem that the almighty artist had, at last, arrived.

In his lengthy account of making the film, Mishima notes that he had been quite laissez-faire when his other literary works were adapted by other film directors, but *this* story was different: "I came to feel that if I were to make the film myself, I would want everything done in a very particular way, right down to the last detail. Included in those 'details'—underpinning them, in fact, was the idea that *I* should play the lead."[31] Although he had planned to act in disguise (his famously large eyes hidden beneath the military cap) and under the stage name of Maki Kenji, upon seeing the rush prints and his all-too-recognizable face and buff physique, Mishima quickly abandoned that idea. At the premier, he noted his chagrin that Japanese audiences burst into laughter upon seeing the opening credits.[32] In fact, these credits were scrolls handwritten by Mishima himself (in multiple languages to facilitate international distribution). His gloved hands are the ones that appear unfurling the title scrolls and the final credits. His hands are literally all over the production.

Borrowing one of his favorite lines from Baudelaire, Mishima likened his doubled role as director and actor in *Yūkoku* to playing "both the executioner and the executed" (*shikeishū to shikei shikkōjin o isshin ni kasaneru*).[33] This metaphor is gruesomely realized in the film where Lieutenant Takeyama Shinji commits seppuku after the failed coup d'état of February 26 in 1936. After a final bout of torrid lovemaking where the usual gendered rules of decorum are suspended for this "last time," Shinji disembowels himself before the eyes of his loving wife, Reiko, who then follows him by stabbing herself in the throat. This metaphor is also, of course, all too literally realized in Mishima's self-killing. On November 25, 1970, after months of planning, he and four members of his self-styled army attempted a military coup by taking a hostage at the SDF headquarters and delivering a rousing speech to the young cadets, which failed to gain either their support or respect. Seemingly anticipating the plot's ultimate failure as a political action, he then committed seppuku as planned. His alleged young male lover from the group, Morita Masakatsu, was appointed as his second (*kaishakunin*), charged with beheading him and then following with seppuku as well.

Around the time he was writing "Yūkoku," Mishima penned another version of the story: "Ai no shokei" or "Execution of love." This one appeared in a gay underground publication under a pseudonym in October 1960, three months before "Yūkoku" appeared in the mainstream literary journal *Chūō kōron*.[34] It offers an alternative gender-bending story of sexual desire and seppuku featuring a hypermasculine young phys ed teacher who is attracted to his feminized young male (*bishōnen*) pupils. In a reversal of the usual hierarchies, the teacher commits seppuku at the bidding of one of these young pupils before his loving eyes. If the contemporaneous composition and the plot similarities between this story and "Yūkoku" are not convincing enough to consider them adaptations of sorts, in Mishima's initial draft, the teacher's first name was Shinji.

With his seppuku and its many echoes of *Yūkoku* and "Ai no shokei," Mishima appears to have fallen into the very trap of Dazai and other "weak" literary artists who "get carried away with the strange doings of their fictional characters." The almighty artist appears to have been felled by creations of his own making that anticipate his own self-destruction.

From this set of texts alone, we can sense how complicated it is to analyze Mishima's entanglement of art and suicide. One plausible interpretation posits him as a narcissistic mastermind who was in total control of his creations, while the other suggests he was entirely at their mercy. What makes his case all the more complex is the way that Mishima, in characteristic fashion, anticipated and deflected our inevitable questions, as well as any easy answers. He identified "the great riddle [*saidai no nazo*] that anyone who sees the film *Yūkoku*, or even more so those who haven't seen it, will ask as: 'Why would someone star in their own production?'" but quickly warned against "trudging out the tired old language of psychoanalysis that might label it narcissism or masochism or such. These methods will not solve the mystery."[35]

TABLE 1 Select timeline of Mishima's works and activities

November 25, 1948	Self-declared start date for his first "I-novel," *Kamen no kokuhaku* (*Confessions of a Mask*, 1949)
March 1960	Stars in *Karakkaze yarō* (*Afraid to Die*, dir. Masumura Yasuzō) as a yakuza who dies by gunshot wound to the back
October 1960	Finishes writing "Yūkoku" Publishes "Ai no shokei" (Execution of love) under pseudonym Sakakiyama Tamotsu in gay underground magazine *ADONIS*
January 1961	Publishes "Yūkoku" in *Chūō kōron*
January 1965	Writes screenplay for *Yūkoku* in two-day marathon writing session
April 1965	Films *Yūkoku* secretly at Okura Studio in a two-day marathon film shoot
April 1966	*Yūkoku* opens in domestic theaters
February 26, 1968	Pledges his life to the Japan National Guard (later Shield Society)
July 1968	Attends Ozawa Kinshirō's "seppuku ballet" adaptation of *Yūkoku*
August 1968	Cameo appearance as a dead taxidermied statue in *Kurotokage* (*Black Lizard*, dir. Fukasaku Kinji)
October 5, 1968	Official launch of Tate no kai (The Shield Society)
August 1969	Costars in *Hitokiri* (dir. Gosha Hideo) in the role of Edo-period samurai who dies by decisive seppuku
September–November 1970	Models in photo shoots with photographer Shinoyama Kishin
November 12-17, 1970	Mishima Yukio Exhibition at Tōbu Department Store in Ikebukuro
November 20, 1970	Meets with Shinoyama to finalize photo selections for *Otoko no shi* (*The Death of a Man*)
November 25, 1970	Dies by seppuku after failed coup attempt at SDF headquarters in Ichigaya

What might solve it, then? To answer his own question, Mishima turned to the fundamental distinctions he drew between his core identity as a novelist and playwright compared to his stints as a cinematic actor. Whereas writing requires "a willful autonomy" (*ishi no jihatsusei*), film acting is utterly lacking in precisely these qualities. Paradoxically, this evacuation of will and autonomy endows the film actor with "a sense of presence or existence as a thing that can be apprehended by the eyes [*me ni mieru mono to shite no sonzaikan*]." Writers, on the other hand, were in a metaphor he borrowed from Goethe, "like a mother pelican who nurtures her children with their own blood," endowing their offspring with an existence in their own stead. "As an artist starved for a sense of existence," he explains, "it was only natural that I would seek to become this strange occupation of a film actor."[36]

Yūkoku was neither the first nor the last film production in which Mishima sought out "the strange occupation of film actor" or in which he died a spectacular death on celluloid, or in other media for that matter (see table 1 above).

As a film star, Mishima dies a spectacular death three times.[37] His on-screen deaths shift from being unexpected, and even feared, to totally self-willed—from a punk yakuza gangster shot in the back in Masumura Yasuzō's 1960 *Karakkaze*

yarō (*Afraid to Die*) to a samurai's decisive wordless seppuku in Gosha Hideo's 1969 period-film *Hitokiri*. In the middle comes his stoic performance of a grueling seppuku as a lieutenant in his silent short film *Yūkoku*.

In broad outline, this arc would seem to suggest a gradual rehearsal and mastery of self-death and embodiment of a self-appointed role that he would enact in real life at the Ichigaya headquarters on November 25, 1970. His trajectory from disembodied literary author to embodied actor, too, conforms to the self-described arc of his career, from words to action. As a story-turned-film with Mishima at its center, *Yūkoku* seems to fit squarely into this trajectory.

As I aim to show below, in moving from story to film, the goal (and effect) was not only, as many have suggested, a move from literature to action, the word to flesh, the word (literature) to the image (cinema), or even life to death. Instead, it entailed also an opposing move away from these things. Far from any stark "either/or proposition" and far from any neat mapping of a trajectory from word to image, literature to film, gay to straight (or vice versa), rehearsal to performance, or art to action, this queer set of texts suggests that theory and practice were rarely united. If Mishima was sometimes delivered the self-oblivion he sought, he was also sometimes betrayed in practice by the very medium he sought to embrace.

DEATH BY PROXY IN *YŪKOKU*

Because Mishima's own unusual choice of seppuku dovetails so closely with that of the lieutenant's (with the notable exception that instead of a faithful wife, Mishima was accompanied by a young male lover in death), we assume that the lieutenant acted as a proxy of sorts for Mishima, especially since he insisted upon playing him in the film adaptation. This may be a flawed assumption and is one I return to question below when considering the possibilities of queering this straight reading of *Yūkoku*, especially when juxtaposed with the so-called "gay version" of the story. For now, I begin with this intuitive assumption that the texts themselves invite.

What makes this theory compelling is that the characters themselves appear to possess these same vicarious abilities. The lieutenant and his wife offer proxies for one another, each seeing their own death through the other. I am suggesting a doubling here where the characters experience the impossible—their own self-deaths—and the author-turned-actor-director experiences his own via theirs. Importantly, for all parties, this proximate experience is just that; it is by proxy and highly mediated. They are able to see themself dying or dead only through the eyes of another. When this human proxy fails, art offers the medium of last resort.

Before considering what Mishima might have been attempting by staging self-death in multimedia, I suggest we need to first look carefully at how the characters experience these self-deaths in each text. At the center of these works is the question of the knowability of suicide to oneself and to another, and the degree to which self-death is knowable depends largely on the medium in which it is

represented. What we find in both the literary and cinematic mediums are both the possibilities and limits of representing suicide to oneself and to another.

The basic plot of the story and the film is the same. After a brief preface that offers historical context for the February 26 incident, the action proceeds as neatly outlined in the film chapter titles

I. Reiko [at home alone, waiting and remembering her beloved husband]
II. The Lieutenant's Return [the couple making a double suicide pact]
III. The Final Love [the couple making love for the last time]
IV. The Lieutenant Commits HARAKIRI (*seppuku*, in the original Japanese)
V. Reiko's Suicide (*jigai*)[38]

For the lieutenant, his wife, Reiko, is central to the conceit that he can see his own dying form. She is the crucial bookend, present from start to finish. She first conjures him during his physical absence from the home, then unites with him bodily in sex until separated again in body and spirit during his seppuku, and finally seeks a blissful reunion in death at the very end. She is so central that the story ends in medias res with Reiko's thrust of the sword leading abruptly to the film screen going blank.

Throughout the seppuku, Reiko acts as a crucial witness, as required by the rather conceited lieutenant who wants to ensure that "there should be no irregularity in his death."[39] He has made an exception to "the usual rule for double suicide pacts [*nami no shinjū no yō ni*]" and opted not to kill her first so that she may fulfill this role. Appointed to die second, she is not, however, appointed *as* his second, or *kaishakunin* in charge of delivering the coup de grâce. She is not to participate in his manly execution, merely to watch to the end as he has bidden. While watching him in excruciating pain, she has to remind herself of this: "The moment the lieutenant thrust the sword into his left side and she saw the deathly pallor fall across his face, like an abruptly lowered curtain [*tachimachi maku o oroshita yō ni*], Reiko had to struggle to prevent herself from rushing to his side. Whatever happened, she must watch. She must watch unto the end. That was the duty her husband had laid upon her."[40] Curiously here, he is referred to interchangeably as her husband and the lieutenant. The same is true, even more curiously, in the sex scenes during which she is allowed, in another generous exception to the general rule, to be on top for once.

This doubled appellation makes sense because the lieutenant/husband seeks to repair his own fractured identity in sex and in suicide. He assumes that he has been left out of the coup d'état attempt by his army buddies because of his newly married status (although in an interesting twist, in an interview in 1966, Mishima also suggested this was merely the lieutenant's own self-serving rationale).[41] Joining his beautiful wife in sex and death is crucial to bring together his otherwise incompatible identities: as a newlywed husband now part of a heterosexual dyad, and as a soldier in a larger homosocial community.

The merging of these two identities is highly successful during sex. In the height of sexual ecstasy, "the lieutenant panted like the regimental standard-bearer on a route march." (In the film, amid her throes of pleasure, Reiko suddenly pictures her husband in cap and uniform saluting her.) Allowed to look for the first "and last time" (*onagori ni*, お名残に), Reiko memorializes his body parts one by one: "her husband's masculine face, the severe brows, the closed eyes, … the powerful chest with its twin circles like shields and its russet nipples, … the lieutenant's naked skin glow[ing] like a field of barley."[42] His two halves merge as completely as the couple, "tightly joined, every inch of the young and beautiful bodies had become so much one with the other that it seemed impossible there should ever again be a separation" (106–7).

Death, too, is to follow the pattern established by these orgasmic "little deaths" (*les petit morts*). In the story, we are told that the lieutenant recognizes the "special favor" of having "every moment of his death observed by those beautiful eyes—it was like being borne to death on a gentle, fragrant breeze" (111). Reiko's constant gaze is central to construing meaning especially in the silent film that lacks dialogue, much less interior monologues like these, that would give us access to the characters' thoughts. During the five-minute-long seppuku sequence, six extreme closeups show her eyes staring at him unceasingly despite her flowing tears. For the film, Mishima asserted that "everything … had to be expressed through the face of the woman playing his wife."[43]

In the story, when we do get Reiko's point of view during the seppuku, rather than any triumphant vision of it, she feels only an acute sense of her increasing distance from him. "Reiko felt that her husband had already become a man in a separate world, a man whose whole being had been resolved into pain, a prisoner in a cage of pain where no hand could reach out to him. But Reiko felt no pain at all. Her grief was not pain. As she thought about this, Reiko began to feel as if someone had raised a cruel wall of glass high (*mujō na takai garasu no kabe*) between herself and her husband" (113–14).

As this passage suggests, it is her role as spectator that causes this divide. Separated by an inviolable fourth wall, or, as in the earlier passage, by "an abruptly lowered curtain," she cannot access his embodied experience of self-inflicted pain; she can only watch it from the outside.

This is also true for the lieutenant himself during the lengthy and grueling seppuku. He, too, is estranged from his own bodily actions and reactions. "After his first strike … despite the effort he had himself put into the blow, the lieutenant had the impression that someone else had struck the side of his stomach agonizingly with a thick rod of iron" (112). In the final effort to deliver the saving blow to his throat, his right-hand moves "like a marionette" (*ayatsuri ningyō no yō ni*).[44]

He toggles between an embodied perspective of physical pain and a disembodied one that looks on the suffering body from an intellectual distance. "In some far deep region, which he could hardly believe was a part of himself, a fearful and

FIGURE 30. Shot-reverse shots of Reiko gazing at Shinji gazing at Shinji. Mishima Yukio, dir., *Yūkoku* (*Patriotism, or The Rite of Love and Death*), originally created in 1965; restored version by the Criterion Collection, 2008.

excruciating pain came welling up as if the ground had split open to disgorge a boiling stream of molten rock. … Was this *seppuku*?—he was thinking. It was a sensation of utter chaos, as if the sky had fallen on his head and the world was reeling drunkenly" (113).

He is here able to somewhat objectively (and perhaps even critically) evaluate the experience of what is referred to in the original Japanese as "this thing called seppuku" (*Kore ga seppuku to iu mono ka*).[45] During these passages, his mind attempts to grasp the lived physical experience by capturing it in language with a series of similes that liken the event to natural catastrophes—it is *as if* the ground had split open, *as if* the sky had fallen. The similes become even more pronounced and immediate as his seppuku climaxes: his pain becoming "like the wild clanging of a bell. Or like a thousand bells which jangled simultaneously at every breath he breathed and every throb of his pulse" (114).

The use of similes rather than metaphor is important; the pain is not the ground splitting open, but *as if* the ground had split open. These similes work to transform the thing as it is into something comparable and comprehensible. But because they fail to complete that action in the way a metaphor might, they suggest a struggling consciousness that attempts, but fails to transform or master experience through language.[46] If the embodied experience of dying can be just barely captured with these skittering similes, death itself requires a wholly disembodied view.

In the film, his dying struggle is visually conveyed by shots that separate his body into discrete parts during the seppuku. Extreme closeups of his grimacing face are juxtaposed with ones of his increasingly bloody torso. Once the seppuku begins, there is never a two-shot of the characters for its duration. Instead, in a series of over thirty shots, the screen isolates one and then the other, creating a shot-reverse shot pattern with Reiko gazing at the lieutenant, but his pattern indicating that he looks only at himself (fig. 30). It is only through Reiko's unreturned gaze that we get a full picture of his body bathed in blood at the very end.

Even Reiko, his faithful witness, ultimately refuses to assimilate the unremittingly gory spectacle unfolding before her eyes. As the bodily excretions and parts spill, Reiko cannot even look at him, but instead "with her face lowered, gazed in fascination at the tide of blood advancing toward her knees" (115). Only at the very

end when she is "unable to bear being an onlooker anymore [*tōtō mikanete*]" does she participate in the most minimal way.[47] She ensures that there is no irregularity in his death by loosening his collar so that the saving blow lands at last, piercing through his neck.

In both the story and the film, his dying is undeniably the main act. Like the sex scene, which, as the intertitle puts it, prioritizes "First the Lieutenant, and then Reiko," death also follows this pattern in similar proportions. His suicide occupies almost six pages of the story and five minutes of the film; Reiko gets just one page and less than a minute. But we do not die with the lieutenant. Instead, we continue on with Reiko as our proxy until her own death blow to the throat.

In dying, she seeks to replicate his embodied experience of pain that she only vicariously experienced twice before. The first time was when the couple enact a gestural rehearsal of the double suicide after making their pact. With the lieutenant seated behind her, we see his hand enacting seppuku as if it were a sword, and then Reiko guiding his hand to stab her own throat. Positioned right before "Chapter III: The Final Love," this bloodless rehearsal serves as foreplay.

The second time, Reiko experiences his suicide as an onlooker: "In her husband's agonized face there had been something inexplicable which she was seeing for the first time. Now she would solve that riddle. … What had until now been tasted only faintly through her husband's example she was about to savor directly with her own tongue" (117–18).

In the film, her firsthand "tasting" of this experience is literalized when she licks the dagger that is soon to enter her throat. Only in this final "Chapter V: Reiko's Suicide" will dying in pain enable her to close the gap that has opened between the living and the dead.

The symmetry between the "his and hers" suicides—notwithstanding the fact that she is not privy to the ritual of seppuku but instead follows the traditional feminine *jigai*—is especially clear in the film. The two scenes are shot in parallel fashion and evoke yin/yang symbolism. For both, a tightly framed closeup of just their torsos, his hand tightening around the sword and hers poised at the throat, is followed by an abrupt cut to a blank screen. In his case, a white background gets a neat spattering of tiny black bloodlike dots, and in hers, a black screen with a thicker spray of whitish fluids (fig. 31).

Dying proves difficult to represent, whether it is one's own or another's. Both appear as mysterious excretions that splatter onto a canvas in the fashion of a Jackson Pollack painting. Interestingly, only her splatter-art depiction is included in the screenplay notes: "*Shot 137: Shomen ni chi ga buchimakerareru*," while the mirror image of his death is not. Like the elusive representation of female sexual pleasure that Linda Williams has claimed finds its outlet in the "money shot" of pornographic films, female death is especially elusive.[48] The story does not even attempt to depict Reiko's self-death to completion, instead ending in mid-action with her vision blurring as she "gathered her strength and plunged the point of the

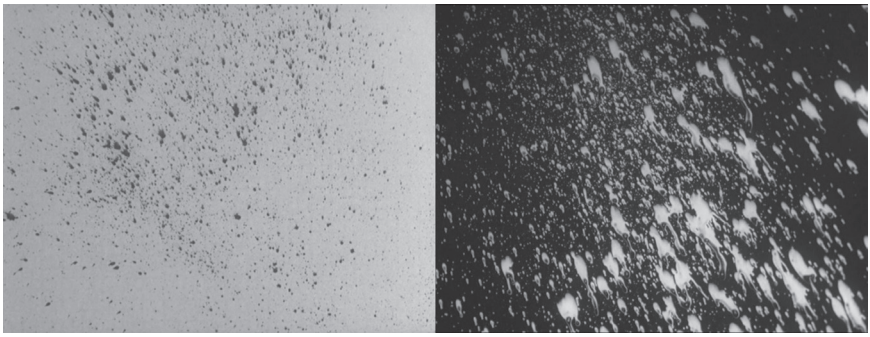

FIGURE 31. His-and-hers suicides, yang and yin. Mishima Yukio, dir., *Yūkoku* (1965); *Patriotism, or The Rite of Love and Death*. New York: Criterion Collection, 2008.

blade deep into her throat" (118). As our (and his) proxy dies, access to dying is foreclosed for character and audience alike.

THE PLASTIC ARTS AS PROXY

In the film, it is at this moment that art rushes in to rescue the death of the image and of the characters. The camera cuts abruptly from the splatter art rendition of Reiko's death to an idyllic vision of the couple reunited in death. An overhead shot magically transports them to a Zen rock garden. Not a drop of blood is evident. Reiko's eyes are peacefully closed, her head rests atop his uniformed chest. If not for the sword piercing his neck, a viewer could believe they were merely asleep. The next and final shot cuts to the background calligraphy scroll "Sincerity" (*shisei*, 到誠), which, like the intertitles, were inscribed by Mishima himself. It then pans down to their stilled bodies. As the camera zooms outward and upward to a more distant overhead shot, their faces become obscured in shadows and their figures are rendered into abstract patterns that blend into the raked sands of the Zen garden (fig. 32). The closing title scroll punctuates this immortal image: "The End" framed again here by the gloved hands of the husband/lieutenant/Mishima.

Although the story ends in medias res, at earlier moments, it flashforwards to similarly transcendent visions of after-death. The lieutenant is an especially privileged witness to these visions. After shaving in preparation, the lieutenant joyfully regards "his death face [*shinigao*]" and thinks, "Just as it looked now, this would become his death face! Already, in fact it had half departed from the lieutenant's personal possession and had become the bust above a dead soldier's memorial [*kinen-hi*, 記念碑]." He imagines his living body not just as a dead one but as a statue, an object of commemoration or an objet d'art. The traces of future death on "this radiantly healthy face" even lend it "a certain elegance" (102). Although he precedes Reiko in death, he can see her death face, too. Looking at her features

FIGURE 32. Penultimate shot of reunited lovers in a Zen rock garden. Mishima Yukio, dir., *Yūkoku* (1965); *Patriotism, or The Rite of Love and Death*. New York: Criterion Collection, 2008.

one after the other, he conjures a "vision of her truly radiant death face," allowing "the unforgettable spectacle to engrave itself upon his heart" (*wasuregatai fūkei o yukkuri to kokoro ni kizunda*).[49]

Reiko has carefully assembled her own remains, as well as his. Both leave behind a brief suicide note (*isho*)—hers stating, "The day which, for a soldier's wife, had to come, has come," while the lieutenant's reads, "Long live the Imperial Forces."[50] In anticipation of the posthumous reception of the suicide scene by a larger audience, she makes up her face "for the world she leaves behind," cracks the door open so they will be discovered by their neighbors while their corpses are still fresh, rearranges her husband's body, wipes the blood off his lips, and covers her waist with a blanket to prevent any derangement of her skirts. Equally important are the incorporeal remains that will stand in for the dead when their bodies are no more. Before the lieutenant arrives back home confirming his own intent to die, she organizes keepsakes (*katami*, 形見) for the people she will leave behind. As the term *katami* (形見) suggests, these objects offer a "glimpse at the form" of something that is no longer present, a substitute for the physical body.[51]

In both the story and the film, a variety of media offer substitutes that promise to preserve and represent the dead. As film theorist André Bazin wryly noted,

"If the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation." In his formulation, two-dimensional media like photography and cinema depend on the mimetic "trace" or "imprint" and thus can be linked to ancient burial customs of embalming the dead—mummies, death masks, shrouds, and so on. Above all, cinema has an especially privileged relationship to death, "as a mold both temporal and spatial" capable of showing "at will the only one of our possessions that is temporally inalienable, dead without a requiem, the eternal dead-again of the cinema!"[52]

At key moments, Mishima's screenplay makes clear how the cinematography is meant to present the couple's bodies as objects of timeless commemoration. Before and after their lovemaking scene, the couple are posed on the dais "in a sculptural pose" (*chōkoku-teki pōzu*); during sex, his "naked body like a bronze" (*buronzu no gotoki ratai*). In the final scene, their insensate corpses are transformed into objects of religious art. As the screenplay stresses, the overhead perspective offered by the film's final crane shot is what enables the focus to move away from the corpse to this prettified and aestheticized distanced view:

> Shot 139. Closeup → Pull Back → Overhead Shot. 15 seconds:
>
> The two corpses collapsed atop one another.
>
> The camera pulls back to show the two corpses atop one another underneath the "Sincerity" scroll in the background.
>
> It then moves even higher overhead to show around the two corpses, the beautifully stylized undulating white cloth that looks like the broom swept patterns in the rocks of Ryōanji Temple garden.[53]

If in the film that final overhead shot is what enables this transcendent vision of the afterlife, the story offers multiple glimpses in multiple media. It opens with an overview of the incident that begins in the clipped tone of a newspaper article—"On the twenty-eighth of February, 1936, (on the third day, that is, of the February 26 Incident), Lieutenant Shinji Takeyama of the Konoe Transport Battalion …"—and then shifts registers to a mythic epic style: "The last moments of this heroic and dedicated couple were such as to make the gods themselves weep" (93). Time, whether historical or mythical, and narrative, whether journalistic or epic, conspire to commemorate the dead in what Thomas Garcin has aptly called "a textual mausoleum raised in honor of Lieutenant Takeyama and his wife Reiko."[54] The story works conspicuously harder than the film to enshrine the dead. Its radical shifts in tone suggest a narrator that sifts through various media, genres, and points of view to try to adequately capture and re-present them.

Immediately after this vertiginous opening, the story's next chapter begins with another representation: a photograph. After a detailed description of the handsome young couple in their commemorative wedding picture comes an explanation of what Bazin might have called "the irrational power of the photograph:"[55]

> After the suicide, people would take out this photograph and examine it, and sadly reflect that too often there was a curse on these seemingly flawless unions. Perhaps it was no more than imagination, but looking at the picture after the tragedy it almost seemed as if the two young people before the gold lacquered screen were gazing, each with equal clarity, at the deaths which lay before them. (94)

The photo enables a magical feat of time travel for all parties. In retrospect, viewers can see death foretold in the photograph. But what is even more unusual here is the way that the characters *in* the photograph are also imagined capable of seeing the future "deaths which lay before them." All can simultaneously view death both prospectively and retrospectively.

The question that remains is whether Mishima might have, too. "Perhaps it [is] no more than imagination, but looking at the picture after the tragedy," we naturally see Mishima's self-willed self-death in these artworks. Moreover, we cannot help but also see Mishima seeing his own eventual suicide in (and through) them. To what degree might Mishima have experienced his own death by proxy through the lieutenant? Or his wife? Through the story? The film? As a writer, actor, or director? Or later, as spectator and critic?

In the next sections, I turn to these thorny questions, albeit with a sense of caution, for they are impossible to answer definitively. This part of Mishima's art and suicide is closed to us now, and perhaps was also to him then. For such a prolific writer who discussed both suicide and art at such length, he wrote surprisingly little about his own investment in repeatedly depicting and enacting self-death *in* art.[56] Mishima did, however, write extensively about his theories of acting in general and about the filmmaking process for *Yūkoku* in particular. Both suggest that any singular identification with any singular character was never the goal and that the end of any one production was far from The End.

THE FILM, PRODUCT AND PROCESS: *NAKA-NUKI*, TIME ON ITS HEAD, EVACUATED ACTORS, AND STRIPPED SCREENPLAYS

> *"It's good to be an actor, isn't it? You can be reborn over and over again."*
> —MISHIMA ON-SET OF *HITOKIRI*, 1969

When reflecting back on making *Yūkoku* forty years later, no one on the crew could recall how or when its final scene of the Zen rock garden got added. It was not in the initial script that Mishima showed to his collaborator, the kabuki expert Dōmoto Masaki, and yet it was ultimately incorporated at significant expense. A crane had to be borrowed from another studio, and its delayed arrival cost them precious time and money that was already tight on this two-day shoot. As Mishima explained in his account, this scene required "the couple bathed in blood

a moment earlier, had to be shown perfectly cleansed, in a symbolic, otherworldly setting." Because this was a low-budget production with just one set and one set of costumes, it required that this last scene be shot first.

It was always Mishima's plan to start at the end. But the unanticipated delays with this shot forced an adjustment to the entire shooting schedule so that all subsequent shots were rearranged into a *naka-nuki* block shooting schedule. Mishima explains: "This meant that we would line up all those shots in the film that used the same focal distance and the same light and camera positions and shoot them one after the other, regardless of where they appeared in the film. None of us preferred this system, but as we had to economize on time, … it was a necessary evil." Even the climactic seppuku scene was not shot continuously. As Mishima reveals, it was neatly divided into the "part that did not require blood before dinner" and the rest after their evening meal.[57] This offers a useful reminder that Mishima's experience of the film as an actor does not match ours (or his) as a spectator.

At the time of his earlier debut appearance as a lead actor in Masumura Yasuzō's 1960 gangster film *Karakkaze yarō* (*Afraid to Die*), Mishima had marveled at the ways that the filmmaking process created a sense of temporal discontinuity for the actors themselves. What impressed him was the fact that film, unlike literature, did so out of practical necessity, employing a "purely mechanical and meaningless time-play … utterly unmotivated by psychology or artistry." The resulting estrangement of the actor from his own body, he writes, is nonetheless "a delightful feeling."[58]

His experience as an actor on the set of *Afraid to Die* led Mishima to develop what he called an "object theory of film acting" (*eiga haiyū obujé-ron*). Elsewhere I explore in depth how his "theory" entailed a simultaneous inhabitation and evacuation of the film actor's body that belies any notion of a simplistic identification process.[59] Here I would stress the ways that Mishima insistently distanced himself from his character. In his capacity as director, Mishima demanded that both he and his costar Tsuruoka Yoshiko play their roles "robotically, as if they were bunraku puppets." She was not to display any "individualized emotion" and he was "to make the lieutenant's each and every act that of a cap and uniform as opposed to that of a living, breathing human being."[60]

If Mishima's actors in *Yūkoku* were not meant to fully inhabit their characters, the roles available for occupation themselves were conspicuously vacant. The screenplay offers a crucial intermediary step in this evacuation, meticulously stripping the literary characters bare of all interiority. As he explained to screenwriter Funabashi Kazuo, he refused to include any "literary psychological ambiguity" (*bungaku-teki shinri-teki aimasa*) in his barebones shooting script.[61] Even in the most dramatic moments, there are rarely any emotional cues for actors.

What does all this suggest about Mishima's own role enacting the part of the lieutenant/husband? Taking on this role was undeniably a move *into* a character's body, but this is a character who himself is depicted as increasingly disembodied,

both literally and figuratively. That an actor's performance in the final film product would be forever distant from their embodied experience of that role was further ensured by the practical demands of filmmaking—especially in this low-budget, time-strapped production where narrative chronology was so skewed that "The End" had to be filmed at the beginning. And especially when that end is nothing less than a magical rebirth.

RITES OF LOVE AND DEATH: HIS & HERS, HIS & HIS

It is worth noting again that it is her, not his, death that ends *Yūkoku*. Mishima's character's seppuku may be the climax, but it is not the final endpoint of either the story or the film. Although Mishima was often criticized for his vacant, stereotypical female characters, the male lead here is equally devoid of characterization. And he is dispatched earlier in the production. As the last woman standing, or "the Final Girl" (to borrow a term coined by film scholar Carol Clover), might Reiko instead have offered a potential proxy for Mishima?[62] After all, as we saw above, the insertion of the wife as a spectator-in-the-text is the crucial mechanism by which the lieutenant hopes to see his death through to the end. For her part, Reiko seeks to move from a position of vicarious observer of another's death to that of active participant in her own. She does this to better know another's experience of self-death. Might then the hyperfeminized character of Reiko, rather than the manly lieutenant, offer a more apt parallel for Mishima?

If so, this proxy is depicted as imperfect. As they approach death, characters are estranged not only from themselves but from each other. Both characters have limited access to this extreme bodily experience. In the moment, no one is privy to the state of death itself. Neither the embodied position of actor (the lieutenant) or spectator (Reiko)—neither experiencing suicide firsthand nor witnessing it secondhand—enables proximity to self-death. At the same time that the story and film both stage the desire to close the gap between life and death, between self and other, each also highlights the complexity in doing so. Rather than suggesting that art offers an easy means to rehearse suicide, instead these works repeatedly point to the difficulties of replicating self-death in any medium.

Of course, there is no reason that Mishima, as author, actor, or director, had to identify with any of his characters, much less only along strictly gendered lines. Some scholars have celebrated the potential for queering even Mishima's seemingly most heteronormative of texts, interpreting them "as homosexual texts through queer reading and imagination which read female characters as men."[63] When "Ai no shokei," the "draft, gay underground version" of "Yūkoku," was finally included in Mishima's complete works in 2005, Dōmoto Masaki celebrated its potential to expose the gay underpinnings of the canonical "Yūkoku," or what he called "the decorative New Years' version … geared for public consumption, wrapped in a paulownia wood box."[64]

"Ai no shokei" was published in October 1960 (the same month Mishima completed "Yūkoku") under a pseudonym (Sakakiyama Tamotsu) in *APOLLO*, a special edition of the underground gay magazine *ADONIS*.[65] It features Ōtomo Ryūkichi (originally named Shinji in Mishima's handwritten draft), a hypermasculine phys ed teacher in his mid-thirties who teaches at a boys' high school. He commits seppuku at the bidding of one of his beautiful, young *bishōnen* pupils, Toshio, after the death of yet another of his beloved *bishōnen*. With its doubled (and even tripled) characters, this so-called gay version of "Yūkoku" defies any easy mapping of one text onto another, much less onto Mishima's own life and death. It does suggest Mishima's enduring interest in exploring sex and seppuku in yet another gender and genre-bending medium.

The story opens with Ryūkichi, sitting at night in his rented secluded farmhouse alone and brooding over a regrettable incident at school that has left him "wanting to mess himself up" (*jibun de jibun o metchametcha ni shite shimaitakatta*) (41). His guilt stems from the recent death of his student Tadokoro, another beloved, slender *bishōnen*, who recently died of pneumonia after he forced him to stand in the rain as punishment for being insolent in class. That night, Toshio appears like an avenging angel on a mission to force Sensei to atone for this classmate's death by "committing suicide via the most agonizing means possible: seppuku" (46). Toshio is clearly a double for this dead classmate—he is "like a beautiful medium" (*utsukushii miko no yō na*)—and also a foil for the hirsute, firm-bodied Ryūkichi, who once caught a glimpse in the school showers of "his rose-colored small nipples, immaculate sunken bellybutton, and not a single hair-like hair on his entire body" (42). What Toshio seeks is not a confession of guilt per se but of "love" (*ai*).[66] Once Sensei's belly is pierced by the sword, confessions of mutual love and desire spill.

If the opening of "Ai no shokei" suggests Ryūkichi's parallels with Reiko as both wait alone in a secluded house conjuring their absent loves until their appearance in the second act, then his manly seppuku squarely aligns him with his namesake, Shinji. As he is dying, Ryūkichi is estranged from his own bodily reactions after the first plunge of the sword, "feeling no pain, only a sharp excitement … the sword entering so deep as to be noteworthy … that he thought, 'Is this all that seppuku is?' [*'Seppuku'tte kore dake no koto ka?'*]" (51). In both stories, what leads these men to commit suicide is their guilt over dead male comrades: Shinji's army buddies and Sensei's pupil. Each story has a crucial spectator-in-the-text present to witness that spectacle: the perfect wife Reiko and a *bishōnen* of unparalleled beauty. Ryūkichi, too, will die by "manly seppuku" (*otoko-rashii seppuku*) (46) before the eyes of a feminized spectator. Most importantly, this fulfills "his deepest desire to be seen off in death by a *bishōnen* like [Toshio]" (45).

Here is where the roles of the witnesses depart. Whereas Reiko, as expected of any perfect soldier's wife, is united in mind and body with her husband, intent to die even before he has returned home, the pupil-teacher relationship is splintered from start to finish. Unlike Reiko, who can hardly stand to look on at the painful

spectacle unfolding before her and eventually helps bring it to a close, Toshio prolongs Sensei's agony to satisfy his own desires to watch him die in excruciating pain. Toshio looks on eagerly and asks, "Sensei! Does it hurt? Are you in agony? Hmm? What does it feel like?" (51). Sensei's response of "Not so much really" discloses little to the eager and sadistic spectator. (In this respect, however, the divide between teacher and pupil is not so deep after all. Just as Sensei tortured Tadokoro, Toshio now tortures Sensei. And Toshio finally confesses that he shares Sensei's own confessed deepest desire: to watch a beautiful male suffering in pain before him dressed in matching tennis whites.)

As the seppuku continues, the gap between the two men only widens, as do any parallels we might draw between Reiko and Toshio. If Reiko was moved only to sympathy, Toshio is moved by antipathetic arousal. While Reiko seeks to know her husband's pain firsthand, Toshio plans to die painlessly by cyanide. He imagines collapsing atop Sensei's body in what he imagines will seem to the world "a strange double suicide" (*fushigi na shinjū*) (53).

"Yūkoku" and "Ai no shokei" share so many parallels that it is easy to gloss over significant differences.[67] Both feature the intense aesthetic and somatosensory experience of a seppuku for one character that is witnessed by another. In both works, there is a reversal of the usual hierarchies during the ritual preparations: Reiko literally gets to be on top for once (and Shinji also puts away the bedding for the first, and last, time), while Toshio orders the teacher around as if he were a tyrant director of an underbudget production. As both stories make clear, neither features a "normal" *shinjū*. The protocol does not follow, and the usual hierarchies do not apply. In both, the bottom will die second—except that in "Ai no shokei," no one actually dies. This is the most curious aspect of this story—the interruption of the suicidal act and the insistent divide between the two lovers.

In fact, this male-male couple is denied any climactic union; both sex and suicide are deferred. There is no "last time," or first for that matter; as Arashi Mansaku notes when republishing the story in the gay magazine *Barazoku* in 1983, "for an underground publication, one would expect much more explicit scenes of male-male sexual desire."[68] The couple do exchange one single brief passionate kiss at Sensei's dying request and they manage a few covert gazes at each other's bodies, most notably during the pre-seppuku bathing ritual when Toshio marvels at Sensei's voluminous pubic hair and "his erect penis with its head shining a purplish red that makes him wonder what excites him so" (48). Sexual pleasure is implied in their mutually eager gazes; as the spectacle unfolds, Toshio repeatedly claims, "This is what I wanted to see" (51, 52, 53), while for Ryūkichi, "just thinking of dying before the wide-eyed gaze of these beautiful, glinting, black pupils, experienced an indescribably sweet spasm run through his whole body" (50). Sensei had resolutely determined to "satisfy this youth by showing him a model example of a manly seppuku!" (*Ore wa, otoko-rashii seppuku no otehon o misete, kono shōnen o manzoku sasete yarō!*) (46). Satisfaction will be achieved by proxy, however. The

sword, Toshio's family heirloom, is the only object that will penetrate the body in this exchange.

For his part, Sensei is never made aware of Toshio's double suicide plan or of his planned sequel to his seppuku, a "ritual purification by blood" in which he will strip the still-living Sensei "naked as the day he was born," tie him up with rope, and carve off his flesh little by little prolonging Sensei's agony and his own joy (53). Each man is initially an equally eager participant in this symbiotic seppuku ritual that satisfies both men's deepest desires, but the sequel is a solo-directed operation by Toshio alone. For all the mirroring and doubling that came before it, the two diverge from one another wildly here.

Death remains in the offing, the sequel unfolding only in Toshio's imagination to which readers are privy in a lengthy interior monologue qua imagined dialogue with Sensei. Until this point, readers have had complete access to each man's mind in alternation (in the form of clunky interior monologues marked off by double quotes). By the end, Sensei has been reduced to a "groaning beast," uttering the bodily moans that Mishima claimed he was keen to avoid in *Yūkoku*: "Uuumu … … guguuu … … uuumu" (54, 52). Toshio, on the other hand, becomes a loquacious narrator cum stage director describing his detailed fantasy of an "execution of love."

This story too ends in medias res, and at its most distant remove from either character. Sensei has become an object inserted into a script entirely of Toshio's making, a "seppuku-mono," or literally a "belly-cutting thing."

> And then across the old uneven tatami mat floor, from the pool of blood of the belly-cutting thing, a streak of blood came rushing toward the beautiful young boy, drenching his toenails.
>
> Soshite furuku natte kashiida tatami no ue o, seppuku-mono no chi-damari kara tsurutsuru to ichijō no chi ga hashitte kite, tatte iru bishōnen no ashi no tsumasaki o nurashita. (54)

In the end, death is forestalled here yet again; any emplotted arc that neatly goes from life to death is foiled. This time, there are no reassuring visions of a symphonic reunion in art. There is only the threat and promise of bloodshed, which has turned from the executed toward the executioner. In this final twist, the spectacle has turned on the spectator.

SURVIVING ONESELF AS SPECTATOR

> *We cannot, indeed, imagine our own death; whenever we try to do so we find that we survive ourselves as spectators.*
>
> —SIGMUND FREUD, *REFLECTIONS ON WAR AND DEATH*, 1918

Theories of identification that depend on conflating Mishima, as writer or actor, with his characters are a dead-end.[69] I would suggest nonetheless that Reiko's role

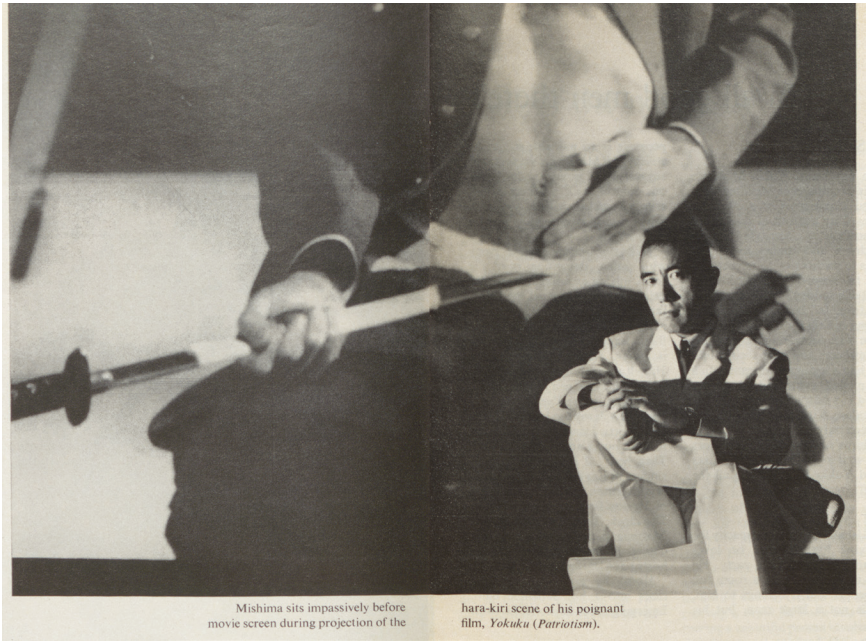

FIGURE 33. Mishima, actor and spectator. Photograph by Eikoh Hosoe, in John Nathan, "Japan's Dynamo of Letters," *Life* (September 2, 1966).

as a proximate yet distanced spectator-in-the-text offers a way out of this deadlock. As we saw above with Mishima's actor-object theory, Mishima's fascination with acting was less about embodying the role of actor than in his doubled role as a spectator viewing his own actor's body onscreen. In his 1959 essay, "I want to become an obujé," he wrote:

> If I become a film actor then somewhere in there *a me that is unknown by me* might be seen.
>
> Boku ga eiga haiyū ni narikireba, boku no shiranai boku o, dokoka de mirareru ka mo shirenai.

He desires to be seen as other, but he does not specify by whom. His wording suggests that he himself is as much, if not more, the audience for this other debuting self. This is a point he clarifies later in the essay:

> Wouldn't it be delightful to find that the me-here is not me at all, and that instead the one-in-the-screen is in fact me?
>
> Koko ni iru boku ga boku de wa nakute, sukuriin no naka ni iru no ga boku de aru yō na jitai ga okottara, yukai de wa nai ka.[70]

Whether Mishima experienced this transcendent discovery of another self in the screen is impossible to know. Even after the film was completed, he continued to seek out multimedia productions in which he entangled art and suicide, often along with a large dose of sex. In July 1968, Mishima described his plans to make "Yūkoku" into a kabuki play. He aborted the plan when he realized that while seppuku is a staple scene in kabuki, the love scene that preceded it posed major problems. Conversely, he agreed to allow Ozawa Kinshirō to remake it into a ballet, although not without a mixture of trepidation and delight: "I expect the love scene will go splendidly, but I really look forward to seeing how the seppuku would be handled. I suspect that never in the history of all the world has there been a seppuku ballet."[71] Just as Mishima juxtaposed the abstract world of noh with cinematic realism in *Yūkoku* and reveled in the "so very bloody seppuku scene that one would never expect to occur on the noh stage," here, too, he delighted in bending and defying mediums.[72]

In retrospect, it was not the film but the story "Yūkoku" that Mishima credited with allowing him to achieve things unimaginable in his real life. In September 1968, he reflected on the text with a combination of complete satisfaction and utter despair: "It would be no exaggeration to say that the singular greatest happiness I hope for in this life is the perfect synergistic unity of Eros and Great Principle depicted in the scenes of love and death [*koko ni kakareta ai to shi no kōkei*]. But sadly enough, in the end, this kind of happiness can likely only be realized on paper [*kami no ue ni shika jitsugen sarenai*], in which case I should perhaps be satisfied that I was able to write this story as a novelist."[73]

As promotional copy for his afterword to a short story collection that contained "Yūkoku," his statement here might be dismissed as mere marketing. But it is intriguing for his attention to what the two-dimensional medium of literature afforded him as a creator. It was not his role in the film as a flesh-and-blood actor or director but instead the story that he claimed came closest to realizing his fantasy, at least on paper. Again, the medium of art—this time in the literal form of a piece of paper—intervenes. If what separated Reiko from the spectacle of self-death unfolding before her was akin to a lowered curtain or high glass wall, for Mishima, sometimes it was the film screen, and sometimes the literary page, that enabled his distant proximity to that spectacle.

What is clear is that after the film was completed, Mishima becomes an outside observer once more, a spectator of his own production (fig. 33). And as we saw above, many of what he regarded as the film's crucial effects were available to him only as a spectator: the sutured gazes of husband and wife, the overhead view of the couple in the afterlife, and, most crucially, the musical soundtrack. That the maligned medium of music was central to Mishima's filmic practice and

imagination offers a way for us to circle back to the beginning of this chapter in the hopes of closing the circle at long last.

MUSIC AND FINALITY, STARTING AT THE END

> *What is music, to me? It is neither one of life's necessities, nor is it a pleasurable diversion. It is temptation.*
> —"YŪWAKU: ONGAKU NO TOBIRA" (MARCH 1967)

In his 1967 essay "Yūwaku: Ongaku no tobira" (Temptation: The doors of music), Mishima returned to discuss his aversion, and his perverse attraction, to music. It stemmed from its ability to draw people toward "something that is not now there" (*ima soko ni nai mono*). In this respect, it is like "film, which is also of course, mere phantoms" (*mochiron tada no maboroshi de aru eiga*). It is music, however, that has the unmatched "power to tempt" (*yūwaku no chikara*), although he notes, "Rare is the film that does not borrow music's powers of temptation."[74]

Yūkoku was no exception. For the film soundtrack, Mishima chose the nineteenth-century German composer Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. The choice was a natural one given the thematic ties between the two works as stories of doomed love and death, especially the opera's final act, "Liebestod" (Love death), where Isolde sings over her lover's dead body as her own consciousness fades and she finally joins him in death. For *Yūkoku*, Mishima insisted on two things: the soundtrack needed to be a wordless version, and the music and image must converge in the end.

Using an orchestral version enabled Mishima to strip the film production of words, or what he called the all too "natural human sounds—moans and the like—that we hear in most films, that [he] had feared from the beginning would sully the purity … in the love scene or during the seppuku." Mishima excised not only the spoken word but all diegetic sounds and even the non-diegetic song vocals. As his screenplay stresses in its first line, this pure wordless music must play seamlessly alongside the film images: "The music of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* runs throughout the entire film without any subtitles or gaps between the threads [*ongaku o jimaku mo orime mo naku nagasu*]."[75]

Mishima timed it precisely so that the climactic final chord of Wagner's opera score would converge with *Yūkoku*'s final film image. While the ending was crucial, the beginning mattered little. What made Wagner's music such a perfect choice was, as Mishima explained, the way "you never knew exactly how long it would continue or where it would end, which meant you could pick almost any phrase at random and begin there."[76] When the crew previewed the result on April 27, the result was kismet. As a spectator of this film of his own making, he was delighted to find that the music conformed to on-screen

FIGURE 34. Framing the beginning and the end, the hands of the lieutenant/husband/Mishima. Mishima Yukio, dir., *Yūkoku* (1965); *Patriotism, or The Rite of Love and Death*. New York: Criterion Collection, 2008.

actions throughout, matching perfectly, "almost all too perfectly [*iya ni naru hodo atcchau*]."[77]

The film's first image opens amid total silence. The white gloved hands of the lieutenant/husband appear in an audiovisual vacuum against a black background to unfurl a scroll with the title, credits, and first intertitle (fig. 34). Wagner's music enters about two minutes into the film toward the end of this first lengthy intertitle that gives background on the February 26 incident and on the lieutenant's predicament. Over the course of Mishima's twenty-eight-minute film, the music swells and speeds, circles and slows down repeatedly, to create the effect of never-ending looping, and even dizzying, music for which Wagner's original score was famous (and famously controversial).

The opera score opens with the famous so-called Tristan chord, an exquisitely unstable four-note chord whose harmonic function is fluid and uncertain. As one music critic has put it, "The chord, and the way the following phrase peters out, set the work's pattern for creating musical expectations that are never resolved"—or rather, are resolved only when "we finally reach resolution at the close of the opera over 5,000 bars and four hours of music later" with the climactic and consonant B-major chord that concludes the work. One of Wagner's contemporaries, the 1903 Nobel laureate Norwegian author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, unflatteringly likened the score to "seasick music that destroys all sense of structure in its quest for tonal colour. In the end, one just becomes a glob of slime on an ocean shore, something ejaculated by that masturbating pig in an opiate frenzy!"[78]

Even without this famous opening chord, the soundtrack in *Yūkoku* strains a listener, thwarting a desire for closure until the very end. The long-awaited final chord coincides with the film's final image of the lovers laid out serenely atop a Zen rock garden. This chord is not struck until the camera has moved to its most distant overhead position that renders the lover's corpses as artistic patterns in the

waves of sand. For twenty seconds, this chord endures as it repeats three times and the screen cuts to the closing title: "The End." Like the opening credits, this text, too, appears on a handwritten scroll presented by the gloved hands of the lieutenant/husband/Mishima. As the final chord concludes, his hands neatly roll up the scroll, and the screen fades to black in silence.

As noted above, it was always Mishima's intent to begin at "The End." Music and film image converge here to resolve at this predetermined and overdetermined endpoint. Like the insistent camera pan moments before traveling down from the handwritten scroll to the lovers' bodies that forces reading the suicidal acts as sincerity incarnate, here our eyes and ears are guided to rest. The final movement of the camera and the music is complete. Images and sounds resolve together, at last converging to offer release and rescue from the discordance caused by death.

That this end was not the end of Mishima himself should go without saying. And yet as we have seen above, there is a tendency to stress the contiguity and continuity of this production with Mishima's own suicide as if there were "no gaps between the threads," to borrow Mishima's phrasing. As I hope to have shown here, in practice, many such gaps exist amid these threads and among his fivefold roles in this production. Perhaps nothing more clearly demonstrates his own playful awareness of this than the final scene. Here Mishima's hands appear even after his character is dead (fig. 34).

What to make of this pointed gesture? It was not merely some editing continuity failure. These gloved hands had inexplicably returned posthumously once already in the film to unfurl the final chapter title—"Chapter 5: Reiko's Suicide"—just after the lieutenant completes his lengthy seppuku. The reappearance of these hands points to someone's survival after death, but whose? The character's? The actor's? The writer cum director's? Although Mishima had repeatedly insisted that he had to expunge "any trace of 'the novelist Mishima Yukio'" from his portrayal of "Lieutenant Takeyama Shinji," it is difficult to take him entirely at his word.[79] The resurrection of the hands of the creator after those hands have taken that creation's life seems all too deliberate.

Again, Mishima appears to be inside, outside, underneath, and on top of the production, simultaneously encircled by, and encircling, it. As we have seen, many of his artistic choices were underpinned by a desire for control. But each also entailed some abdication of control. Playing the lead actor also meant giving himself over to the production and to the director (even if it was a self-authored and self-directed film) and expunging himself (or at least his novelist persona) from the production. Producing this film independently outside of a studio system enabled him to avoid being strong-armed by "evil capitalist" forces, even as he covertly borrowed staff from Daiei and equipment from Tōhō and shot the film at Okura Films studio.[80] The low-budget indie production also came with its own financial and time constraints. By Mishima's own account, the music was the most crucial and unexpected aspect of the production that he left "entirely to chance,"

but it fit the actions throughout the film "almost all too perfectly." Here, too, however, any assertions of lacking control were ambivalent at best. As Mishima put it, "It was, of course, a coincidence. But that coincidence was the goal."[81]

In choosing Wagner as the soundtrack for *Yūkoku*, Mishima seems to have been asserting mastery over a medium and a musical artist that he also claimed to feel mastered by. This state of submission was not an undesirable one as he had clarified in his earlier 1955 essay when asking, "Are not the pleasures of listening to music the pure delight of being encircled, embraced, and dominated?"[82] A later painting done by his artistic collaborator and close friend Yokoo Tadanori depicts the famed image of Mishima posing as the martyr St. Sebastian tied to a tree. Here, rather than any arrows, the bound and encircled Mishima appears pierced by the consoling sounds of Wagner (fig. 35).

In his 1959 primer on literary style, Mishima had invoked Wagner as the model for his ideal literary prose, albeit one he felt he failed to achieve. He likened his decades-plus work as a novelist to that of a conjurer, or more modestly, a pharmacist "who makes medicine, extracting chemicals from thin air and fixing them into prose. But if sometimes I can write with ease, at others, I cannot write at all." He recognizes the importance of "literary prose that has visual beauty" (*bunshō no shikaku-teki na bi*) but aspires also to prose that "moves one easily with its uniquely thick rhythms [*isshu no jūatsu na rizumukan ni kandō shiyasui*]. Yet, no matter how I try, I cannot achieve a similar Wagner-like literary style."[83] Overlaying the Wagner opera music onto a silent film adaptation of one of his earlier literary works would seem to offer one way to achieve this goal of marrying musical rhythms to literary prose.

But Mishima again anticipates and disarms any line of reasoning that might assume film merely compensated for the perceived deficiencies of literature. In discussing *Yūkoku* with screenwriter Funabashi Kazuo in April 1966, Mishima balked at the suggestion that writing the screenplay and then directing and acting in the film offered him artistic fulfilment that he could not achieve as a literary author, or vice versa. When asked if he felt frustrated by the experience of transposing the powerful original story into a screenplay and film, Mishima challenged that premise head-on:

> By your way of thinking, you believe that it must've felt impossible to transpose words into film images—that turning this or that image of a word [*ji no imēji*] into a film image [*eizō*] was impossible. But, in fact, since I myself wrote the original work, there's an opposite way to look at it. What I mean is that words enter into our heads through a process of abstraction, and, from there, the image grows. So, for example, when confronted with the word "mountain" or "sky," we employ our poetic imaginations. When we read novels, that sort of process is always the case. But, in this case, because it is me, [the original author of "Yūkoku"], who is fixing the image into words, I fix them into a place that does not come after the word, but before it. That is the way I think about it. What I'm saying is that reality may

FIGURE 35. Mishima, the martyr, enrapt and encircled by Wagnerian bodhisattvas (Yokoo Tadanori, *Otoko no shi arui wa Mishima Yukio to R. Wāgunā no shōzō*, 1983). Courtesy Yokoo Tadanori, 1983.

> be lacking, but I suspect something exists that is even rawer, something even more filled with some raw dripping essence. Only by making words abstract can they be communicated to us, but what I wanted to do was return them to the stage prior to that. And so, it was not an attempt to adapt the original, but instead an attempt to return that original work to its origins. I wanted to return the original work to my subconscious, or to put it even more boldly, to return it to the universal subconscious of the Japanese people.[84]

Leaving aside his bolder claim of bardic status here, Mishima suggests that writing the film screenplay offered not a rewrite or adaptation, and certainly not a rehearsal of something to come in the future, but rather an unwriting, a move back to before. This was a return to a preverbal state before the abstraction of words forces the thing to become estranged from its origins. The ultimate goal is not necessarily the image (film or otherwise). Instead, something much less (and more) tangible, more visceral (*doro doro to shita mono*). Elsewhere he called it "the chaos that predated the process of abstraction" or "the original inner chaos residing inside me" (*orijinaru na konran wa watashi no naibu ni aru no de aru*).[85]

Later in his discussion with Funabashi, Mishima asserts that the mediums of film and music, especially a composer like Wagner, offer privileged access to this state of inner chaos:

> Isn't [the cinema] just like music? Not at all like novels. In music—and Wagner is like this too—we are enrapt [*tsutsumikonde*], thrown into the midst of extreme chaos, and inside there is no sense of shame, no anything at all. And we are freed from all erotic feelings inside of us. Or we are chased into a tight corner and suddenly put face-to-face with death. That is what music is like. … Novels too should immerse us, but there is a screen in between. With music, no such screen exists. And with films, this is even truer since the music and visuals come together as one.[86]

Mishima again expresses his phobic wonderment over the powers of music and film to obliterate the self. Paradoxically, novels possess a "screen" (*sukuriin*) that interferes with a reader's immediate reception of a text, while music and film are screenless mediums that immerse listener-viewers completely. Their immersive effects resemble a state of death.

Writing in the late 1930s, Theodor Adorno had identified these self-obliterating tendencies of Wagner's operas as the evils of the modern culture industry. In *In Search of Wagner*, Adorno critiqued their dubious enchantments for tending "towards magic delusion, to what Schopenhauer calls 'The outside of the worthless commodity', in short towards phantasmagoria.'" Their undesirably immersive and illusory effects had been inherited by bourgeois cinema, appearing in its most debased form in Hollywood films, but as the origin of the term "phantasmagoria" suggested, could be traced back to early nineteenth-century proto-cinematic magical lantern shows.[87]

The problem, according to Adorno, is that Wagner's operas offer "consoling phantasmagoria" that make time stand still. They offer "the mirage of eternity" often by presenting "the idea of metempsychosis" at a thematic level where characters transmigrate at will, "detached from time." In other words, they promise the eternal return of the dead. This promise is not just proffered thematically but through the medium of sound, the "acoustic delusion" of "distant sound" in which "music pauses and is made spatial, the near and the far are deceptively merged." Wagner's looping music with its "absence of any real harmonic progression becomes the phantasmagorical emblem for time standing still." Adorno fears that such invisible all-encompassing spatialized sound will paralyze its audiences and foreclose the potential for political critique.

From the perspective of a Marxist modern culture industry critique, the key problem was that phantasmagoric media conceal the labor behind their own production. In so doing, the creator is effaced while the creation (and the world it re-creates) is reified. As Adorno made clear, this was problematic not just for the audience but for the creator as well:

> The phantasmagoria tends towards dream not merely as the deluded wish-fulfilment of would-be buyers, but chiefly to conceal the labour that has gone into making it. It mirrors subjectivity by confronting the subject with the product of its own labour, but in such a way that the labour that has gone into it is no longer identifiable. The dreamer encounters his own image impotently, as if it were a miracle, and is held fast in the inexorable circle of his own labour, as if it would last forever. The object that he has forgotten he has made is dangled magically before his eyes, as if it were an absolutely objective manifestation.

With the means of production concealed, the creator can instead conceive of themselves as a spectator of a magical phantasm that appears magically before them. As Adorno puts it, the artist and artwork alike become "a passive, visionary presence."[88]

It is not difficult to map Adorno's critique of Wagner onto Mishima's own quest for a "total artwork" (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) that synthesized multiple art forms and one that would allow Mishima to become not just the almighty artist par excellence but also the audience for his own authorless and autonomous creation.

It is worth stressing again that as important as Mishima's musical choice of Wagner was for *Yūkoku*, there is no pretense that the characters (or actors playing them) can hear this music. The soundtrack was non-diegetic, and it was added in postproduction. It is only as spectator that Mishima is privy to this perfect accordance of image and sound in the film's final moments. If film allowed Mishima as a spectator to achieve a desired "self-oblivion" (*bōga*), then his many stints dying on celluloid might seem to offer him the apotheosis of the cinematic experience. But instead, it is only as the film spectator of the final omniscient shot, untethered to any one bodily perspective, that the reassuring film images and dreaded music converge at last.

Epilogue

Dialoguing with the Dead

A book is a great cemetery where the names have been effaced from most of the tombs and are no longer legible. Yet there are times when one remembers a name perfectly well, but without knowing whether anything of the person who bore it survives within these pages.

—MARCEL PROUST, *IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME*, 1927

"Repository," he finally says, "you know this word? A resting place. A text—a book—is a resting place for the memories of people who have lived before. A way for the memory to stay fixed after the soul has traveled on."

—LICINIUS IN *CLOUD CUCKOO LAND* (DOERR 2021)

In "Fuyu no tabi: Shisha to no taiwa" (Winter's journey: A conversation with the dead), a hauntingly beautiful essay penned one year after Mishima's suicide, the writer Enchi Fumiko imagines the appearance of Mishima's ghost one winter's night in her library. As they debate their shared love of classical literature and kabuki theater, Enchi strives to reconcile Mishima's artistic talents and tastes with his suicidal act. When she criticizes his suicide—claiming that "the moment you cut off life in the manliest fashion was when your feminine maiden side rose in revolt"—he retorts, "Ah, it would've really been something if you could've said that to me when I was alive. … But now, since I've already had my fill of tasting that bitter phrase 'the dead have no mouths,' let's just read on."[1]

It is no coincidence that Enchi opens by setting this piece in her library, beginning with the line, "I was looking for something" (*Watashi wa sagashimono o shite ita*) and explaining that "Books are heavy things" (*Hon to iu mono wa omoi mono de aru*). She imagines her elderly woman's body crushed and immobilized by piles of dusty books and paper scraps, living, as she does, among the leaves of books, "dwelling like a silverfish" (*shimi no sumika*). Although younger by a generation,

Mishima, too, she notes, is "a ghost born from the dwellings of silverfish."[2] In other words, they are a pair of bookworms who commune in death, just as they did in life, over books.

Haunted by the images of Mishima's severed head that appear in the tabloids, Enchi imagines another kind of haunting here, in and through the pages of her and his beloved books. The book Enchi initially seeks and the one that Mishima's ghost locates for her is a red-covered translation of D'Annunzio's 1911 play "Le Martyre de saint Sébastian." Although it goes unmentioned here, this volume is likely one co-translated by Mishima himself.[3]

In the essay's final lines, it is not Mishima, but only this book that remains:

> When I finished reading over the essay manuscript, the room was dark. My listener was no longer there, and only the book on Saint Sebastian remained on top of the desk, like a red square of blood.
>
> Genkō o yomiowatta toki, heya no naka wa kuraku natte ita. Kikite wa sude ni soko ni inai de, San Sebasuchien no seihōkei no chi no yō ni akai hon dake ga tsukue no ue ni okarete ita.[4]

What is Enchi to do with these remains in the end? What, for that matter, is a reader to do in the end with all the textual remains offered in this book?

These are troublesome bodies of texts. "Like red squares of blood," each bears the bodily traces of those who wrote and read them when faced with suicide—Fujimura's 143-character poem of "tears or blood," the "unsightly" writings and corpse of young poet Kishigami or Akutagawa's own revealing and concealing corpus, the anonymous young woman's skeleton discovered in Aokigahara forest with a book as her pillow, the poetic "smoke rising from Mount Mihara" for the young poet Matsumoto's memorial tablet, Dazai's "tunnel of green," the single writing brush of Etō Jun's buried in a literary grave in lieu of his corpse, Mishima's gory seppuku and a prettified afterlife on the page and on-screen, Yamada Hanako's flowery "PYON!" in a manga panel.

Perhaps no text more poignantly demonstrates the entangled nature of these writing, reading, and dying bodies than the note of the young, exhausted marathoner Kōkichi marked by a drop of his blood and its edges stained with tears that fell from his elder brother's eyes upon reading it.

Faced with these troubling bodies of texts, one option is for us to read and to write in response, like many others before us. To converse with the recently deceased in prose like Enchi. To offer a memorial writing in lieu of a single stick of incense at Etō Jun's funeral, as Yoshimoto Taka'aki did, or to imagine cradling the bones of the dead while conjuring him from her own sickbed as Ōba Minako did. To write of another who died calling out one's very own name and to call out to them as well in one's poetry, like the young poet Nagasawa Nobuko did for Haraguchi Tōzō. To try to make orderly the disorderly volumes of notebooks and

diaries left behind by his manga artist daughter as Yamada Hanako's father did. Or, in the absence of any text, to read and map out the scene of a suicide in an effort to situate oneself in the same neatly mapped space as Kon Wajirō did.

The inevitable series of substitutions whereby survivors represent the dead is evident in all these posthumous publications where friends, family, and strangers, like me, take up the brush in response. At the point when the dead can no longer speak for themselves, others speak about, to, and for them. What can help mitigate our fears of committing any kind of "posthumous infidelity," or at least an "obscene … violation," is by reading and writing with care, as they themselves did. It is helpful to remember that in writing, they were both creating and severing connections across the centuries. Our own acts of writing and reading attempt to stretch across this divide to bring us closer to those who have died before us and also to face the death that lies ahead for all of us.

Each of these writings demonstrates what Anne Carson identifies as the "pulling and calling" motions of an epitaph, drawing us toward those who have died just as we draw them toward us. Like the carved epitaphs "upon a tomb" (*epi* + *taphos*), these inscriptions mark both a person's passing from our world and their preservation in it. The dead, Carson notes, are not "saved by this motion. Except as writing. But that is not nothing."[5] We, too, can be saved by this doubled motion for it is in and through these long-dead words and images that these reunions with the dead are imagined, experienced, and possible. And that is not nothing.

NOTES

In the notes, works frequently cited have been identified by the following abbreviations.

ARS	Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke shinjiten*, ed. Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi (Tokyo: Kanrin Shobō, 2003)
ARZ	Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū*, 9 vols. (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1971)
KMYZ	Mishima Yukio, *Ketteiban: Mishima Yukio zenshū*, 44 vols. (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2000–6)
MHLW	Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare
MYE	Mishima Yukio, *Mishima Yukio eigaron shūsei*, ed. Yamauchi Yukihito (Tokyo: Waizu Shuppan, 1999)
MYZ	Mishima Yukio, *Mishima Yukio zenshū*, 36 vols. (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1973–76)
WHO	World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

Epigraph: Améry (1999, 1).

1. Améry (1999, 10, 21).
2. Améry (1999, 4).
3. Current guidelines recommend replacing the phrase "committed suicide" with the more neutral "died by suicide" and avoiding any language of "successful or unsuccessful attempts." If the former aims to avoid associations with criminality, the latter seeks to defuse any sense of the act as a worthy goal. See Suicide Prevention Alliance (2023) and Singer and Erreger (2016). Throughout this book, I have tried to follow these recommendations as much as possible but compromise at times in the interest of smoother prose or more accurate translations.

4. In 2017, public health agencies in Japan began exploring information and communication technology (ICT) as one means of combatting the relatively new phenomenon of "internet group suicides," anonymous web denizens who make and plan suicide pacts (Itō Jirō and Sueki Hajime 2018). For a review of ICT's efficacy, see Rassy et al. (2021).

5. On biomarkers of suicidality, see Kaplan (2018), Guintivano et al. (2014), and Le-Niculescu et al. (2013). On linguistic markers, see Nook et al. (2022) and Tingley (2013). I am grateful to the many mental health professional researchers who patiently walked me through their research at the 2019 International Summit on Suicide Research.

6. In her diary entry for November 23, 1926, Woolf recorded making this remark to her lover and friend Vita Sackville as she was writing her novel *To the Lighthouse*, long before her own suicide in March 1941 (Woolf 1926).

7. Améry (1999, 29).

8. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–27), cited in Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, "Editors' Introduction," in Derrida (2001, 3).

9. Wordsworth's poem *The Excursion: Being a Portion of The Recluse, a Poem* (ca. 1806), cited in de Man (1984, 77).

10. Didion (2005, 196).

11. The historian Golo Mann (1909–94), brother of Klaus (1906–49) and son of author Thomas Mann, cited in Améry (1999, 28).

12. All citations of "Wanting to Die" are from Sexton (1966, 58).

13. Yamana (1949, 199).

14. Burke (1952, 369).

15. Terayama (1979, 63–64). See also Ōe Kenzaburō's imagined posthumous dialogues with his brother-in-law and filmmaker Itami Jūzō, who died by suicide in 1997, in his 2000 *Torikaego* (*The Changeling*). The protagonist uses a clunky old tape recorder called Tagame that is likened to an "interdimensional mobile phone" that enables his dead friend to continue communicating from "the Other Side" (Ōe 2010, 12).

16. Extended entries for each of these authors appear in both Ueda Yasuo (1976) and Kokubungaku (1971). The former also includes Ikuta Shungetsu and Hino Ashihei, while the latter includes playwrights Katō Michio and Kubo Sakae (while leaving out Kawabata, since his suicide postdates its publication).

17. Miyoshi (1974, xvi). For other works that conclude with Mishima as their final chapter, see also "Mishima Yukio (1925–1970): The Man who Loved Death" (Lifton 1979, 231–74); "Mishima Yukio: Engeki-teki jisatsu [a theatrical suicide]" (Kokubungaku 1971, 190–93); Ueda M. (1976); and Pinguet (1993), whose two final chapters on modern authors cover a slightly expanded roster with Kitamura Tōkoku, Arishima Takeo, Akutagawa, Dazai, Haraguchi Tōzō, and finally Mishima (243–85).

18. Harold Strauss, personal correspondence to Michael Gallagher, December 2, 1970, Alfred A. Knopf Archives, the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

19. Lifton (1979, xi–xii). *Six Lives, Six Deaths* focuses on six men—General Nogi Maresuke, Mori Ōgai, Nakae Chōmin, Kawakami Hajime, Masamune Hakuchō, and Mishima Yukio—three of whom are professional writers and two of whom, Nogi and Mishima, died by suicide. For a more recent example, see Bargen (2006).

20. Orbaugh (1996, 13, 17). For a critique of the gendered, heterosexist, and classist biases of most accounts of suicide in modern Japan, see also Robertson (1999) and Pflugfelder (2005).

21. On Internet group suicide, see Ozawa-de Silva's (2012) exceptional ethnographic study *The Anatomy of Loneliness*. On the letters and poems left behind by kamikaze pilots, I would point readers to the excellent study by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). On public politically motivated self-immolations, see Norimatsu (2012); and "Yuigon • saigo no isho: Yui Chūnoshin" in Matsuta (1972, 33–34). See also the bestselling last writings of Zainichi youth Yamamura Masa'aki in *Inochi moetsukiru to mo* (1971). For works in English on the Japanese practice of *seppuku*, see Seward (1968) and Rankin (2011).

22. Bourdaghs (2003, 115). See his chapter "Suicide and Childbirth in the I-Novel" (especially pages 126–31) on the underlying gender politics of representations of death in Japanese literature that depict passive female deaths from childbirth in contrast with active male suicides.

23. Ōhara (1971, 18).

24. For a fascinating work that tackles the pedagogy of teaching literary suicide, see Berman (1999).

25. Miyoshi (1974, xv).

26. Alvarez (1990, 245).

27. Miyoshi (1974, x, xi, xv).

28. De Vos and Wagatsuma's analysis can be found in *Socialization for Achievement: Essays on the Cultural Psychology of the Japanese* (De Vos 1973, 486, 486–549). De Vos adds a fifth category dubbed "role narcissism" in an attempt to inject Durkheim's sociological framework with a Freudian psychoanalytical component that he believes can adequately address the cultural particularities of the Japanese case (see 438–85). For a highly mechanistic application of these frameworks onto Japanese authors and cultural productions, see Iga (1986, 69–113 and 149–56).

29. Iga (1986, 70); De Vos (1973, 488).

30. Iga (1986, 113).

31. A similarly diagnostic impulse can be seen in *Sakka to jisatsu* (Writers and suicide), a special edition of *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kanshō* published in December 1971 that pairs essays by literary scholars on suicidal writers with ones by the psychiatrist Ōhara Kenshirō. See also Ueda Yasuo (1976). For critiques of such diagnostic approaches, see Améry (1999, 10, 4), Alvarez (1990, 12–13, 113–39), and Pinguet (1993, 21–29).

32. Ōhara (1965); Kōsaka Masa'aki and Usui Jishō, *Nihonjin no jisatsu* [Japanese people's suicide] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1966); Stuart D. B. Picken and Taoko Hori, *Nihonjin no jisatsu: Seiō to no hikaku* [Japanese people's suicide: A comparison with the west] (Tokyo: Saimaru Shuppankai, 1979); and Fuse (1985).

33. Wolfe (1990, xv, xiv).

34. Wolfe (1990, 14).

35. Wolfe's study targets so very many other scholars that reviewers critique it for succumbing to the pitfall of "the (inevitably?) tail-chasing nature of a deconstructionist … academic discourse" and for failing to offer a sustained or alternative approach of its own (Orbaugh 1990, 193). See also David Pollack's review that notes that Dazai's writings themselves are not examined "until the fifth chapter" and that "their 'deconstruction' (especially when achieved pretty much in the absence of the texts themselves) has the feel of trying to crack nutshells with a bomb, and leaves us in the end without very much but the big deconstructive bang itself" (*Monumenta Nipponica* 46, no. 1 [Spring 1991]: 114–15).

36. Émile Durkheim's classic 1897 work, *Le Suicide: Étude de sociologie*, was translated into Japanese in 1932, relatively early compared to other nations, but Di Marco finds little evidence of the now-famous "Durkheimian paradigms [of] individualistic [egoistic], altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic suicide in the literature published before the end of World War II," although his "sociological explanation of suicide showed a certain ascendency … from the late 1920s onward" (2016, 40–41). In Japan, early enthusiasts for Durkheim's sociological method include journalist Yamana Shōtarō, who serialized a column titled "Sociological explanations of suicide" in a new journal, *Shakaigaku* [Sociology] in 1933 and claimed that the contemporaneous Mihara incident (the subject of chapter 2) offered "nothing less than a means of understanding the sociology of suicide" (Yamana 1933, 2, 336). For examples of the use of Durkheim in Japanese-language research on suicide, see Ōhara (1965, 37–39) and Fuse (1985, 159–66). On Freudian theories of life and death instincts, see Fuse (1985, 151–59).

37. Like Pinguet's expansive study, Di Marco's work incorporates a much wider range of examples than most English-language studies, ranging from regular citizens to kamikaze pilots, authors to idols. See especially the chapter 2 subsection in Di Marco (2016) "Desisting from Culturalizing Women's 'Blameful Suicides'" and the chapter 4 subsection "Outcasts from the 'Suicide Nation'—Women and Youths" (70–76, 158–64). See also the chapter "Female Suicides" in Iga (1986, 48–68).

38. Di Marco (2016, 182, 6, 35).

39. Di Marco (2016, 29, 28, 117). For more on "the consolidation of the cultural narrative" in the early twentieth century, see 28–35; on the postwar, see the chapter 3 subsection "A Cultural By-Product: Historicizing Suicide," 117–23.

40. In May 2013, I traveled to Kegon Falls and visited Fujimura's grave in Aoyama Cemetery in Tokyo. I also toured the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) headquarters in Ichigaya, the site of Mishima's seppuku, which, as the tour guide pointed out to everyone's astonishment, preserves the scarred doorframe where SDF forces and Mishima's slashed at one another through the barricaded door. In June 2017, I toured the Mitaka sites where Dazai Osamu lived, died, and is buried, attended his annual memorial service at Zenrinji Temple, and conducted research and interviews at the Dazai Osamu Bungaku Salon. I also visited nearby Inokashira Park, where ethnographer Kon Wajirō lived in the early 1920s and created a "suicide distribution map" to capture the many suicides there. My planned trip to Mount Mihara in spring 2020 fell through because of the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions, but even earlier, although I had the opportunity, I shied away from more contemporary sites, especially the death tourism at Aokigahara Forest. My one visit to the location of a relatively recent suicide, Itami Jūzō's 1997 leap from the roof of his Tokyo office building, felt ghoulish in the extreme.

41. Pinguet (1984, 263–85).

42. Améry (1999, 152).

43. The phrase "in the middest" comes from Edmund Spenser's 1589 letter to Sir Walter Raleigh regarding *The Faerie Queene*, in which he compares the work of historians, who analyze the past in retrospect and "discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne," with "a poet [who] thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the things forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing analysis of all." In *Prefaces and Prologues to Famous Books*, Harvard Classics vol. 39 (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910), 63.

1. THOUGHTS AT THE PRECIPICE: FUJIMURA MISAO AT KEGON FALLS

1. Hiraiwa (2003, 25–26).

2. Watsuji (1963, 298).

3. Naka Michiyo, "Naka-hakase no oi Kegon no taki ni shisu," *Yorozu chōhō*, May 26, 1903, reprinted in Yamana (1949, 157–60) and in Hiraiwa (2003, 5–7).

4. By the time of the ban, the photo by Yamanaka Shashinkan had already appeared in *Tōyō gahō* (edited by Kunikida Doppo) in July 1903 (Hiraiwa 2003, 23–24; Yamana 1933, 300).

5. The former Nikkō Kankō Kyōkai website, which was available as of March 4, 2014, had been revamped with all mentions of Fujimura Misao scrubbed by May 13, 2021 (Nikkō-shi kōshiki kankō WEB, n.d.).

6. Yamana (1949, 160); Hiraiwa (2003, 7).

7. For examples of ghosts captured at Kegon and other suicide sites, see Namiki Shin'ichirō, *Nihon reikai chizu: Norowareta kyōfu no tabū chitai* (Tokyo: Take Shobō, 2013).

8. Kuroiwa Shūroku [Ruikō], "Fujimura Misao no shi ni tsuite," originally published June 13, 1903, reprinted in full in Yamana (1949, 166–85).

9. I use the transcription of Fujimura's poem provided in Hiraiwa (2003, 61).

10. In Fujimura's poem, "Horatio," which was written in katakana, refers to Hamlet's loyal friend in Shakespeare's play, which Fujimura was reading in the months leading up to his death. The reference confounded many contemporary commentators who assumed that Fujimura was insufficiently familiar with the ancient philosopher Horace or with Shakespeare (for example, see Kuroiwa [1949, 171–72]).

11. For example, see *Yorozu chōhō* (n.d., 1903?) and *Kokkei shinbun*, July 20, 1903, reproduced in Hiraiwa (2003, 25, 70).

12. Fujimura's note to his cousins is reproduced in Hiraiwa (2003, 19). This was Fujimura's second trip to the falls, having first visited during a middle school class trip in 1900 (Domon 2002, 120–21). This was the same year that an enterprising local, Hoshino Gorobei, completed constructing a teahouse at the fall's base after seven long years of labor (Nikkō Kankō Kyōkai former website, s.v. "Kegon no taki," accessed March 4, 2014).

13. Abe, "Waga tomo o omou," originally published May 1904, cited in Hiraiwa (2003, 55). Here and below, I have modernized all kana usages, here, for example, using *omou* rather than *omofu*.

14. Hiraiwa (2003, 24–26).

15. Domon (2002, 131).

16. Information on the number of copycat suicides at Kegon Falls after Fujimura drawn from the following sources: "Fūzoku tokei," *Nippon shinbun*, cited in *Japan Weekly Mail*, September 26, 1903, 335; Hiraiwa (2003, 100); Yamana (1949, 162); Domon (2002, 115). Later scholars note that there were rumors that Fujimura's father, from a prominent samurai family and director of a major bank in Hokkaido, died by suicide years earlier, although this was rarely brought up by commentators at the time.

17. On the "cult of anguish," see Takahashi S. (1986, 16) and Hiraishi (2002, 20–29).

18. Uozumi, "Nijūnen no omoide,"originally published December 1914, in Uozumi (1974b, 334–35); Abe, "'Gantō no kan' o megutte," originally published September 1949, in Abe (1949, 54).

19. Hiraiwa (2003, 26).

20. Iwanami and Uozomi cited in Hiraiwa (2003, 41; 45; on Uozumi's response, see also 192). Some speculated that Iwanami's later publishing enterprise was deeply influenced by Fujimura's suicide.

21. *Japan Weekly Mail*, September 26, 1903, 335.

22. On Kōda Minoru's copycat suicide, see *Yorozu chōhō*, July 6, 1903, Hiraiwa (2003, 38–40).

23. Domon (2002, 115); Takahashi S. (1986, 16).

24. Hiraiwa (2003, 40).

25. Domon (2002, 118). See also the satirical op-ed "Bakamono no shinibasho," *Kokkei Shinbun* no. 117 (August 5, 1906): 390.

26. Kuroiwa (1949, 166). See also Shimazaki Tōson, who complained in 1906 that "the literati only forgive the anguish of youths when it is intellectual, not when it is sentimental. … That explains why they lack sympathy for the drowning of a young couple on Haneda shore but sympathize with Fujimura Misao." *Ryokuin zatsuwa*, April 1906, cited in Hiraishi (2002, 109–10).

27. Yamana (1949, 155). This record was discovered in an old storehouse in summer 1921 when the local Nikkō authorities were still struggling to manage suicides at Kegon Falls, which totaled over seventy by that point.

28. "Bakamono no shinibasho," *Kokkei shinbun* no. 117 (August 5, 1905): 390.

29. Sōseki was likely the anonymous eulogist who compared Fujimura to Empedocles based on similar remarks in his 1907 *Bungakuron*. For an extended comparison with Sappho, see Ōtsuka Yasuji, "Shi to bi-ishiki: Seishiron no issetsu," *Taiyō*, September 1903, cited in Hiraiwa (2002, 52–53).

30. Kuroiwa (1949, 166). Kuroiwa ranked Fujimura above Empedocles (172).

31. Hiraiwa (2003, 46–47, 51). For unnamed critics' reactions at the time, see also Yamana (1949, 162–63).

32. Di Marco (2016, 37). Also see Di Marco (2016, especially 35–46), for a compelling analysis of the ways that Fujimura's suicide sparked competing discourses in the medical community. Wasaki identifies a similar tendency among educators to pathologize youths by associating adolescence with anguish and suicidality after Fujimura's death (Wasaki 2010, 40–41n37, 45).

33. "Jisatsu no ryūkō," *Kokkei Shinbun* no. 122 (September 5, 1906): n.p.

34. Anezaki Chōfū, "Genji seinen no kutō ni tsuite," originally published July 1903, cited in Hiraiwa (2003, 50); Uozumi (1974a, 291). Uozumi, "Kojin-shugi no kenchi ni tachite," originally published in *Dai-ichi Kōtō Gakkō Kōyūkai zasshi*, October 1905, cited in Hiraiwa (2003, 208).

35. Nakamura Hajime et al. (1982, s.v. "Fujimura Misao," 505).

36. Hiraiwa (2003, 37).

37. Kinoshita (1955, 127).

38. *Meiji Taishō Shōwa dai-emaki* 1931, n.p.

39. Like most of these commentators, Anezaki found it lamentable that Fujimura had "decided upon the 'not to be' [in English]" option but blamed the "crimes of society and education" (cited in Hiraiwa [2003, 50]).

40. Keigetsu reassured those who feared copycat suicides that they could "relax, for the average masses lack the courage to learn from this marvelous singular death of Fujimura's" (Ōmachi Keigetsu, "Uchū no kaishaku," *Taiyō*, July 1903, cited in Hiraiwa [2003, 46–47]).

41. Yamana (1949, 163); Miyatake Gaikotsu, cited in Terayama (1979, 59).

42. Kuroiwa (1949, 170, 184, 182).

43. "Ganzen kōtō," originally published in June 1908 (Futabatei 1964, 263).

44. Tsubouchi (1903, 70, 56). Here, Tsubouchi distinguishes between "purposeful, active suicides (committed for others or for one's principles)" versus "passive, egoistic ones (committed out of physical or spiritual suffering)." See his fascinating chart on pages 58–59. For a survey of the nine articles published in *Taiyō* from July to September 1903, see Hiraiwa (2003, 46–54), which characterizes four in support of voluntary death and five against, including Tsubouchi.

45. Di Marco (2016, 35).

46. Hiraiwa (2003, 40). Mount Asama was such a hotspot for suicides that one critic joked it stopped erupting because it was filled with so many jumpers; see "Jisatsu denpō," *Tokyo Puck* vol. 4, no. 20 (July 9, 1908): 6. In July 1933, the Hokushin Nichiren sect sponsored a memorial ritual at the mountaintop that was attended by thousands (Yamana 1933, 290).

47. Futabatei (1964, 263).

48. Itō Sei (1964, 139; see also 132–36 passim). On Sōseki's encounters with Fujimura, see also Etō (1970, 252–55) and Domon (2002, 84–95). Although space limitations preclude going into any depth here, Sōseki's subsequent 1914 novel *Kokoro* includes the most famous example of a suicide note in Japanese literary history, or rather two suicide notes, one as loquacious as the other is taciturn.

49. McKinney (2008, 128). Translation adapted here to more closely reflect the original text, which is available at Aozora Bunko, www.aozora.gr.jp, a digital, open-access library of e-books.

50. English-language translations that aim at more elegant, literary renderings tend to underemphasize any condemnation evident here. McKinney's 2008 translation elides the censure evident in the first clause: "To me, it seems that this young man sacrificed his life, that precious gift, for the sake of beauty pure and simple" (128). Alan J. Turney's translation in *The Three-Cornered World* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965) takes greater liberties by implying that the rationale for his suicide was nothing less than Art itself: "As I see it, that youth gave his life—the life which should not be surrendered—for all that is implicit in the one word 'poetry'" (162–63). Notably, both translations flip the word order and thereby stress artistic gain rather than bodily loss.

51. McKinney (2008, 23, 51). I have slightly altered McKinney's translation of Nami's dialogue to reflect the depth of her skepticism here. Robert Tuck (2017, 86) points out how the beautiful Nami confronts the protagonist-painter with "the aesthetic fantasy of female suicide by drowning within which he has already imagined her" through the templates of "two other drowned beauties, the Maid of Nagara from the *Man'yōshū* poetry collection and both the Shakespearean and Pre-Raphaelite Ophelia." She succeeds in laying bare his basest artistic impulses by pointing to the ways his (male) artistic composition depends on the sight of her (female) self-death. See also Atsuko Sakaki, "Unmaking the Tableau: Natsume

Sōseki's *Kusamakura* and Gender/Genre Politics," *Recontextualizing Texts* (Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1999), 99–135.

52. McKinney (2008, 129), with slight alterations.

53. Natsume (1966, 175). Literary scholar Kin'ya Tsuruta notes that Sōseki subsequently rejected the novel and its artist-protagonist's detached aestheticism in a 1906 letter where "he wrote that while a detached, aesthetic life like that of the novel's painter-protagonist could be one way of living, 'real' living should involve life" ("Sōseki's Kusamakura: A Journey to 'The Other Side,'" *Journal of Association of Teachers of Japanese* 22, no. 2 [1988]: 169).

54. A more complete edition of eleven letters and notes from Fujimura to his friends and family were published for the centennial anniversary of his death in a collection claiming to "correct rumors and hoaxes" (Domon 2002, 3). For reproductions, see Domon (2002, 29–40) and Hiraiwa (2003, 213–22).

55. "Fujimura Misao no 'koibito e no isho' hakken," *Shūkan Asahi* (July 11, 1986), reproduced in Hiraiwa (2003, 89; see also 82–91). Despite the publicity, scholars were aware that this volume existed even before Tamiki's death (Itō Sei 1964, 137). I am indebted to the painstaking work of an anonymous blogger who has collated and reproduced many of the relevant original documents at the website Chiisa na shiryō-shitsu, "Shiryō 2 Fujimura Misao no 'Gantō no kan." Last modified November 12, 2023. https://sybrma.sakura.ne.jp/02hujimura.htm.

56. "Jisatsu annai," *Kokkei shinbun* no. 58 (October 5, 1093): 350–52. See also "Bakamono no shinibasho," *Kokkei shinbun* no. 117 (August 5, 1906): 390; and "Shitsuren yatsu Fujimura Misao" [The broken-hearted bastard Fujimura Misao], *Kokkei shinbun*, July 20, 1903, n.p., reproduced in Hiraiwa (2003, 70).

57. Domon (2002, 155).

58. See Yamana (1933, 300) for a reproduction of this note to his cousins inscribed on the inside cover of his Chikamatsu volume. See also Yamana (1949, 160–61). The other plays included in the Chikamatsu volume were *Keisei hangonkō*, *Nagamachi onna hara-kiri* (*Hara-kiri of a Woman at Nagamachi*, trans. Paul S. Atkins), and *Semimaru* (*The Legends of Semimaru: Blind Musician of Japan*, trans. Susan Matisoff).

59. Yamana 1933, 298–301.

60. Translations adapted from *I am a Cat*, trans. Aiko Ito and Graeme Wilson (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1972), 538, 541. Original text available at Aozora Bunko, www.aozora.gr.jp.

61. Takahashi S. (1986, 16).

62. Hiraiwa (2003, 24).

63. "'Gakusei' no shinpo jyūkanen" [The ten-year progress of a "student"], reproduced in Hiraishi (2002, 50).

64. "Shi-teki jisatsu," *Osaka Puck* no. 7 (1912): 14.

65. Henshall (1987, 151–52); Tayama Katai (1901, 383–84). I have made a slight adjustment to Henshall's translation here to reflect Katai's direct citation of Fujimura's poem's "*fukakai*" (incomprehensible).

66. In *The Similitude of Blossoms: A Critical Biography of Izumi Kyōka (1873–1939), Japanese Novelist and Playwright* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), Charles Inouye notes Kyōka's "early-modern penchant for topicality" and offers an intriguing discussion of the autobiographical ties that led him to incorporate suicide as a key theme in his writing (179–85).

67. For synopses of these many adaptations, see Hiraiwa (2003, 97–116, 139–74) and Tanizawa (2015a and 2015b).

68. All translations of Shimazaki's story "Tsugaru Strait" are drawn from the 1918 translation by Torao Taketomo in Shimazaki 1904. For the original, see Shimazaki (1956). For a stinging critique of this story as an obvious "attempt to cash in in on the reading public's appetite for topical sensationalism," see William E. Naff, *The Kiso Road: The Life and Times of Shimazaki Toson* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 233–34.

69. Harrison (2003, 39–40).

70. Harrison (2003, 1, 2, 20, 12).

71. Shimazaki (1956, 215; emphasis mine).

72. Uozumi's eulogy, cited in Hiraiwa (2003, 193, 194).

73. Hiraiwa (2003, 71).

74. Tuck (2017).

75. Hiraiwa (2003, 192, 193).

76. Cited in Hiraiwa (2003, 130). According to a newspaper at the time, authorities deleted the poem not just "out of fear of a second jumper appearing," as one of his friends speculated, but also "out of fear of many tourists" (*Hōchi shinbun*, July 21, 1903, cited in Hiraiwa [2003, 26]). The sense that Fujimura's poem and suicide would also attract tourists was a double-edged sword for authorities, both a source of revenue (with over fifteen thousand yen spent by families traveling to retrieve their loved ones' bodies in 1932 alone) and costly to the city since it enlisted and paid locals to patrol and report on would-be suicides (at twenty yen each and over six hundred informants) (Yamana 1933, 289).

77. Another Fujimura family grave that is fashioned into the shape of a tree trunk on the Aoyama Cemetery plot evokes this severed connection as well.

78. Tezuka (1987, 55–57).

PART ONE. MAPPING SUICIDE: *JISATSU MEISHO*, THE POETIC PLACES OF SUICIDE

1. Tokyo Hāpii (1907, n.p.). The Niagara incident appears to refer to the suicide on March 31, 1907, of "a Japanese, T. Tamai, [who] leaped into the river from the outermost of the Three Sisters islands and was carried over Horseshoe Falls. He left behind a note containing his address, No. 17 Concord street, Brooklyn" (Marshall Michigan, *Daily News*, Monday, April 1, 1907, 1). His body was discovered by a fisherman (see fig. 1, inset image on left). Mount Vesuvius was the site in 1897 where "a young foreigner, believed to be German … ascended Mt. Vesuvius while it was in eruption, lay down near the edge of the crater, and then shot himself, apparently with the idea that the lava would flow and cover his body" (*New York Times*, September 18, 1897)

2. Yamana (1949, 153).

3. Beautrais (2007, 59). There is no agreed-on minimum number of suicides or timeframe that leads to designating a place as a *jisatsu meisho* or suicide hotspot, but instead a more subjective sense of its cache as a suicide destination.

4. Edward Kamens, *Utamakura, Allusion, and Intertextuality in Traditional Japanese Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.

5. Fujiwara no Tameaki cited in Haruo Shirane, *Nature and the Culture of the Four Seasons: Nature, Literature, and the Arts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 67.

6. WHO (2017, 6–7). Numerical representations are also recommended to be self-censored. For example, the California Highway Patrol stopped their official count for Golden Gate Bridge at 997 on June 5, 1995, and Yamanashi Prefectural officials stopped publicizing counts of bodies retrieved from Aokigahara forest in 2001.

7. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) website, 2007–23. "Jisatsu taisaku hakusho." For "jisatsu no meisho" in the 2007 version, see 16; for its replacement with "jisatsu no tahatsu basho," see 2012, 23; and 2017, 24.

8. Yamana (1933, 133–38). Each incident is listed by date, time, location (and its height), gender, age, occupation, and cause/motive (*gen'in*). In addition, each suicide is marked as completed or attempted (with any injuries sustained), and whether a suicide note was left behind.

9. For example, see Satō (2016) for a comprehensive list of 521 stations' suicide rankings over a ten-year period, published on Tōyō Keizai Online (website), n.d.

10. My approach here takes a cue from historian Mary Elizabeth Berry (1997, 578), who explains what the profusion of *meisho* and representations of these famous places in guides and maps can (and cannot) reveal about Tokugawa society:

> We might speculate usefully, though inconclusively, about the transforming power of the famous place. Perhaps a dispersed geo-piety, attached both to local and national monuments, came to unite a people and a landscape. Perhaps a historical consciousness … came to unite a people and a shared past. The … guidebooks focus, however, not on feeling but on access and choice. The many *meisho* and their thick histories are available, and available in the same terms to anyone who wants them for any reason. … Myriad places with multiple associations were opened to all claimants.

2. MOUNT MIHARA'S SAME-SEX SUICIDES AND FLIPPANT FLIPS

1. Chimura Chiaki quoted in *Miyako shinbun* (April 1933), cited in Yamana (1949, 215).

2. Yamana (1949, 202). Details about this incident and its contemporary reportage are drawn from Fujin Kurabu (1933); Bunshin online (https://bunshun.jp/articles/-/15686 and https://bunshun.jp/articles/-/15687, posted 2019); Yamana (1949, 187–218); Kinoshita (1955); Katō (1965); and Koike (2019).

3. Saitō (2017, 93, 95).

4. Sakaguchi (1950, n.p.). Originally published in *Bungei shunjū* 28, no. 6 (May 1950).

5. Yamana (1949, 188); Saitō (2017, 102).

6. President of Tōkai Kisen steamship company, cited in Kon (1994, 14).

7. See timeline on the Oshima Town official website, www.town.oshima.tokyo.jp/soshiki/seisaku/s2.html, last modified 2014; Kon (1994, 15–22 passim). Song lyrics for "Habu no minato" and "Shima no musume" are available at http://J-Lyric.net. Both songs were tie-in hits for the 1933 Shochiku short film *Shima no musume* (dir. Nomura Hōtei). For a short film clip set to "Habu no minato," see www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZDjiCdoXBI.

8. Saitō (2017, 85–86). See *Fortune* 11, no. 5 (May): 112–23, for fantastic contemporary photos of Mihara's key attraction: steamship travel, camels, "beer, tea, postcards," and a

toboggan chute to descend from the summit. One picture shows Shinto priest Shako Tanaka and police chief Iwasa stationed to thwart prospective suicides while another depicts crowds of sightseers gathered around the crater's edge in a photo captioned "Waiting for Someone to Jump In" (115). I thank filmmaker Jacqueline Castel, who has plans to make a feature film set in Mount Mihara (www.jacquelinecastel.com/mihara), for sharing this article with me.

9. Yamana (1933, 290).

10. Lyrics for "Moyuru goshinbi" available at http://j-lyric.net/artist/a000979/l02061d.html.

11. Numbers dipped again in the immediate postwar down to 73,211 in 1950 but in 1973 reached a historic record number of 830,000 visitors (Oshima Town official website, www.town.oshima.tokyo.jp).

12. Kinoshita (1955, 122, 124); Kon (1994, 8). Kinoshita's original reportage in the February 14, 1933, *Tokyo Asahi* is reproduced in full in Kon (1994, 1). In his 1955 article written over two decades after Matsumoto's suicide, Kinoshita reconstructs the incident and its reportage based on his notes from working at Asahi at the time.

13. Pflugfelder (2005, 154, 160).

14. "Miharayama funkakō de jyogakusei dōsei shinjū," *Tokyo Asahi shinbun* (February 14, 1933), 7; reproduced and available at Bunshun online, https://bunshun.jp/articles/photos/15686. See also "Miharayama no kemuri to kieta: Jyogakusei jisatsu no shinsō o tazuneru," *Fujin Kurabu* 14, no. 4 (1933): 328–34, at page 331, which notes that her love of the classics included *Man'yōshū*, *Kinkashū*, and *Tsurezuregusa*. In this and other articles about Mount Mihara in the mid-1930s, the words *shinjū* (double love suicide) and *jisatsu* (suicide) are used interchangeably with no seeming distinction or value associated with either.

15. "Gakuyū no funkakō tōshin o kikai! Ni-domo michi-annai. 'Shi o sasou onna,'" *Yomiuri shinbun* (February 15, 1933), available at Bunshin online, https://bunshun.jp/articles/-s/15686?page=3. Tomita died suddenly on April 29, reportedly of cerebral meningitis. After her death, the media became immensely more sympathetic and claimed she died "seeking the ghosts of her friends" (Kon 1994, 10).

16. Poet Fukao Sumako in "Dōseiai o sabaku," *Fujin sekai* (April 1933), cited in Kon (1994, 44–45n4). Pflugfelder notes that there was often inconsistent and unclear reportage about the "exact relationship of 'same-sex love' and 'same-sex suicide'" but that sexological and journalistic discourses converged in a way that "helped to suffuse this particular 'love' with a sense of distinct, and possibly mortal, danger" (2005, 157–58). For accounts of how sexological work on same-sex love suicides evolved over the early twentieth century, see Pflugfelder (2005, 140–50) and Robertson (1999, 19–24).

17. Article in *Yomiuri shinbun*, February 17, 1933, cited in Kon (1994, 5).

18. Robertson (1999, 1–7). Notwithstanding the overwhelmingly disparaging critiques in the media, same sex suicides offered lesbian couples a "culturally intelligible act that turned a private condition into a public matter" (Robertson 1999, 30) or "a form of self-representation toward others" (Pflugfelder 2005, 154). Similarly biased coverage is evident in *Fortune* magazine's May 1935 coverage of an earlier June 1934 suicide attempt at Mihara involving three women in a love triangle. The article opens with a list of the Tokyo Bay Steamship Co. assets that include "One volcano (active.) 313 suicides. 1,208 attempted suicides. Three Lesbians (one a transvestite* ([defined as] *a person who wears the clothing of the opposite sex.))." "Profits in Suicide." *Fortune* 11, no. 5 (May, 1935): 112–23, at 112.

19. Yamana 1949, 201.

20. Kikuchi Kan, *Tokyo Asahi shinbun* (February 1933), cited in Yamana (1949, 213). See also a 1910 cartoon in *Osaka Puck* that suggests that women, and beautiful women in particular, were looking for attention with a suicide attempt. The manga shows a beautiful woman praying in a kimono beside a river being hailed by a male passerby; the caption (in English) reads, "Beautiful suicides always look for a passer-by while ugly onees [*sic*] dash straightforward." "Jisatsu misui to kisui," *Osaka Puck* no. 5, 12.

21. "Goshinbi wa maneku: Miharayama jyogakusei jisatsu jiken no zensō," *Fujin sekai* (April 1933), cited in Kon (1994, 9).

22. Di Marco (2016, 72). See "Culturalizing the Meaning of Suicide (1930s–1945)," 57–93, for Di Marco's arguments about psychiatry's failure as a discipline to maintain a coherent position on suicide in an era of increasing nationalism.

23. "Miharayama ni jinji sōdan," *Fujo shinbun* no. 1721, June 4, 1933, 482.

24. Yoshiya Nobuko comments in an article in *Tokyo Asahi*, February 16, 1933, cited in Yamana (1949, 214–15). For more on the incident's reception in the contemporary media, see Di Marco (2016, 71–73) and Pflugfelder (2005, 159–60).

25. Kinoshita (1955, 124). According to other sources, this letter opened with an apology: "I can only apologize to everyone" (Katō 1965, 83).

26. Menninger's research developed in line with earlier Freudian theories of suicide as an expression of a repressed or redirected homicidal impulse. In the late 1950s, American psychiatrists tended to categorize suicidal motives using this scheme, distinguishing, for example, between "animosity toward others versus toward self." In Japan, a 1979 study by a Tokyo medical examiner, which surveyed 586 suicide notes over a thirty-one-year period from 1948 to 1978, ascertained motive by explicitly using Menninger's Freudian hypothesis distinguishing between "the wish to die" (47 percent males, 41 percent females), "the wish to be killed" (27 percent males, 14 percent females), and "the wish to kill" (31 percent males, 35 percent females) (Inamura 1977, 257–68; and Tuckman et al. 1959, cited in Izawa 2002, 617). Dr. Ōhara Kenshirō, one of Japan's early leading suicidologists, created a modified taxonomy that categorized notes as primarily filled with pessimism (38 percent), self-blame (29 percent), or externally directed blame (17 percent) (Koshinaga 1979).

For an overview of medical and sociological approaches to suicide in the west and their adoption to the Japanese context, see Di Marco (2016, 20–28). Her work suggests that Freud had only a minor influence on the dominant psychiatric approaches to suicide in Japan despite appearing translated in prominent journals between 1912 and 1918 (41–42) and somewhat superficially incorporated by some in the field like Komine Shigeyuki writing between 1919 and 1942 (66).

27. Kinoshita (1955, 124). Masako also had a nineteen-year-old younger sister who was a Tokyo Jissen Girls' School student.

28. "'Shi no annai' zenbō hanzen su" [Clearing up the whole story of the "death guide"], *Yomiuri shinbun* (February 16, 1933), cited in Kon (1994, 4). Matsumoto's mention of going "to Heaven" was likely an oblique reference to the Sakata love suicide incident of February 1932 between a twenty-two-year-old woman from a rich Christian family and a twenty-four-year-old Keiō University student. Within a month, their deaths were dramatized in a Shōchiku film directed by Gosho Heinosuke, *Tengoku ni musubu koi* (A love consummated in heaven, 1932) starring Takamine Hideko. In a 1967 radio interview, Gosho reflected on this film with chagrin

noting that it was a rush job designed to capitalize on the sensational incident (*kiwamono*). He claims not to have wanted to direct it, although he omits any mention his equally sensational adaptation of the Mount Mihara suicide that same year in *Shojo yo, sayonara*. The interview, originally broadcast on June 5, 1967, is reprinted in Mikuni (1989, 202–9).

29. Matsumoto's last letters are reproduced in Kinoshita 1955, 124. Original Narihira poem and translation taken from Paul Schalow, *A Poetics of Courtly Friendship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 67.

30. "Miharayama funkakō de jyogakusei dōsei shinjū" *Tokyo Asahi shinbun* (February 14, 1933), available at Bunshun online, https://bunshun.jp/articles/photos/15686.

31. "Hi o fuku Mihara-sanchō shinyū・shi no tachiai: 'Sayōnara' to hito-koto: isho o nokoshi kakō e" [The smoke-billowing peak of Mount Mihara, close friend as death witness: Saying only 'sayōnara' and leaving behind a last letter, to the crater mouth], *Tokyo Asahi shinbun* (February 15, 1933), available at Bunshun online, https://bunshun.jp/articles/-s/15687?page=2. This poem is also transcribed in "Miharayama no kemuri to kieta: Jyogakusei jisatsu no shinsō o tazuneru," *Fujin kurabu* 14, no. 4 (1933): 328–34, at 328.

32. Kon (1994, 8). Kinoshita (1956, 124) claims this was a poem she composed at the peak during her October 1932 visit with friends.

33. Katō (1965, 83); "Hi o fuku Mihara-sanchō shinyū・shi no tachiai," *Tokyo Asahi shinbun* (February 15, 1933), available at Bunshun online, https://bunshun.jp/articles/-s/15687?page=2; Kinoshita 1955, 124.

34. "Poem 9, Ono no Komachi," *Ogura hyakunin isshu*, Japanese Text Initiative, University of Virginia Library. Translation slightly modified here to standardize capitalization of waka poems. Last modified November 7, 1998. https://jti.lib.virginia.edu/japanese/hyakunin/frames/hyakuframes.html.

35. Kinoshita (1955, 124).

36. Kinoshita (1955, 122).

37. Harrison (2003, 145).

38. Kinoshita (1955, 123).

39. Yamane (1949, 216). See also the comments of Buddhist scholar and educator Asano Kenshin (214).

40. All information on the Yomiuri crater exploration taken from Kon (1994, 24–28, 32–40).

41. "Sekai-teki daikensaku seikō・Miharayama kakō soko o kiwamu." *Yomiuri shinbun*, May 30, 1933, article available at Bunshin online (https://bunshun.jp/articles/photo/15686?pn=10) and in Kon (1994, 34–35).

42. Tsurumi (1993, 125).

43. Pinguet (1993, 180).

44. "Goshinbi, mata seinen o nomu," *Yomiuri shinbun*, June 21, 1933, cited in Kon (1994, 38).

45. Kon (1994, 42). By the late 1930s, the locale faded as a suicide destination with the escalation of war and the concomitant decline of the suicide rate.

46. Katō (1978, 197).

47. Reports of Mihara suicides and their last words taken from the following sources: Kon (1994, 31); Tsurumi (1993, 125); Yamana (1949, 147); Katō (1965, 83); Kinoshita (1955, 126); and Yamana (1949, 195).

48. Yamana (1949, 197).

49. Katō (1965, 83); Kinoshita (1955, 122); and Kon (1994, 4).

50. Kon (1994, 30).

51. These included a lecture series, talkies, and radio shows produced by *Yomiuri shinbun*; a humorous documentary by Nikkatsu based on footage from the *Yomiuri shinbun* descent into the volcano mouth titled *Miharayama wa waratte iru*; and a Moulin Rouge review show called *Miharayama kensaku ki* (Kon 1994, 38–42). For a discussion of popular song adaptations that fed into the Mihara suicide boom, see Saitō (2017, 84–85, 99–103).

3. SUICIDE MAPS AND MANUALS

1. Shively (1953, 345).

2. Kon (1994, 30); Henshall (1987, 151–52, emphasis mine).

3. Katō (1978, 193–94). Morita subsequently wrote about their affair and suicide attempt in the hit serialized semi-autobiographical novel *Baien* (Smoke, 1909). On this incident, see Rubin (1984, 135–37).

4. Kon (1987b, 253). All subsequent citations of this text appear parenthetically. My thanks to Jordan Sand for drawing my attention to this fascinating map.

5. Kon (1987a, 248). Kon romanizes the title of this map as "Inogasira-kōen no picnic no mure." Both maps were published in Kon Wajirō and Yoshida Kenkichi (1930).

6. See Silverberg (1992, 35–44) for an analysis of Kon's modernology projects including "Tokyo Ginzagai fūzoku kiroku" (Record of mores on Tokyo Ginza Boulevard).

7. Kon cited in Harootunian (2000, 128).

8. Naikaku Tōkei Kyoku, ed., *Nihon Teikoku tōkei tekiyō* [Summary of Japanese Empire statistics], published by the Imperial Cabinet Statistics Bureau annually from 1887 through 1912, contains statistics for suicide that date back to 1882. These records are available on the National Diet Library Digital Collections, the 1888 version at https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/805991/1/58. Motive appears to have temporarily stopped being recorded between 1888 and 1890, but then returned in 1891 with a more streamlined list of eight motives; see https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/805997/1/56.

9. MHLW (2007–23). Prewar and postwar studies invariably include motive/cause in even their shortest lists, including Yamana (1933, 133–39) and Ōhara (1965, 32–38), which breaks down motive (*dōki*) into thirteen categories, including mental disturbance, sickness, poverty, regret for past crime, family disharmony, anxiety over future, failure at work, illicit pregnancy, broken heart, debauchery and dissipation, and pessimism, and a miscellaneous "Other" category (33).

10. Yamana (1949, 155).

11. Hirayama (1971, 196–245).

12. Silverberg (1992, 44).

13. Kon 2016, (71, 68).

14. On Kon's ability to occupy the inviolable position of all-seeing observer while retaining a self-reflexive stance on his role as a spectator, see Harootunian (2000, especially 130).

15. "Kon Wajirō 'Inokashira kōen jisatsu basho bunpuzu," Google map, www.google.co.jp/maps/d/viewer?mid=1z9vnFXRgFVE7JEnYC_ANuQFaQ88&hl=ja&ll=35.6983650371478%2C139.57571150000004&z=17.

16. Dazai moved to Mitaka in September 1939, evacuated in April 1945, and returned in November 1946. See timeline at "Dazai Osamu to Mitaka," www.city.mitaka.lg.jp/dazai/dazaitomitaka/index.html#header.

17. Unless otherwise noted, all of Dazai's and Tanaka's works mentioned in this chapter are available at Aozora Bunko (www.aozora.gr.jp/), and all translations of their works are mine. Several of Tanaka's other published 1948–49 fictional and nonfictional works appear collected in a work titled *Shi Dazai Osamu* (Master Dazai Osamu) (Tanaka 1994). For an account of the two men's relationship, see the chapter on "Tanaka Hidemitsu: Shi no shi ni junjita burai no shi" that follows the one on "Dazai Osamu: Jigai ni ikite 'Guddo・bai'" in Ueda Yasuo (1976, 180–99); see also Kokubungaku (1971, 135–56).

18. Depictions of suicide attempts alone do not make this list, thus significantly reducing the tally for an author like Dazai; for example, neither "Ubasute," a semi-autobiographical story about one of his failed attempts, or more metaphorical suicides, such as the girl-fish Suwa in "Gyofuku-ki" (Metamorphosis) make the list (Hirayama 1971, 196–245).

19. Dazai's contemporary Sakaguchi Ango, for example, criticized his suicide and his final writings for lacking self-reflexivity, or what he called the "M・C, or my comedian" tone of Dazai's best works ("Furyōshōnen to kirisuto," Aozora Bunko, www.aozora.gr.jp/). In *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Dazai Osamu* (1990), Alan Wolfe writes against what he sees as the critical establishment's tendency to monumentalize Dazai as a failed, alienated writer whose many suicide attempts and many suicidal writings were characterized by failure and incompletion. Instead, Wolfe seeks to recuperate the unfinished qualities of Dazai's writing and his life as resistance to closure and to seamless autobiographical fiction, the dominant literary trend of his time.

20. See "Mitaka bungaku sanpo," Mitaka City website (last modified on November 24, 2022), www.city.mitaka.lg.jp/c_service/011/011644.html. In 1990, the Mitaka City Library published *Mitaka bungaku sanpō* (Ōkōchi 1990) featuring local Mitaka authors. Recent city plans to amplify this literary presence use the new tagline: "Bungaku no kaoridakai machi Mitaka" (Mitaka, a town steeped in literature); see "Inokashira onshi kōen nai ni kensetsu suru 'Inokashira bungaku shisetsu (kashō)' ni kansuru seiri kihon puran (shūsei-an)," at the Mitaka City website, www.city.mitaka.lg.jp/c_pubcome/068/attached/attach_68283_5.pdf, December 2017, 1–9.

21. A total of 70 of Dazai's fictional works and essays feature Mitaka (Mitaka City 2008), while 80 out of approximately 150 total works were penned while he was living in Mitaka.

22. Mitaka Dazai no Kai (2008).

23. "Dazai yukari no basho," Mitaka City 2008, www.city.mitaka.lg.jp/dazai/dazaitomitaka/yukari.html.

24. My sincere thanks to Koyano Yoshifumi, head volunteer of the Mitaka Tour Guide Association, for taking me on a tour on June 19, 2017 and to Yoshinaga Mami, curator at the Dazai Osamu Bungaku Saron (literary salon), whom I interviewed at the salon on June 20, 2017. Tour guide information available at https://mitakaguide.p-kit.com.

25. A photo of Dazai in his signature pose—one he imitated from his literary idol Akutagawa Ryūnosuke—was also displayed at his wake (Mainichi 2009). In 2013, Dazai's infatuation with Akutagawa made headlines when his old school notebooks were discovered with this author's name repeatedly inscribed into its pages ("Dazai nōto ni rakugaki: 'Akutagawa' to nandomo," *Nikkei shinbun*, May 11, 2013; and "Dazai no jugyō nōto: rakugaki

darake," *Asahi shinbun*, May 11, 2013). All Japanese-language newspapers cited in this section are drawn from the Nikkei Telecom database.

26. Tanaka claimed to be wildly pleased with his "ability to imitate Dazai to the letter so precisely in this photo" (Nohira 1992, 131–32) and even to be "happy to now die" ("Dazai Osamu to Tanaka Hidemitsu Ten [November 26 2011—January 15, 2012], Kōchi Literary Museum, http://home.u06.itscom.net/lupin/111126_2/111126_2.html). See the photographer's account of his unwitting role in Tanaka's copycat photo and suicide in Hayashi Tadahiko, *Bunshi no jidai* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1986), 26–32. I thank Paul Roquet for sharing with me a photo of the uncannily realistic depiction of Dazai in latte art by an entrepreneurial café in Mitaka.

27. "Dazai yukari no basho," Mitaka City 2008, www.city.mitaka.lg.jp/dazai/dazaitomitaka/yukari.html. See also Mitaka Dazai no Kai, ed. 2008, "Dazai Map" (fig. 10).

28. In his short Inokashira Park essay, Kon Wajirō (1987, 254) also traced the derivation of the "man-eating river" to this schoolteacher's death. Today, the canal is placid and shallow, confounding tourists who anticipate a swift deep current at this former site of suicides and accidental drownings.

29. See, for example, Sakaguchi Ango's scathing remarks in "Dazai Osamu jyōshi-kō" [Thoughts on Dazai Osamu's love suicide], originally published August 1, 1948, Aozora Bunko, www.aozora.gr.jp/.

30. Claiming Dazai is not the exclusive purview of Mitaka. Another memorial just a bit further from the spot where Dazai and Yamazaki entered the canal is a placard beside a large local rock from his hometown of Aomori called "Jeweled Deer Rock" (Stop #12). Alternatively, in the town of Kanagi, visitors can tour his birth home, which has been renamed the "Shayōkan," after his most famous novel *The Setting Sun*. Here, for a small fee, you can "walk through the town where Dazai left his scent," as the promotional materials put it. We are assured that "'Dazai' is standing just around the corner" (http://dazai.or.jp/en/museum/index.html).

31. Yamazaki's note has been reproduced by an anonymous blogger and Dazai fan at www.age.ne.jp/x/matchy/yamazaki.html#note, accessed December 1, 2023.

32. Tanaka's story "Rikon," cited in Ueda Yasuo (1976, 194).

33. Ueda Y. (1976, 192); Kokubungaku (1971, 152). On the day of his death, Tanaka called on several friends and writers who had also been key players in the aftermath of Dazai's suicide. This included their shared editor Nohira, who later complained of being labeled a "gravedigger" (*haka-hori ninpu*) after his role as the caretaker of both Dazai's and Tanaka's ashes (Nohira 1992, 132).

34. See, for example, criticism of Tanaka lodged by his friend and fellow author Hanada Kiyoteru: "Committing suicide in front of Dazai Osamu's grave is an end unbefitting to someone belonging to the materialist school [*yuibutsuron-sha*], but Tanaka Hidemitsu always did have a feudalistic side to him. He had old-fashioned tastes. And yet, I can only conclude that he was an unworthy pupil. Somehow Dazai-sensei's method of committing suicide was a bit smarter than the pupil's. Although it is true that *shinjū* itself is old-fashioned …" ("Chiriyuki inochi ni," *Tanaka Hidemitsu zenshū* 11 (1965): 374–75.

35. See several pictures of Dazai's cherry-laden grave in an article exploring their meaning posted online by Sasaki Moe, "Dazai no haka ni sakuranbo oshikomu 'nazo no fūshū,'" June 24, 2019, https://j-town.net/2019/06/24290573.html?p=all.

36. In June 2009, for the fiftieth anniversary of Dazai's death, a retrospective series of thirty-one photos and articles was published by *Mainichi shinbun*. Dating from his death in June 1948 to the 2009 Ōtōki memorial service, the series offers a kaleidoscopic view of how Dazai has been mourned over time (Mainichi 2009).

37. Opponents worry that a Dazai museum would "destroy the nature and environs of Inokashira Park," a place "where children play and events are held," this "forest for little birds, a crucial place that houses a diversity of living creatures." See public comments as well as original and revised plans at Mitaka City website, February 2, 2018, at www.city.mitaka.lg.jp/c_pubcome/068/068283.html. See also "'Dazai Osamu Kinen Bungakukan' minaoshi: Tokyo, Mitaka-shi ga Inokashira kōen-nai o dannen," *Sankei shinbun*, February 5, 2018), www.sankei.com.

38. "Atashi ya, jishi shita mono-kaki wa mitomen yo: Dazai Bungakukan 'konryū' hantai," (October 8, 2017), accessed April 4, 2019, formerly available at https://ameblo.jp/mushumi54/entry-12317770103.html. On Dazai's popularity with youths, see Saitō et al. (2009) for a roundtable discussion between psychologist Saitō Tamaki, Dazai scholar Andō Hiroshi, and novelist Kawakami Mieko. For a strident critique, see Ishihara Shintarō (2009). Ishihara worries especially about Dazai's influence on the disaffected "NEETS and freeters analyzed in psychologist Saitō Tamaki's work." Calling it symptomatic of nothing less than "the decline of the nation of Japan," Ishihara critiques both the author's and his readers' masochistic tendencies where "narcissism masquerades as self-hate" and cites Mishima Yukio's own infamous diagnosis and prescribed cure of "a daily morning regimen of cold water rubdown and radio exercises."

39. Tsurumi (1993), book jacket band. Subsequent page numbers are cited parenthetically. According to Yomidasu bestseller data, *The Manual* was the number one nonfiction bestseller in November 1993 and remained in the top ten through March 1994. In 2002, *Jisatsu no kosuto* (The costs of suicide, published by Ōta Shuppan), a rival publication by Amamiya Karin, the punk rock singer and writer, offered a "balance sheet of suicide's profits and losses that were not included in *The Manual*."

40. This comment was made by a member on the Tokyo Youth Protection Ordinance committee who wanted to revise regulations to include "tempting suicide and thereby harming the healthy development of youths" ("'Kanzen jisatsu manyuaru' Seishōnen e no eikyō dai," *Mainichi shinbun*, September 20, 1999). In Aichi, which was the fourteenth prefecture to label *The Manual* a harmful book, the penalty for selling it to minors is up to six months imprisonment and/or fines of up to five hundred thousand yen ("Yūgai tosho: 'Jisatsu manyuaru' o shitei—ken, seishōnen hogo ikusei jyōrei kaisei de," *Mainichi shinbun*, July 8, 2005). All newspaper articles for this section on *The Manual* are drawn from the Yomidasu, Maisaku, and Asahi online databases.

41. Tsurumi defended his book as a paradoxical intervention of sorts, countering that "the men did not decide upon suicide from reading the book. What I wanted to say with this book is that one can live easier knowing that there exist many choices for 'suicide.'" ("'Jisatsu annaisho' shomochi shita 2 itai: 'Hon de mite kita,'" *Tokyo Yomiuri shinbun*, October 20, 1993, 31. Alternatively, Tsurumi claimed that the book is designed to counteract Japanese society's condemnation of suicide (Tsurumi 1993, 195) or "a book meant to challenge this nation of Japan where there is a tendency not to face suicide head on" ("Fueru 'Jukai jisatsu': Manyuaru-bon ga jimoto shigeki," *Asahi shinbun*, November 25, 1993, 3.

42. Kumamoto (2011, 12–13). In March 1977, one high school student leaped from the Takashimadaira complex after failing her entrance exam, and in April, there was a "parent-child double suicide" (*oyako shinjū*) by a spiteful father who took along his young children ages six and nine and left behind a scathing note to his wife (Kamijō Masashi, "'Okāsan wa, jigoku e ike' Haha-oya jyōhatsu de chichi to kodomo-tachi no sōzetsu isho," *Shinchō 45* vol. 27 (June 2008): 52–54.

43. Nomura (2004); Kumamoto (2011, 12–13).

44. Tsurumi (1993, 95). Writing in 1965, psychiatrist Ōhara Kenshirō noted a disproportionate number of suicides in scenic locales like Nikkō, Kamakura, and Atami and speculated that dissatisfaction with cities and "the desire to die in a place with a mood" is what drives these "business trip suicides" (*shutchō jisatsusha*) (42). Katō Hidetoshi coined the term *scenic suicide* (*fūkō jisatsu*, 風光自殺) to describe the trend started by Fujimura at the turn of the century (1978, 194–95).

45. Kumamoto (2011, 13). For English-language coverage of the Takashimadaira suicide boom, see John Needham, "Apartment Complex Fights Image as 'Mecca for Suicides,'" United Press International, October 29, 1980, www.upi.com; and "Coveted Homes in Tokyo Draw Many Suicides," *New York Times*, February 23, 1979, 9, www.nytimes.com.

46. See Beautrais (2007, 60, 61) for a Swiss example demonstrating the inefficacy of physical barriers and also on the need for updated policies that warn against advertising any implementation of physical barriers out of fears that they will instead promote suicide and the site. *The Manual* details just such prevention strategies at Takashimadaira and even notes that this architecture is what now draws sightseers to the complex (Tsurumi 1993, 94).

47. Nomura (2004). These interim reports and MHLW funding applications were formerly available at Japan Support Center for Suicide Countermeasures (JSSC)/National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry (NCNP) online archives at https://jssc.ncnp.go.jp/archive. Accessed February 19, 2019. Nomura Tōta, head of Architecture at Monoritsuku University, headed the research on "suicide prevention and space/place" (*jisatsu yobō to basho・kūkan ni kansuru kenkyū*) for this multiyear MHLW-funded grant that ran from 2001–4. For the team's final reports, see https://mhlw-grants.niph.go.jp/project/5386. Nomura Tōta, "Jisatsu yobō to basho・kūkan ni kansuru kenkyū hōkoku (zoku)," Heisei 14-nendo Kōseirōdō kenkyū-hi hojokin [2002 application for MHLW research funds], 2002, n.p.

48. Tsurumi (1993, 71–72).

4. AOKIGAHARA JUKAI, SEA OF TREES

1. *The Sea of Trees*, directed by Gus Van Sant, written by Chris Sparling, featuring Matthew McConaughey, Ken Watanabe, and Naomi Watts, A24 Distributors, May 16, 2015 (Cannes).

2. "Aokigahara, monogatari no kanpeki na butai," *Asahi shinbun* (May 6, 2016). All Japanese-language news articles in this chapter were retrieved from Nikkei Telecom, unless otherwise noted.

3. Emily Yoshida, "The Forest Turns Japan's Suicide Forest into an Obstacle Course for Americans," *The Verge*, January 8, 2016, www.theverge.com; "Matthew McConaughey's Sea of Trees Booed at Cannes," *Entertainment Weekly*, May 15, 2015, https://ew.com; Nico

Lang, "Film Review: The Sea of Trees, Gus Van Sant's Embattled Film Mangles Its Profound Subject Matter," *Consequence of Sound*, August 27, 2016, https://consequenceofsound.net.

4. According to a Yamanashi Prefecture official who questions detainees, "The majority come to Jukai having seen or heard about it from the media in television, newspapers, or books" (Satō 2001, n.p.).

5. The January 2018 YouTube posting prompted public outcry over the lack of standards on social media platforms; on this incident and its aftermath, see Cather (2018). Until Aokigahara vlogs were censored by YouTube, they were standard fare featuring similarly clueless guides who posed as intrepid explorers braving the haunted forest in a *Blair Witch Project* docudrama style that invariably featured the scattered possessions and remains of the dead. One example strung together "5 YouTubers Who Explored the Suicide Forest in Japan," culminating with Logan Paul's infamous clip.

For an exceptional production centered on the forest, see the avant-garde feminist production by playwright Kristine Haruna Lee (*Suicide Forest*, 2019), www.harunalee.com.

6. Tsurumi (1993, 70).

7. Takahashi Y. (1986, 23, 24, 26). In contrast, Hayano Azusa, a self-appointed guardian who patrols the forest to dissuade suicides, stresses that individuals who choose to die there do not necessarily desire to vanish and are often found not far from the main path ("Aokigahara Jukai o haikai, sono taiken o misuterii ni," *Shūkan Tōyō keizai*, September 12, 1998). Hayano is the subject of the refreshingly compassionate documentary by VICE media 2010. Hayano is also a prolific mystery writer going by the penname of Satō Toshio whose *Saifuku no idenshi* (1998) was implicated for leading a man to try to die there. The man survived and claimed that unlike its depiction in the book, "Jukai was not of this world, it was hell" (*Aokigahara Jukai wa kono yo de naku jigoku*), *Yomiuri shinbun*, November 1, 1998.

8. "'Jisatsu annaisho' shomochi shita 2 itai: 'Hon de mite kita,'" *Tokyo Yomiuri shinbun*, October 20, 1993. After *The Manual*'s publication in July 1993, suicides in the forest were said to have increased from twenty-one in both 1991 and 199, to thirty-three in 1993. It is difficult to prove or refute this assertion because these statistics are not broken down month by month, and most bodies are discovered during the annual October sweeps. What makes it suspect, however, is the fact that thirty suicides were discovered in 1990, and there was a peak of fifty-three back in 1989 ("Rensai: Shakaibu hatsu Aokigahara Jukai de jisatsu bōshi borantea," *Nikkan sports*, March 11, 1998.

9. On the Papageno effect, see Niederkrotenthaler et al. (2010) and Niederkrotenthaler and Till (2019).

10. DeWyze (2005, n.p.). On the Werther effect, see Phillips (1974). It should be noted that there was no proof that those who did commit suicide actually read these news reports, although later studies conducted using a similar methodology in the United States, Britain, and Asia replicated these findings and affirmed the validity of this general claim (Fu and Yip 1996; Stack 1996). A 2001 comparative study of media reporting of suicides in Hungary, Japan, the United States, Germany, Austria, and Finland from 1981 and 1991 offers a more nuanced analysis and conclusions. Researchers found that newspapers in Japan and Hungary tended to over-publicize celebrity suicides, particularly ones who died using a spectacular method. But they also found that the "positive, sometimes heroizing evaluations" in Japan were counterbalanced by displays of the negative consequences of suicide, which "decreases the possibility of imitation-identification" (Fekete et al. 2001, 171).

11. The 2002 WHO Suicide Prevention Guidelines for Media in Japanese acknowledges in a footnote that "imitation" (*mohōsei*) and "contagion" (*densensei*) depend on media reporting of an actual suicide and that research lacks consensus regarding fictional depictions. In the main text, they point to one US-based study that identified copycat suicides after the publication of the cofounder of the Hemlock Society in 1980, Derek Humphry's manual on voluntary death, *Final Exit* (1991). (WHO 2002, n.p).

12. Phillips (1974, 340).

13. DeWyze (2005, n.p.).

14. Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe et al., *Conversations with Eckermann: Being Appreciations and Criticism on Many Subjects* (New York: M. Walter Dunne, 1901), 48. My thanks to Michiko Suzuki for pointing me to the religious significance of the wounded pelican allusion.

15. Jan Thorsen and Thomas J. Oberg, "Was There a Suicide Epidemic after Goethe's Werther?," *Archives of Suicide* 7, no. 1 (2003): 69–72.

16. Saio (2012, 216).

17. Fujii Yasue, "Kaidai (Nami no tō)," in Matsumoto (2009, 2:399–400). Her pillow book is not identified in the press but was likely either the volume from Bungei Shunjū's *Matsumoto Seichō zenshū*, which had recently published the story as a single volume (on January 17, 1972), or perhaps the Kappa Noberusu edition from June 1960.

18. WHO (2008b, n.p.). For his part, Matsumoto Seichō defended himself by claiming no such authorial intent, likening himself to Meiji literary giant Ozaki Kōyō, who, he asserted, "surely did not write *Golden Demon* in order to make Atami Nishikigaura famous for suicide, even if suicides there increased afterwards" ("'Meisaku no butai' 'Nami no tō,'" *Sankei shinbun*, December 24, 1994) The suicide of a woman in the early 1960s on Noto peninsula was blamed on another Seichō novel ("Jukai, Inochi no mori [ue]: Seimei no atsumori jikkan," *Tokyo Yomiuri shinbun*, September 16, 2010).

19. The first theatrical film adaptations of *Nami no tō* was in 1960 by Shōchiku "women's film" director Nakamura Noboru. Eight TV film adaptations have followed to date, including the most recent 2012 TV Asahi drama.

20. DiMarco (2016, 119).

21. Matsumoto (2009, 2:395). Subsequent page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text, preceded by the volume number. All translations are mine.

22. Nishiki Masa'aki, "Kaisetsu," Matsumoto (2009, 2:407).

23. "Seichō no 'Shōwa': 3 Ōse no Jindaiji, būmu ni," *Asahi shinbun*, August 7, 2009.

24. Despite a general trend for women to attempt suicide more often than men, Takahashi found that between 1982 and 1984, the male-female ratio for attempted suicide in Aokigahara was 9:1. Between 1975 and 1984, men died there three times as often as women, accounting for 206 of the 281 total (Takahashi Y. 1986, 24).

25. Lisa Zunshine, *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us about Popular Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006); and Clover 1993).

26. Fukuoka (1968, 55). Like Dazai before him, Seichō spurred tourism booms in the various locales where he set and wrote his works. See the recent book series that maps his fiction (including *Nami no tō*) onto their settings in *Chizu de yomu Matsumoto Seichō*

(Tokyo: Teikoku Shoin, 2020–21); or virtual tours online at www.yamaimo.net. See also Nishiki, "Kaisetsu," Matsumoto (2009, 2:405–6).

27. Fujii, "Kaidai (Nami no tō)," in Matsumoto (2009, 2:399).

28. A local sixty-four-year-old man who worked at this youth hostel at the time Seichō was writing the novel (and who was the model for one of its characters) recalls the author's visit to scout locations, speculating that "something about Sensei's mystical depiction lent itself to the aesthetics of people intent upon dying" ("Shōsetsu 'Nami no tō': Jukai … Inochi ga hajimaru mori," *Tokyo Yomiuri shinbun*, June 23, 2007). A huge fan, he admitted that the copycat suicides were a problem, but he was loath "to criticize Seichō-sensei. It's complicated" (Jukai-Inochi no mori [ue]: Seimei no atsumori jikkan," *Tokyo Yomiuri shinbun*, September 16, 2010).

29. There is a red herring at this point in the novel where readers are led to believe that Yoriko might choose drowning in the lake, a prototypically female mode of dying (2:392). Matsumoto's secretary/stenographer for nine years recalls debating with Matsumoto whether to kill off Yoriko or save her in the end of *Nami no tō* (Fukuoka 1968, 54–56).

30. Ishihara Shintarō's story "Aokigahara" was initially solicited and published by *Shinchō* in December 1999. The film originally screened at the 2012 Tokyo International Film Festival. I thank Ark Entertainment for sharing with me a copy of the otherwise difficult to obtain film.

31. "Ishihara-tochiji ga jisaku eiga 'Aokigahara' no seisaku happyō: 47-nen buri ni shutsuen," *Sports hochi*, April 12, 2012. Ishihara's "retirement" from politics was short lived. At the film premiere on October 26, 2012, he announced the establishment of his new Sun Party, explaining that "I had planned to quit as governor and direct films, but I erred in my way. … And I just can't stand to see this country as it is" ("'Michi, machigaeta' chiji gensaku no jyōeikai," *Tokyo shinbun*, October 27, 2012).

32. "'Jukai eiga satsuei wa hairyō o' Yokouchi-chiji, Ishihara-shi ni motomeru," *Yamanashi nichi-nichi shinbun*, May 31, 2012.

33. "Aokigahara Jukai aoki sennen no mori," *Yamanashi nichi-nichi shinbun*, November 6, 2013.

34. "Shōsetsu 'Nami no tō' Jukai … Inochi ga hajimaru mori," *Tokyo Yomiuri shinbun*, June 23, 2007.

35. "Eiga 'Ki no umi' ga 7-gatsu 30-nichi kara kōkai: Takimoto Tomoyuki kantoku 'Shuyaku wa Jukai.'" Other Japanese productions set in the forest include *Ki no umi* (dir. Takimoto Tomoyuki, 2004), *The Forest* (dir. Jason Zada, 2016), and *Jukai no futari* (dir. Yamaguchi Hideya, 2013).

36. "Aokigahara Jukai aoki sennen no mori," *Yamanashi nichi-nichi shinbun*, November 6, 2013.

37. Ishihara (2014, 70).

38. Ishihara 2014, 38. The economic burden of caring for unidentifiable corpses, which often tally two-thirds of all bodies found in the forest, falls to the local villages and are estimated to cost anywhere from approximately 1.5 to 3 million yen annually. In 1993, twenty-two of thirty-three recovered bodies were unidentified, and in 1998, forty-four of sixty-three were unidentified ("Fueru 'Jukai jisatsu': Manyuaru-bon ga jimoto shigeki," *Asahi shinbun*, November 25, 1993; "Yamanashi jisatsu kyūzō, jimoto komatta," *Mainichi*

shinbun, November 5, 1998). The cost to families is estimated to be four million yen total (Amamiya 2002, 74–75; see also Tsurumi 1993, 73–74).

39. Ishihara (2014, 28–29).

40. Takahashi (1988, 165).

41. Ishihara (2014, 4–5).

42. Takahashi (1988, 166).

43. Satō (2001, n.p.).

44. Kishida (2008, 94). This modern Japanese-language translation of the shogunal response to the grave caretaker's request is provided by Kishida alongside the original: 「見苦敷被成御肆「晒」被成候が御仕置」.

45. Nomura (2004).

46. "JR Chūō-sen no tobikomi jiko bōshi puran," *E-Mansion*, May 17, 2005; revised May 20, 2005, available at www.ll.em-net.ne.jp.

47. Just how these flyers spell out the pathetic state of corpses—in verbal and/or visual terms—is not specified. Satō 2001, n.p. "Inochi tsunagu tame ni jisatsu taikoku Nippon no ima (3): 'Meisho' henjō e 'mizugiwa' sakusen," *Yamanashi nichi-nichi shinbun*, June 22, 2008.

48. "Suicide Deterrent Net," Golden Gate Bridge Official Website, n.d., www.goldengate.org; "Golden Gate Bridge's Suicide Net Comes after Decades of Tragedy," *New York Times*, November 8, 2023, A1. See also one spokesperson's comments in 2017 noting that "if a person jumped onto the net, it would be unforgiving, perhaps leading to broken bones"(Katy Steinmetz, "The Golden Gate Bridge Is a 'Suicide Magnet.' So Officials Are Adding a Net," *Time*, April 12, 2017, http://time.com). During an October 2022 visit, I discovered that the net had been temporarily taken down after they discovered a technical glitch that was causing terrible noise pollution from wind interference.

49. "'Meisaku no butai' 'Nami no tō,'" *Sankei shinbun*, December 24, 1994.

50. Russell (2006, n.p.).

51. "Jisatsusha: 8-hitoberashi no 131-nin: Jukai imēji-mukiage hakaru 17-nen ken matome," *Mainichi shinbun*, June 8, 2018; "Jukai, inochi no mori (Ge): Kawaru fu no imēji," *Yomiuri shinbun*, September 18, 2018. "Jukai no utsukushisa posutā de 'Seimeiryoku yutakana basho,'" *Yomiuri shinbun*, August 15, 2018. The 2018 Jukai promotional poster available at: https://twitter.com/livedoornews/status/1019881085755305984.

See also the recommendations of a local Yamanashi doctor who advocates patrolling, arranging image-enhancing events that stress nature and eco-tourism, and disallowing any media productions that "spread the image of Aokigahara as a *jisatsu meisho*" (Hosaka Michio, "Aokigahara Jukai de shinryōnaika o kaigyō shite," *Kokoro to shakai* 45, no. 4 (2014): 90). Just days before the Logan Paul scandal broke, the prefecture had sponsored a family friendly event to promote the site as "a place famed for tourism" (*kankō no meisho*) ("Aokigahara jukai: Ninki jiwari—'Jisatsu' no imēji kara kankōchi," *Mainichi shinbun*, December 26, 2017)

52. Sontag (2003, 91, 64). For a similar strategy that outs online spectators of suicide in order to question the ethics of such representations, see the performance art of Eva and Franco Mattes, *No Fun* (2010), in which they simulated a hanging body on the website *Chatroulette* to record spectators' reactions, which range from shocked horror and titillation to boredom. After being banned on YouTube, the only currently available video is an eight-and-a-half-minute extract available at https://vimeo.com/11467722. See also the 2004

documentary *The Bridge* (dir. Eric Steel), which was heavily criticized for presenting the filmmakers as inviolable spectators who watched and filmed people plunge to their deaths from the Golden Gate Bridge.

53. Sontag (2003, 89).

PART TWO. NOTING SUICIDE: *ISHO*, THE WRITINGS LEFT BEHIND

1. Kastenbaum (1993, 273). In Japanese, the term *yuigonsho* (or *igonsho*, 遺言書) is used to refer to a legally binding will, but *isho* (遺書) is used colloquially to refer to these as well, or alternatively to an unofficial suicide note.

2. Okamoto (1927, n.p.).

3. Mark Twain in "The Curious Republic of Gondour" (1919), cited in Guthke (1992, 27). Guthke notes the "disconcerting fact" that "George Washington, Immanuel Kant, and André Gide not only died saying insignificant words, they died saying exactly the *same* insignificant words" (68).

4. Whether professional writers write something qualitatively (or quantitatively) different from the average population in their final moments is debatable. One 1901 French study, *Le Requiem des gens de lettres*, found that little separates professionals from amateurs in the end, as did a 1921 study that sought to characterize last writings by the professional affiliations of their writers, dividing them into religious, royalty, military, philosophers, litterateurs, physicians and scientists, artists, poets, and statesmen (Guthke 1992, 127, 215–16n21).

5. Nakamura (1948, 91).

6. Nosaka (1988, 146, 147). See also Terayama Shūji's satirical essays "Jyōzu na isho no kakikata" [How to write a good suicide note] and "Jisatsu shinshi-ron," where he debates the merits and demerits of various "gentleman's suicides" including Fujimura Misao, Haraguchi Tōzō, and Tsuburaya Kōkichi (Terayama 1979, 41–46, 58–99).

7. Kawabata (1968). On the importance of the "rhetoric of sincerity" to early twentieth-century Japanese literary criticism, see Fowler (1988).

8. Dickinson's poem "I've Seen a Dying Eye" playfully if somewhat ambivalently invokes this privileged final vision. In *Poems by Emily Dickinson*, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and T. W. Higginson (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890), 124.

9. Fuss 2009, 879; on Dickinson's death poems, see 884–85. Literary theorist Kenneth Burke points out how death makes especially great fodder for poetry because of its unknowability and "ideality" (Burke 1952, 369).

10. Guthke 1992, 28; *The Law.com Dictionary*, s.v. "nemo moriturus praesumitur mentire," https://dictionary.thelaw. In his 1922 story "Yabu no naka" ("In a Grove"), Akutagawa Ryūnosuke relentlessly satirizes any such presumptions of deathbed truths by staging the competing testimonies of a man headed to the gallows, a woman confessing at a Buddhist temple, and finally a dead man speaking through a shaman.

11. "Jisatsu taisaku ni kansuru sankō tōkei shiryō," MHLW, n.d. Statistical data on suicide in Japan from 1899–2022 is collated in this report. The report tallies motive from 1978 until 2005, clarifying that just one motive per individual was assigned but that as of 2006, up to three motives could be included "provided they were clearly specified in suicide notes or other documents" (248–49).

12. For a critique of the police, see Izawa (2002, 608, 612); on the media's tendency to oversimplify motive, see Sakamoto et al. (2006, 44, 50).

13. Hori (2002, 142–43). For an example of one psychiatrist who used what he claims may be the world's "first suicide note" to diagnose an ancient Egyptian, circa 1800 BCE, with "severe depressive psychosis" that was "not dissimilar to the views expressed by suicidal patients today," circa 1980, see Thomas (1980, 285, 284).

14. Shimizu (2007, 49–50). See also Inamura (1981, 1630–35) and Myōki (2007). For prohibitions against publicizing suicide notes, see WHO (2017, 7, 11).

15. Koseki Tomohiro, "29-moji no isho: Jyosei daigakuinsei wa naze jisatsu shita no ka," *Chūō kōron* 116, no. 5 (May 2001): 176–87; "Nagaoka Yōji Gi'in: Isho-naki jisatsu de sasayakareru 'konna dōki'" *Shūkan Asahi* 110: 39 (August 2005), 31–32.

16. A study of suicides in Kobe from 1981 to 2001 found that the note-leaving rate remained fairly constant (between 23–36 percent) notwithstanding suicide rates almost doubling (from twelve to twenty-four per hundred thousand population) over the twenty-one-year period (Shioiri et al. 2005, 227–28).

17. National police data for 1999 found that 28 percent left behind a note (males, 29 percent, and females, 25 percent). Izawa's 1999 study in Niigata Prefecture found that 34 percent left behind notes, with just slightly more men than women (at 35 percent versus 33 percent), but found much larger deviation between the genders depending on their age. The older the man, the more common it was to leave behind a note, while the opposite was true for women: 57 percent of men in their nineties wrote versus 27 percent of women compared to 32 percent for men in their sixties and 36 percent for women; younger females wrote more consistently than younger males overall, and the younger they were, the more likely to leave behind a note (55 percent of females in their twenties versus 35 percent for males) (Izawa 2002).

Earlier studies appear to show more variation. A study of suicides in Tokyo from 1955 to 1957 found 35 percent total left behind suicide notes with more youths than elderly and a tendency to write less the older one got. A regional study in Kanagawa Prefecture from 1977 to 1978 found 27 percent total with more women than men (31 percent versus 26 percent) while another from Saga in 1981–90 also had 27 percent total with more elderly than youths writing (32 percent in their sixties versus 21 percent in their thirties) (Izawa 2002, 608).

18. Shneidman (1996, 4); Shneidman (2004, 7).

19. Shneidman (2004, 7–8). See also a 2006 study by psychiatrists in India who use suicide notes as "an important component of psychological autopsy" (Bhatia et al. 2006, 163).

20. Ōhara (1978, 88–90). Ōhara's previous two monographs were *Isho no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 1963) and *Isho no naka no jinsei* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsho, 1970).

21. Ōhara (1978a, 89). Ōhara wrote, "I had thought that all suicides leave behind suicide notes. But in fact, only one-third of youths leave them, and the older one gets, the lower that figure becomes with just 15% of those in their seventies." Writing in the late 1940s, Yamana (1949, 147) worked under a similar assumption, commenting that out of 761 cases he surveyed, "only" 288 had notes at all, although at 38%, this was actually quite a high ratio.

Little cross-cultural comparative work has been done on suicide notes, but many scholars have tended to assume that the Japanese were uniquely reticent to leave behind notes. For example, the eminent sociologist Fuse Toyomasa claims that the low percentage of suicides who leave a suicide note ("a mere 24%") points to a failure of Japanese to communicate in words and a preference for gestural or non-verbal/textual "communication," a word he says is entirely lacking in the Japanese vocabulary (1985, 203–4). The literary scholar Masao Miyoshi (1974) similarly points to the uniquely reticent qualities underpinning modern Japanese literary aesthetics in his *Accomplices of Silence* featuring three suicidal authors: Dazai, Mishima, and Kawabata.

22. Shneidman (2004, 8; emphasis in original).

23. This psychiatrist, Inamura Hiroshi, proposed an alternative taxonomy that rejects his colleagues' tendency to use suicide notes to diagnose a patient along reigning Freudian interpretations of suicide as displaced homicidal aggression. Whereas their categories included "animosity toward others" versus "animosity toward self," for example, his considers what kind of communication each offered to those left behind—whether they could be categorized as words of thanks, goodbyes, apologies, or self-justifications, for example, or what they said about the individual's views about life and death (Inamura 1977, 257–68).

24. On *jisei*, see Hoffmann (1998) and Nakanishi (1984).

25. One study of 371 suicide notes (out of 868 total suicides) in Niigata in 1999 conducted by a university medical school researcher in the Division of Legal Medicine found that *isho* most often take the form of a letter (80 percent), tend to be addressed to a designated recipient(s) (66 percent), sometimes with date and signature included (19 percent and 30 percent, respectively), and most leave behind one (63 percent) or two (19 percent) letters. Their length ranged from one to twelve pages with an average of 1.2 pages, the shortest example comprising only two characters, while most (65 percent) were about a paragraph long. Notes have been written on anything from memo paper to sumo broadsheets and business cards (Izawa 2002, 606–8),

26. For the original study, see Shneidman and Farberow 1957. For a critique of this study and an overview of subsequent ones, see Lester (2014, 78–89).

27. Yamana (1949, 145–47). In his 1933 study, Yamana devotes twice the amount of space to "notes of nameless suicides" as he does to more famous ones (304–31).

28. Yamana (1949, 149–51).

29. Nakanishi (1987, 3). This collected volume of famed last writings stretches from the death poems (*jisei*) of sixteenth-century figures, such as Sen no Rikyū and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, to suicide notes, wills and testaments, and last poems by twentieth-century luminaries who died of natural causes as well as by suicide, including Fujimura Misao, Mori Ōgai, Masaoka Shiki, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Hagiwara Sakutarō, and Hino Ashihei.

30. WHO (2000, 8).

31. For the most recent statistics on suicide in Japan, see MHLW 2023. Youths who are sexual minorities are at a particularly high risk for suicide, although as researchers note, reliable data is hard to come by. One study found that the risk was six times higher for urban non-heterosexual males in their teens and twenties (Hidaka Y. et al. 2008). Another report notes that these individuals are rendered doubly invisible after their suicides because their sexuality is often obscured by families out of fear of prejudice (Tokyo Jinken Keihatsu Sentā 2013).

32. Hagiwara (1972, 306–7).
33. Burt (2009).

5. A NOTE TO AN OLD FRIEND, OR TWO: AKUTAGAWA RYŪNOSUKE

1. *ARS*, s.v. "Isho," 33–34. In this chapter, all primary works by Akutagawa are drawn from Aozora Bunko (www.aozora.gr.jp/), and all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

2. Matsumura (1927). Beongcheon Yu's translation offers no indication that it elides almost half of the original and takes great liberties throughout (in Lippit 1999, 205–6). See also Akio Inoue, trans., "A Note Forwarded to a Certain Old Friend," in *Posthumous Works of Ryunosuke Akutagawa: His Life, Suicide, and Christ* (Tenri: Tenri Jihō, 1961), 11–14. Mamoru Iga (1986, 82–84) offers a fairly complete, accurate translation but elides the postscript and instead inexplicably appends a passage from another suicide note that Akutagawa wrote to his friend Oana Ryūichi.

3. Hibbett and Itasaka (1971, 188–93). In an essay on literary translation, Robert Lyons Danly recounts the story of a certain unnamed prominent social scientist in Japan Studies, whose translation of the note from the Hibbett and Itasaka textbook as a second-year Japanese student in the early 1970s was discovered by his wife after an epic fight, leading her to mistakenly believe it to be a genuine suicide note (Danly 1991, 63–67).

4. *ARS*, s.v. "Isho" and "Bonyari shita fuan," 34, 254; Iga 1986, 84–85. The phrase yields over three million hits on Google search. See also "Baku to shita fuan," *Mainichi shinbun*, November 11, 2003 (Osaka morning edition), Maisaku database.

5. The Agon Sutra would become the basis for a Japanese "new religion" (*shin shūkyō*) that emerged in 1954 after its founder, whose attempted suicide was averted when he came across a copy of the Buddhist text *Juntei Kannon-kyō* and attributed his salvation to Kannon's mercy ("Agonshū," in Peter B. Clarke, ed., *Bibliography of Japanese New Religious Movements* [Richmond: Japan Library, 1999], 135–39).

6. The word *inhuman* appears capitalized and romanized ("Inhuman") in Akutagawa's original.

7. *ARS*, s.v. "Isho," 34.

8. Samuel Richardson, cited in David Lodge, "The Epistolary Novel," *The Art of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1992), 23.

9. Kōjien dictionary defines memo (*shuki*) as "something one writes oneself, or a record that one takes down for oneself" while a letter (*tegami*) is defined as "prose sent to another person."

10. Tsurumi (1993, 77, 56). For more contemporary examples of tongue-in-cheek "guides to suicide" that were more contemporary to Akutagawa's time, see "Jisatsu annai" (Introduction to suicide [methods]), *Kokkei shinbun*, no. 58 (October 5, 1903): 50–352; and "Shinan jisatsu ryōhō" [New proposals for the treatment of suicides], *Tokyo Puck* 11, no. 12, 1929.

11. Akutagawa's comment about fearing a deflation in property value if he commits suicide at home is filled with his characteristic irony, but also may have reflected a reality. In contemporary Japan, property owners are legally required to report any suicide at that locale in the past five years, or at least until two other sets of occupants have resided there (Amamiya 2002, 51).

12. Fowler (1988, 27).

13. Kawabata's Nobel lecture is available (in Japanese and English translation) in Kawabata 1968. For his essay "Matsugo no me," see Kawabata (1964, 482–83). For citations of this passage in secondary works, see Keene (1988, 587) and Pinguet (1993, 258).

14. Nakamura S. (1960, 480).

15. Scholars have identified Henri Régnier's story as chapter one of "Les bonheurs perdus" (Lost happiness) which was translated into Japanese as "Ushinawareru kōfuku" ("Isho—Aru kyūyū e okuru shuki," in *ARZ* 8:114n1).

16. *ARS*, s.v. "Empedocles," 34.

17. Matthew Arnold, *Empedocles on Etna: A Dramatic Poem*, originally published 1852, available at www.telelib.com.

18. In the footnotes to "A Note to a Certain Old Friend," Japanese editions do note that both Philipp Mainländer and Heinrich von Kleist committed suicide ("Isho—Aru," in *ARZ* 8:114n2, 115n11). On Racine's focus on death and suicide in his works ("la mort et le suicide en particulier sont omniprésents dans ses tragedies"), see Tom Bruyer, *Le Sang et les larmes: Le suicide dans les tragedies profanes de Jean Racine* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012).

19. Theodor Lessing, *Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche: Eine Einführung in moderne Deutsche philosophie* (Munich: CH Beck, 1906).

20. Miyamoto (1957, 137–65).

21. Nakamura M. (1969, 11–12, 10).

22. Yoshida Sei'ichi, "Kaisetsu," *ARZ* 4:425; Satō Haruo quoted on page 424.

23. Rubin (2006, 205). I have just slightly adapted Rubin's translation here and borrowed from Will Petersen's earlier translation to draw attention to the original's emphasis on the act of writing as "the hand taking up the pen (*pen o toru te*)" (Petersen 1999, 175). Yamazaki Mitsuo claims that in the aftermath of Akutagawa's death there was a deliberate rewriting of his method from cyanide to trendy sleeping medications like the Veronal mentioned in this passage in order to fashion it as a more literary suicide. (Yamazaki 1997, 195–98, 240–45).

24. Petersen (1999, 203). The story has also been translated by Jay Rubin (2006) as "Spinning Gears," 206–36.

25. Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) cited in Gallop (2011, 50).

26. Here I've adapted published translations slightly to emphasize Akutagawa's use of the metaphor of autopsy (Rubin 2006, 186; Petersen 1999, 177).

27. English translators have chosen to title it "A Fool's Life" (Petersen) or "The Life of a Stupid Man" (Rubin), but a more accurate if less literary translation would be "The life of a certain fool."

28. *ARS*, s.v. "Aru ahō no isshō," 20.

29. Rubin (2006, 204), with a slight alteration to reflect the original, which has the title listed in full this time.

30. The chapter title "Illness" similarly repeats itself twice in sections 6 and 41. Some critics interpret these repetitions as evidence of Akutagawa's disordered and drug addled mental and physical state, although they seem quite deliberate (*ARS*, s.v. "Aru ahō no isshō," 20).

31. Améry (1999, 1–30).

32. Lippit (2002, 48–49). See also Yu (1972, x, 4). On Akutagawa's last essays on Christ, "Saihō no hito" ("The Man from the West"), see Doak (2011) and Megumi (2014, 50–82).

33. Yu (1972, 96); Keene (1988, 584).

34. Hiramatsu Matsuko has been identified as the potential "springboard" partner Akutagawa mentions in "A Note to a Certain Old Friend" and as his unnamed promised partner in what is labeled a "double platonic suicide" (*daburu puratonniku sūisaido*) in two excerpts (47 and 48) of "A Fool's Life." (The choice of this particular phrase in katakana seems to point to yet another intertextual allusion, an oblique reference to Kleist's platonic suicide with a similarly infirm, young unmarried woman.) Most of their contemporaries, including his wife, seem to have believed that it was a wholly platonic relationship and that Matsuko helped forestall his suicide. *ARS*, s.v. "Akutagawa Fumi," 10; and "Hiramatsu Masuko," 510–11. See also Akutagawa's wife's memoir: Akutagawa Fumi and Nakano Taeko, *Tsuisō Akutagawa Ryūnosuke* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1975).

35. See, for example, the claim that "Akutagawa's last words were, 'In those days I wanted to make myself into a god'" (Keene 1988, 587).

36. *ARZ* 4:14, 51, 45. "Mitsu no mado" (Three windows) was dated June 10 and published in *Kaizō*; a shorter earlier version of "Yume" (Dream) was published in *Fujin kōron* in November 1926. "Anchū mondō" (Dialogue in darkness), found by his deathbed, was posthumously published in the September 1927 issue of *Bungei shunjū*.

37. Yoshida Sei'ichi, for example, first credits all three posthumously published stories, including "Dialogue in Darkness," for offering "records of the desperate defeat of his life," but quickly then asserts that "especially 'Cogwheels' and 'A Fool's Life'" are worthy of critical attention ("Kaisetsu," *ARZ* 4:424–25).

38. Nowhere have I been able to locate a complete and definitive list of the number of notes Akutagawa left behind. Some accounts include notes addressed to "his aunt Fuki, his uncle Takeuchi [Senjirō], and his nephew Kuzumaki Yoshitoshi and other relatives" (*ARZ* 8:292). Information on notes is based on accounts in *ARS*, s.v. "Isho," 33; *ARZ* 8:118; and *ARS*, s.v. "Dr. Shimojima Isaoshi," 272.

39. On Akutagawa's Bibles, see Doak (2011, 250).

40. The three designated recipients are thought to be Dr. Shimojima, Kikuchi, and Oana, though some speculate that it instead refers to his relatives.

41. Nihon Kindai Bungakukan (2009, 172–73, 208–9).

42. This was a curious request given the number of times Akutagawa had explicitly declared his intent to kill himself to Oana; for example, in a May 17 letter, he wrote, "Night after night, I sleep resolved to die without delay" (Yoshida, "Kaisetsu," *ARZ* 4:423).

43. *ARZ* 8:114–19; also available on Aozora Bunko, s.v. "Isho," www.aozora.gr.jp/.

44. See, for example, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke: Maboroshi no isho, Izoku-taku de yontsū hakken, zuisho ni suikō," *Mainichi shinbun*, July 19, 2008 (Tokyo morning edition). For a copy of the extant handwritten notes with visible edits, see Nihon Kindai Bungakukan (2009, 171–86). This volume reproduces a note to Kikuchi with a list of five largely practical provisions (180–81), but *ARZ* notes the existence of another note to Kikuchi that seems to have been destroyed ("Akutagawa sakuhin sakuin," 8:7).

45. Oana 1956. In this work, Oana also records the following provisions from other unpublished notes: "(1) If a collected volume is published, it should be based on the manuscripts in my possession and (2) "Yōba" [The hag] (in *God of Agni*, if this is to be reprinted) and "Shigo" [After death] should be excluded (for my wife's sake)." Provision 4 in the note to his wife designated Iwanami as his publisher of choice, following in the footsteps of his "beloved Natsume [Sōseki] sensei," as he put it in the P.P.S.

46. His sons were only aged seven, five, and two at the time of his death. His eldest son Hiroshi (1920–81) became an actor and the youngest Yasushi (1925–89) a composer, while Takashi (1922–45) was drafted and died in Burma.

47. Only the final bullet point of the note to Kikuchi departs from the more mundane practical matters with its plaintive cry: "(5) I ask for forgiveness from everyone. Do not forget that deep in my heart I ask for everyone's forgiveness" (*ARZ* 8:118).

48. All translations from Akutagawa's note to Oana are mine based on the original version in *ARZ* 8:117–18. On his affair with the poet/singer Hide Shigeko (1890–1973), see Rubin (2006, 260n17); and *ARS*, s.v. "Hide Shigeko," 505–6.

49. Oana published two versions of *Futatsu no e*, one in installments in December 1932 and January 1933 in *Chūō kōron* with the subtitle *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke jisatsu no shinsō* [真相], and an expanded version in the same journal in January 1956 with the revised subtitle *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke no kaisō* [回想]. All citations are my own translations of the latter version, which is available at Aozora Bunko (www.aozora.gr.jp/) (Oana 1956).

50. *ARZ* 6:342–43.

51. Yoshida Sei'ichi, "Kaisetsu," *ARZ* 4:421.

52. De Man (1984, 67, 68, 77).

6. A NOTE FOR ONESELF: KISHIGAMI DAISAKU

1. Kishigami 1960, 239–55. Hereafter, all page numbers of quoted or referenced passages from Kishigami (1960) are cited parenthetically in the text.

2. On one page alone, there are four such emphatic direct addresses: "K-san yo! … Yoshimoto-san! … Yoshimoto-san! … Okui-san!" (245); "Takase yo! … Takase! … Takase yo!" (250–51). Takase Takakazu (1939–2008) was a fellow student-poet at Kokugakuin University who roomed next door and was Kishigami's best friend from the same hometown in Hyogo Prefecture. In the note, Kishigami expresses both his deep sense and friendship and jealousy toward this friend whom he believed to be his rival in love. He expresses equally ambivalent sentiments toward the poet and critic Yoshimoto Taka'aki (1924–2012) for managing to balance both an esteemed career as a writer and a rich family life (245). Late in the note, he writes, "As long as Yoshimoto Taka'aki is alive, this world still has some use. Yoshimoto-san, I will die clutching your poems. And just as rigor mortis sets into my hands, your poetry collection will fall to the earth, drenched by the rain. Serves you right! I don't want to lose to you of all people" (252).

3. Kishigami singles out poets who died of tuberculosis, a disease he himself had suffered from, including Kajii Motojirō (1901–32), Nakahara Chūya (1907–37), Tominaga Tarō (1901–25), and Sagara Hiroshi (1925–55). Although he admits a desire to be canonized among them, he also acknowledges the folly of this, writing, "What does it matter if I'm registered as a poet who died young in literary history or not? Any literary critic who calls me one is an idiot" (252).

4. Ogawa (1999, 258). Dazai's opens his story "Ha" ("Leaves," 1933) with these lines: "I planned to die. In January I received a New Year's gift of a gray striped robe. It was clearly a summer kimono. I thought I might as well go on living until summer" (Wolfe 1990, 132).

5. Tanaka Hidemitsu, "Sayōnara."

6. At one point, Kishigami links the unfavorable reception of his *buzama* writings and his corpse more explicitly. He imagines that "Yoshiko," the object of his unrequited love to whom he leaves all his books, diaries, letters, and personal effects, will never in fact receive or accept any of these items. Instead, they will all just be sold off thereby "completing this pathetic suicide." He writes that he dies with a photo of his beloved in his pocket and another on his desk (240–41). His unrequited love has been identified as the eighteen-year-old Sawaguchi Fumi (b. 1941), who was also an aspiring poet in his same poetry circle. Sawaguchi foreswore poetry after his suicide, although she turned to poetic criticism in the early 1970s and later released a volume of her own poetry in the early 1990s. Seven years after he died, she also published a novel titled *Kaze no naru hi wa …*, in which her main character resents the ways that the tabloids demonized and silenced her after his death, while Kishigami's "books got published and widely read," including his poems, which also appeared in school textbooks (Ogawa 1999, 28–29; see also 16–19).

7. Ogawa (1999, 13).

8. Ogawa (1999, 28–29; see also chapter 6, "Anpo tōsō no numa no naka de," 165–19). In 1960, suicides among those twenty to twenty-four years old were peaking at 4,269 total (13–15). See also Yoshimoto Taka'aki's chapter on Kishigami in *Jidaibyō* (Tokyo: Ueitsu, 2005) titled "60-nen Anpo no jidai-shi to shite no Kishigami Daisaku."

9. For Kishigami's closing lines and postscript, see Kishigami (1960, 254–55).

10. Paul de Man, cited in Macksey (1984, 979).

7. A NOTE TO THE NATION: TSUBURAYA KŌKICHI

1. For the most recent 2020 Olympics coverage, see the July 19, 2021, front page of the *New York Times* sports section: "A National Hero with a Broken Heart: Kokichi Tsuburaya Won a Bronze Medal in 1964. He Died at 27, Believing He Had Let Japan Down" (www.nytimes.com).

2. Both notes are reproduced in their entirety in Matsunaga 1968, 101. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

3. De Vos 1973, "Role Narcissism and the Etiology of Japanese Suicide," 438–86. For examples of the typical English-language media coverage of Tsuburaya's suicide, see Tim Larimer, "The Agony of Defeat," *Time Asia*, October 2, 2000, at http://edition.cnn.com; or Robert Whiting's 1964 Olympics retrospective, "Schollander, Hayes Were Spectacular at Tokyo Games," *Japan Times*, October 17, 2014, https://www.japantimes.co.jp. In Japanese, see "Tsuburaya Kōkichi 64-nen Tokyo Gorin akagane kara hajimatta higeki," *Nikkan Sports*, December 21, 2015, at https://www.nikkansports.com; and the *Asahi shinbun* editorial on January 10, 1968, cited in Matsunaga (1968, 100).

4. Kobayashi (2009, 158); Sawaki (1976, 120, 119). For praise of his "SDF spirit" on NHK broadcast, see also Matsunaga (1968, 100). For this chapter, details on the incident and its contemporary reception are drawn from several pieces of excellent scholarship in Japanese, especially Kobayashi (2009, 153–73) and Sawaki (1976, 95–140).

5. Okabe et al. (2010, 17) suggest that Kōkichi's case illustrates "our nation's unique … 'Japanese sports outlook,'" one constructed in the postwar to tighten individual affiliations to school, hometown, company, and nation. See also Ezura Koya, "Tsuburaya Kōkichi:

Jisatsu no kage ni 'kon'yaku haki,'" ["The 'broken engagement' hiding in the shadows of Tsuburaya Kōkichi's suicide], *Shūkan bunshun* 42, no. 35 (2000): 28–29.

6. Tsuburaya's family members cited in Kobayashi (2009, 159–60, 163–64, 170). The estimated total number of visitors at the Tsuburaya Kōkichi Kinenkan quickly grew, doubling from five thousand in 1980 to ten thousand by 1988. The later relocated and renamed Memorial Hall (Memoriaru Hōru) gets about seven hundred visits per year, with spikes during the Olympics and annual memorial marathons.

7. Some scholars have criticized the nationalist and regionalist impetus behind such projects. Komatsu Kazuhiko interprets the 1980s boom in such postwar "people's memorials" (*jinbutsu kinenkan*) as a not-so-subtle continuation of the deification of patriots as *kami* in "people's shrines" (*jinbutsu jinja*) that were abolished alongside state Shinto in the immediate postwar. While we may be rightly cynical about the ideological (and commercial) impetus for such state-sponsored projects, Kobayashi Teruki points out that even when institutions originate from such cynical aims, what must sustain them is an ability for visitors "to touch the hearts and humanity of the dead" (Kobayashi 2009, 153–55).

8. The play *Egg* by Noda Hideki ran at the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre in November and December 2015 (www.geigeki.jp).

9. "Hitori no michi" lyrics available at https://j-lyric.net. In live performances, the band would sometimes read Tsuburaya's suicide note to his family in full after performing the song. Initially, they opened with a live recording of Yoyogi Olympic Stadium at the moment when Tsuburaya lost his second-place lead, although it was subsequently removed due to copyright infringement (a recording of one of their performances is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WxdgK70B4U).

10. The manga series *Eikō-naki tensai-tachi* (No glory for the greats), serialized from 1986 to 1992 in *Shūkan yangu jumpu* (Weekly young jump), includes this harangue by Tsuburaya's father: "No man would be such a pathetic fool as to look behind them during the midst of a race!" (Morita Shingo and Itō Tomoyoshi, *Eikō-naki tensai-tachi*, vol. 3, *Abebe soshite Tsuburaya*. [Tokyo: Shūeisha Bunko, Komikku-ban, 1997]).

11. Kimihara, cited in Sawaki 1976, 135. A documentary about Kimihara from 1964 titled *Seinen: Aru marason rannā no kiroku* (dir. Kuroki Kazuo) depicts the grueling training regimen and disappointments of such runners charged with representing their nation in the Olympics.

12. I am deeply grateful to Sukagawa City for sharing with me a copy of Tsuburaya's note to his family. On their website, there are no longer any explicit mentions of his suicide or notes, beyond one brief mention that "on January 8, 1968, Kōkichi left behind a suicide note for his family saying '[I] am far too tired to keep on running' and took his own life. He was twenty-seven. It was a far too short-lived life" ("Sukagawa jinbutsu-den Tsuburaya Kōkichi," last modified March 24, 2023, https://www.city.sukagawa).

13. Nornes makes this insight in the context of Mishima Yukio's English-language handwritten intertitles to his film *Yūkoku*, the subject of chapter 10. Noting "the shimmering smudge" on one intertitle, Nornes writes that "*the smudge may have no semantics but it does possess somatics*" (Nornes 2021, 125, 129–30).

14. Maruya (1987, 67–73). Tsuburaya's note to his family is published here along with Kawabata's essay in praise of the note, which is discussed in greater detail below.

15. Matsunaga (1968, 102); Sawaki (1976, 99); Kawabata (1973, 293–94).

16. Matsunaga (1968, 101, 102, 104). Matsunaga compares Tsuburaya as a "peacetime national hero" to author Shimao Toshio, a wartime national hero facing certain death as a *kaiten* pilot during WWII. If Shimao was an author who recognized the importance of his *furusato* while alive, writing longingly about a desire to return to an authentic self in his hometown (also located in Tōhoku), Tsuburaya only realizes it belatedly (103). Although space prohibits going into this in any depth, Shimao offers an illustrating counterpoint to other examples I discuss since he too scripted his state-imposed "suicide" into his fiction, writing in retrospect about his near-death experience in his fascinating story "Shuppatsu wa tsui ni otozurezu ("The Departure That Never Came," 1962).

17. Matsunaga (1968, 100).

18. Mishima (1968, 6). All subsequent citations are taken from this one-page article from the "Self-Cultivation" (*kyōgi*) column of *Sankei shinbun* on January 13, 1968, all translations are mine. The only time Mishima uses the word *suicide* (*jisatsu*) to refer to Tsuburaya's act, he modifies it extensively as if to redefine it: "It is a suicide [*jisatsu*] committed out of a preciously fragile, manly, and beautiful sense of self-respect" (6). Otherwise he calls it a *jiketsu* (twice) or alternatively in the title, a *jijin* (suicide by sword).

19. What complicates any too-neat mapping of Mishima's manly and soldierly *jiketsu* onto Tsuburaya's is the fact that Mishima also introduces another "splendid *jiketsu*" in this 1968 essay: the drowning suicide of the elderly kabuki actor Ichikawa Danzō in June 1966. See also his earlier, longer article titled "Danzō・Geidō・Saigunbi" (Danzō, the arts, rearmament) (Mishima 1966a).

20. This poem was composed by Mishima in July 1970, although some scholars claim that it was also designed to serve as his *jisei* (Keene 2003, 46–47). For Mishima's second *jisei* composed days before his suicide, see my discussion in chapter 10.

21. On Mishima's solo training with the SDF, see Inose and Sato (2012, 485–93); see 546–47, 551, for his subsequent trainings in March 1968 along with members of what would become the Shield Society and its "fateful" training exercise in terrain surveillance of the SDF headquarters in Ichigaya. Years later, their shared SDF air officer commander recalled that Mishima was a weak runner and Tsuburaya hated swimming, but that both were stoic (Sugiyama 2007, 176–80).

22. Mishima (1966b, 371). Reflecting on his choice to publish this testament years later, Mishima worries some will accuse him of "indulging in exhibitionism that knows no bounds," but he defends his choice by noting that the point of a will and testament, after all, is to be read by others (372). All subsequent citations of this text are my own translations based on the version in Mishima (1966b, 371–74). See also Inose and Sato (2012, 16–17), for an alternative translation and discussion of this earlier testament.

23. Mishima notes with some pride that he successfully resisted army censorship and "the model wartime examples for wills and testaments" that were pressed on young soldiers (1966b, 372–73). It is not clear what models circulated among soldiers at the time, but presumably they are along the lines of ones in later published collections like *Kike wadatsumi koe* (*Listen to the Voices From the Sea*, 1949).

24. In his 1968 Nobel speech, Kawabata claimed to "neither admire nor [be] in sympathy with suicide" but nonetheless carves out space for a Zen Buddhist "concept of death … very different from that in the West" by citing the example of the fourteenth-century Zen Buddhist priest Ikkyū and also the example of one of his contemporaries, an avant-garde

painter friend who died young having "said over and over that there is no art superior to death, that to die is to live" (Kawabata 1968).

25. Ueda M. (1976, 210).

26. Kawabata (1973, 293). All subsequent citations of this text appear parenthetically in the text. All translations are mine.

27. Kawabata's essay, "Issō ikka—'Izu no odoriko' no sakusha," originally appeared serialized in the literary journal *Fūkei* from May 1967 through January 1969; the two entries related to Tsuburaya were written in January and February 1968 shortly after Tsuburaya's suicide and were published in March and April.

28. See also Kawabata's despair that "the poet Itō Sachio surely never dreamed that 'Wild daisy' would be the one work that continues to be known among today's young readers. Maybe in fifty or a hundred years' time, Natsume Sōseki will only be known as the author of *Botchan*" (315).

29. See also the previous installment where Kawabata writes that he finds himself "at a loss at the prospect of turning seventy years old in the New Year" and regrets that "I have not yet been able to write the kinds of things I want to write" (290–92).

30. In Kawabata's case, the refusal to narrate his own last final moments gave rise to several competing narratives about his motives and even speculation as to whether it was a suicide. It also led to a tendency to read into his life for scandalous biographical details that might explain his suicide in retrospect (see Usui Yoshimi's 1977 novella *Jiko no tenmatsu* that claimed an illicit affair with a young maid was the root cause, which prompted Kawabata's estate to sue for libel and eventually led Chikuma Shobō to discontinue publishing). See also the chapter on Kawabata in Mamoru Iga's *The Thorn in the Chrysanthemum* (1986), which concludes by labeling it an "egoistic suicide in Durkheimian terms" (113) after citing a host of biographical details—including being orphaned as a young child, poor physical health, increased professional demands and pressure in the wake of receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1968—and after diagnosing his personality as a combination of iconoclastic individualism, traditionalism, fatalism, and pessimism, as well as citing Japanese animistic views on death (106–13). Among commentators, Pinguet is exceptional in that he follows Kawabata's lead, devoting just one line to Kawabata in his lengthy study of *Voluntary Death in Japan* (1993) to acknowledge the act as "a reminder that silence has its own grandeur: in our increasingly noisy society, we need it" (283). Makoto Ueda similarly avoids any mention of Kawabata's suicide at all, unlike his chapters on Dazai Osamu or Mishima Yukio (Ueda M. 1976, 173–218).

31. Ueda M. 1976, 196–97. My thanks to Sharalyn Orbaugh, who pointed me to this insightful essay and to the case of Tsuburaya Kōkichi. For Kawabata's essay "Matsugo no me," see Kawabata (1964).

32. Ueda M. (1976, 194).

33. Kawabata (1982a, 615). For Mishima's funeral, Kawabata delivered the opening address and served as chief mourner (*moshu*), a role that reflected his tightknit connection with the younger author whose literary career he had helped launch.

34. Okamoto (1927).

35. Kawabata (1982b, 178).

36. Kawabata (1982a, 76–77). At the funeral, Kawabata asked the public to show mercy to Mishima's family, citing one of Mishima's letters to him (dated August 4, 1969) in which

Mishima requested this, fully anticipating that "the public will leap at the chance to dig up all my flaws and ignominiously rip me to shreds" (77). In calling for a "quiet ceremony in the beautiful and heartfelt traditions of Japan" (76), Kawabata was also clearly warning off any potential disrupters who might interrupt this peaceful send-off and threatened to immediately cut short the proceedings should any occur.

37. Nosaka (1988, 146). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text in this section; all translations mine. Nosaka's essay originally appeared in the magazine *Taiyō* in October 1978. See also Nosaka (1983), his edited collection of *zuihitsu* on the topic of death, which included Akutagawa's "A Note to a Certain Old Friend," as well as Kawabata's essay on Akutagawa "Matsugo no me."

38. Futabatei's perfunctory last testament (*Yuigonjyō*) is available on Aozora Bunko (www.aozora.gr.jp). Nosaka also cites approvingly François Villon's (d. 1463) *Le Grand Testament* (1461), a lengthy autobiographical recounting of the author's fears and regrets late in life that intermixes a variety of fixed poetic forms and genres (146).

39. Two days before his death on December 9, 2015, Nosaka offered his own leftist manifesto, a "letter lamenting the contemporary state of Japan ("gendai Nihon ureu [憂う] tegami") on a TBS radio program featuring Ei Rokusuke, the author of the best-selling *Daiōjō* (Peaceful death, 1994). Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qap3RLeeJg.

40. This *jisei* was composed by Mishima on November 23, 1970. I am grateful to the poet Yuki Tanaka for his help in attempting to capture Mishima's poetics in my translation here. The line "chireba koso" alludes to the famous *Tales of Ise* poem: "Chireba koso / itodo sakura wa / medetakere / ukiyo ni nani ka / hisashikarubeki; It is precisely because / cherry blossoms scatter / that we find them appealing. / Does anything endure long / in this world of sorrows?" (McCullough 1968. 125). At Mishima's behest, final poems were also penned by his fellow Tate no kai soldiers, who all thought they would die along with Mishima in the coup attempt two days later.

41. Writing in 1968 in *Sun and Steel*, Mishima similarly endorsed the mundane language found in last letters by kamikaze pilots, praising "their very impersonality and monumentality [that] demanded the strict elimination of individuality" (Mishima 1970, 81).

42. In Japanese, these characters 虚実 invoke the dichotomous terms of *shinjitsu* (真実)/*kyokō* (虚構), *jitai* (実体)/*hyōgen* (表現), *shajitsu* (写実)/*kyogi* (虚偽) (https://kotobank.jp/word/虚実53357).

43. Shirane (2012, 399).

8. AUTOTHANATOGRAPHY, OR THE EXORBITANT CALL TO WRITE ONE'S OWN DEATH: ETŌ JUN AND YAMADA HANAKO

1. Burt (2009). On the ties between autobiography and autothanatography, see also de Man (1984). On Sylvia Plath's autothanatography, see Boileau (2017).

2. Bazin (2003), 31.

3. De Man (1984, 70).

4. The use of pronouns in these last writings merits more thorough consideration although space precludes going into depth here. James Pennebaker (2011) has argued that our use of pronouns (and other of our "most forgettable words") reveals things about us

that we might otherwise strive to conceal from listeners. His earlier coauthored study (Stirman and Pennebaker 2001) "Word Use in the Poetry of Suicidal and Non-Suicidal Poets" found a preponderance of I-language in suicidal writers. The researchers theorize that inward-looking, ruminative thoughts are reflected by these self-referencing pronouns. In my Japanese examples, as often as there was an erasure of "I" language entirely, there are also other texts filled with first-person language. See, for example, Akutagawa's repeated use of the masculine I-pronoun "*boku*" in two of his famed "last" works: 79 times in his short "A Note to a Certain Old Friend," 493 times in "Cogwheels," and, most intriguingly, just 3 times in his "Life of a Certain Fool," which instead uses the third-person masculine *kare* 358 times. These represent a striking proportion of pronouns for any language text, but an especially conspicuously high one for a language like Japanese that does not require subjects to be explicitly stated. I am grateful to Jamie Pennebaker for sharing his insights on this topic in our meeting on February 18, 2022.

5. Kishigami (1999, 255).

6. Terayama (1979, 63–64).

7. A transcription and a photo of Etō Jun's original note appears in Bungakukai (1999, 222–23). All Japanese-language newspaper articles in this chapter are drawn from the online newspaper databases of Asahi, Yomidasu, and Maisaku (accessed in May 2012).

8. Ishihara, "Tsuioku taidan: Zoku to sūkō o tsunagu hito (Ishihara Shintarō and Fukuda Kazuya)," *Bungakukai* 1999, 51. In his memorial essay for this September 1999 *Bungakukai* special issue, Karatani Kōjin parroted Etō's own favored form of title, calling his piece "Etō Jun to watashi" (44–46). See also comments by the writer Kurumatani Chōkitsu, who quoted Shiga Naoya's own terse comment after Arishima Takeo's love suicide—"Weak"—adding that "although as a husband, Etō's suicide attests to an extreme love rarely seen today, as a writer, it was a dog's death" (64).

9. The *Japan Times* claimed, "A suicide note was left in his home, in which he mentioned the recent loss of his wife, Keiko, as well as his own failing health, police said. He had recently spent time in the hospital after suffering a stroke. Police suspect Eto killed himself due to anguish over these matters" ("Literary critic Eto, 66, commits suicide," July 22, 1999). In *Asahi shinbun*, July 22, 1999 p.m. edition, two articles made similar claims: novelist and psychiatrist Kaga Otohiko commented "He loved his wife, wrote 'Tsuma to watashi,' and ended his own life" ("Etō Jun-shi jisatsu: Bundan sekibetsu no koe") and Obuchi Keizō, the prime minister at the time, speculated that "his feelings for his wife were one cause" in an article that claimed the "main gist of the note's content was 'I lost my wife and am sick and therefore have lost the will to live'" (*Mitotta tsuma, ou yō ni jisatsu no Etō-shi "hitori torinokosareta*").

10. Etō's chosen method—slashing his wrists in the bath—evoked premodern Japanese samurai traditions for some, and western classical ones for others. Literary scholar-critic Komori Yōichi noted that he "felt distant from Etō's political stances, but … wondered if Etō was perhaps the last 'literary warrior' [*fumi no mononofu*]" ("Etō Jun-shi jisatsu," *Asahi shinbun*, July 22, 1999 p.m. edition); Edwin McClellan described it like this: "Sat in the bath he did. Very Roman." And Donald Richie replied, "Like Seneca" (Donald Richie and Leza Lowitz, *The Japan Journals: 1947–2004* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2005), 440.) Articles about Etō's suicide were so very numerous that they ranked number fourteen in the top-twenty list of "the most important domestic news items" for 1999, even though it occurred fairly late in the year ("Kokunai 10-dai nyūsu," *Yomiuri shinbun*, December 21, 1999).

11. Glosses were provided for five of the more difficult words. See "Jisatsu shita Etō Jun-shi no isho kōhyō," *Asahi shinbun*, July 23, 1999; "'Byōku taegatashi … Onozura shoketsu' Etō-shi no isho kōkai," *Yomiuri shinbun*, July 23, 1999; "Etō Jun-san isho, bungo-tai de jisei" and "Jisatsu no Etō Jun-san, jitaku ni isho—Byōku taegatashi onozura shoketsu shi …," *Mainichi shinbun*, July 22, 1999. One essay in the *Bungakukai* special feature memorial edition even conducts a detailed handwriting analysis of the note (Kusamori Shin'ichi, "Kunpū wattate iku: Etō Jun no 'isho' no ato-ashi," *Bungakukai* 1999, 138–47; see also Kojima Nobuo's comments at page 62).

12. Ebersole 1989, 8. Ebersole's framework has been very useful for my own project especially his insistence that just because ritual tears may be "scripted" this does not render them meaningless, but all the more meaningful as signs about what society invests in this symbol and in this script. See also his article "The Function of Ritual Weeping Revisited: Affective Expression and Moral Discourse," *History of Religions* 39, no. 3 (February 2000): 211–46.

13. Bungakukai (1999, 70).

14. Etō and Kurumatani (1998, 169).

15. De Man (1984, 68).

16. Bowring (1975, 145–46); Ōgai's original testament is available on the Mori Ōgai Memorial Museum website, n.d. at https://moriogai-kinenkan.jp, accessed December 1, 2023.

17. *Bungakukai* (1999, 41–42). In Etō's note, Yoshimoto detects a "self-delimiting willful suicide of one who is already dead" (*jiko gentei ni yoru ishi-teki na shigo no jisatsu*) (42). For Yoshimoto, the key point is less about any public/private self than a divide between Etō before and after his stroke, between his former writing self and the now-sick self who needs to be disposed/deposed.

18. Etō and Kurumatani (1998, 168–69). From 1994 until the time of his death, Etō was chairman of the board for this communal literary grave (*bungakusha no haka*) in Shizuoka Prefecture that was created under the aegis of the Japanese Writers' Association in 1969. I was unable to confirm what work does represent Etō Jun or other writers here at this public site, having been informed by the institution that this information was private as per the wishes of the surviving families.

19. Etō and Kurumatani (1998, 162). Etō also points out that the translation of "shishōsetsu" by foreign literary scholars as "I-novels" is a misnomer given that the Japanese language originally had no first-person pronouns at all (164).

20. "Takaichi Yumi (Yamada Hanako) no saigo no hinichi" (dated late February 1994) in Yamada 1998a, 12–13. *Jisatsu chokuzen nikki* had eight initial print runs through Ōta Shuppan and a revised "complete edition" (*kanzen-ban*) in 1998. It was subsequently published by Tetsujinsha in both 2014 and 2018 ("Shūkan besutoserā," *Yomiuri shinbun*, June 22, 1996, 3). On her father's transition from car salesman to aspiring writer, see "Yamada Hanako nenpyō," in *Kinkyū tokushū: Tsuitō Yamada Hanako* n.p. (*Garo* 1992). For reproductions of her hand-scrawled diaries, manga production notes and sketches, see Yamada 2009.

21. Fujiguchi Tōgo, "Eien ni ikashite yaritai: Jo ni kaete," in Saeki (1949, 7–9). I thank the librarians at the Gordon W. Prange archives of Occupation-era publications reviewed by the censors for pointing me to this little known text, which to my knowledge is not held by any other library worldwide. This volume was passed by the Occupation censor without any notations beyond the facts of its publication details.

22. Kojō Hisako, "Saeki-san no baka," in Saeki (1949, 241–47).

23. One of the most famous examples of the struggle to control a posthumous literary legacy in the case of a suicide is the disputes over the literary estate of Sylvia Plath (1932–63) due to her contentious relationship with her estranged husband, the poet Ted Hughes. For an excellent book on this subject, see Janet Malcom, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

24. "Ninki mangaka no Nekojiru-san jisatsu—*Garo* nado de katsuyaku," *Yomiuri shinbun*, May 13, 1998, 11.

25. In 1999, there was a reported 44 percent increase among elementary, middle, and high school students in public schools since the previous year ("Kyonendo no kodomo no jisatsu 192-nin: Kōritsu shō-chū-kō de 44% zō, saikin 10-nen de saita," *Yomiuri shinbun*, December 16, 1999, 1). The media also noted that the parasuicidal behaviors of X Japan hide's many fans attending his funeral service, which were said to number over fifty thousand (Neil Strauss, "The Pop Life: End of a Life, End of an Era," *New York Times*, June 18, 1998, www.nytimes.com. For an excellent documentary film about hide and X Japan, see *We Are X: The Death and Life of X Japan*, dir. Stephen Kijak (Passion Pictures, 2016).

26. "Shonen no jisatsu, saiaku no 74-nin," *Yomiuri shinbun*, May 5, 1999, 27.

27. Hayami Yukiko, "Shinjinrui heisoku: Sabukaruchā no karisuma-tachi no jisatsu," *Aera*, November 19, 2001, https://dougasetumei.hatenablog.com. See also Yoshinaga (2004, 56–57).

28. Yoshinaga (2004, 7).

29. Yoshinaga (2004, 83).

30. On Nekojiru, see Thom Bailey, "Where Has All the Cat Soup Gone: An Investigation of Manga Artist Suicides," *HZ Net Journal* 5 (December 2004), https://www.hz-journal.org. See also Yoshinaga (2004, 71–72).

31. "Bakuzen to shita shōsō: Saeki Masako no baai," *Shinjoen*, February 6, 1948, reproduced in Saeki (1949, 219–24).

32. In all commentary I have seen, there was little to no discussion of mental health issues. This likely reflects reigning taboos against the subject in the early 1990s and the tendency to interpret suicidality as a sign of artistic genius. See Jamison 1993 on "the surprising links between manic-depression and creativity" among "the world's greatest artists."

33. Yoshinaga (2004, 202).

34. Yamada (1998b, 30, 8). I would like to express my sincere thanks to Takaichi Maki at Seirin Kōgeisha for generously allowing me to reprint her sister Yamada Hanako's manga in the pages of this book.

In Yamada's manga, mothers are also depicted using this iconography, portrayed at best as only ineffectual annoyances in their children's lives. The fact that Yamada's own mother was a schoolteacher and is the target of much of her anger in the diaries suggested to many that there was a heavily autobiographical home life component to her works. On the topic of bullying in her manga, see Ohizumi 1996, 106–18; Migiwa Pan, "Panko to Hanako no teihen no warai"; and Iguchi Shingo, "Daibingu・purinsesu Yamada Hanako" in *Garo* 1992, n.p.; and Sugawa Akiko, "Yamada Hanako to Shinsan Nameko," *Sabukaru・poppu magajin maguma* 17 (2009): 46–64.

35. Yamada (1998a, 14–15).

36. Yamada (2009, 49–52).

37. Yamada (1998a, 24).

38. Yamada (1998a, 137–38).

39. Yamada (1998a, 21). She had announced the debut of this new poet's identity in an earlier diary excerpt two weeks earlier, on March 15, announcing her "plans for the June edition of *Garo*: 1) Suzuki Haruyo and 2) Haru no kogawa" (Yamada (1998a, 19), a work that was later retitled "Aamen, sōmen, hiyashi sōmen."

40. Maruo Suehiro, afterword in Yamada (2009, 190).

41. Yamada (2009, 41–43).

42. Yamada (1998a, 19).

43. Yamada (2009, 95–98). "Ikite itemo daijyōbu" appeared originally in July 1987 in a self-published zine called *Gladiolus*, which was also her band name with friends and her sister, the manga editor Takaichi Maki.

44. In her diary, she refers to herself alternately as "Tamami, a girl who has always been a patient child" versus Neko, "a pain in the ass, selfish, swaddled baby, a hysteric (Yamada 1998a, 18, 16).

45. Yamada (1999, 83). Just beneath the lower left corner outside the manga panel border, another note reassures the reader, "A tranquilly sleeping Tamami. But just so you know, she'll appear again reborn." This panel appeared in "Maria no kōmon," originally serialized in Reed Comics from May 1990 through November 1991 and first published in book form under the title *Nageki no tenshi (Der Bleu Engel)*, taken from Josef von Sternberg's 1930 film, one of her favorites.

46. Takaichi Toshihiro, untitled, *Garo* (June 1986), Underground Magazine Archives, https://kougasetumei.hatenablog.com/entry/takaichitoshihiro.

47. Takaichi Toshihiro, "Takaichi Yumi・Tokkō mangaka Yamada Hanako o shinonde," Underground Magazine Archives, https://kougasetumei.hatenablog.com. This entire passage is censored out of the reprinted version in the "Complete Edition (*kanzen-ban*)" published by Ōta Shuppan in Yamada (1998a, 192).

48. Yamada (1998a, 152).

49. Nemoto Takashi, "Maria no kōmon o mita onna," in *Garo* (1992, 12–14).

PART THREE. MOURNING IN MULTIMEDIA

Epigraph: Carson (1999, 84–85). I am grateful to Alan Tansman for pointing me to Carson's beautiful and insightful essay.

1. Bungakukai (1999, 42). After Yamada Hanako's suicide, a similar series of memorial essays and tributes were published by her colleagues and friends, who in this case, represented the limelights of the underground comics and music scene. See the *Garo* special memorial issue (Garo 1992, 15–26) and Yamada (2009, 212, 162). For her fans' responses, see the letters sent to her family reproduced in Yamada (1998a, 204–29).

2. Bungakukai (1999, 40, 42).

3. Bungakukai (1999, 112–13). See Anne Allison's recent book *Being Dead Otherwise* (2023) for a compassionate consideration of the innovative ways that old traditional burial and mourning practices (including incense stick offerings and *kotsuage* or "picking up the bones") are evolving in contemporary Japanese society with an aging population without

descendants to tend to them when they are dying and dead. See also Mark Rowe's *Bonds of the Dead* (2011) for an intimate, incisive portrayal of Buddhist funerary practices in contemporary Japan and Andrew Bernstein's *Modern Passings* (2006) for a fascinating historical account of the evolution of premodern Japan's death rites.

9. COPYCAT POETS AND SUICIDES: NAGASAWA NOBUKO AND HARAGUCHI TŌZŌ

Epigraph: Fukushima (2009, 90). See also (Kuyama 1974, 267).

1. *Études à Vingt Ans* was first published by Maeda Shuppan in June 1945, just eight months after Haraguchi's suicide. After immediately selling out five thousand copies, another five thousand were printed and sold in the fall. In February 1958, a former editor at Maeda, Date Tokuo, published a new version through his newly established publishing company Shoshi Eureka (later Eureka) that became their number-one bestseller. Kadokawa's subsequent editions (seven total from 1952 to 1974) were also best long-sellers (Fukushima 2009, 41; Nakane 2015, 49). Chikuma Shobō's 2005 text is the most recent print version. All citations are based on my translations of the online version at Aozora Bunko, www.aozora.gr.jp.

2. Haraguchi was born in 1927 in Keijō (now Seoul) and schooled in Manchuria until Japan's defeat in 1945. His experience as the youngest fifth son of a family of colonialist settlers colors several of his excerpts in *Études*. For the importance of the colonial experience in shaping Haraguchi, see Nakane (2015, 55–56).

3. Selections of Nagasawa's poetry were initially published in 1965 by a small publishing firm in her hometown in Gunma under a title taken from one of her poems, *Umi: Nagasawa Nobuko no ikōshū* (The sea: The posthumous writings of Nagasawa Nobuko). The volume was later republished in 1968 by Tensei Shuppan, a newly established publishing company that, like Shoshi Eureka, staked its initial success on the publication of a suicidal poet's last works. For this later volume, Nagasawa's work appeared under the more sensational title of *Tomo yo watashi ga shinda kara tote*, a line taken from what soon became her most famous poem. Another volume with this title was published by Shin Shuppan in 1983. A complete edition of her poems and her high school notebooks and diaries was recently published by Kōseisha in an 850-page volume in 2021 but is thus far available in a handful of libraries across the world.

4. *Shinin oboegaki*, alternatively called *Memoires d'un mort*, includes essays by literary critic Nakamura Mitsuo, two philosophy professors at Doshisha and Tokyo University (Mashita Shin'ichi and Mori Arimasa), Haraguchi's friends Hashimoto Ichimei, who became a noted Rimbaud scholar at Kokugakuin, and the later literary critic Kiyo'oka Takayuki, and Haraguchi's brother and another friend. It had ten printings in 1948 alone (Haraguchi 1948b).

5. *Asahi shinbun* (October 30, 1946) article cited in Nakane (2015, 51).

6. Haraguchi (1948b, 156). Haraguchi's suicide threats became such a common refrain that they gained the status of a legendary joke among his friends, with one classmate asking him frequently at what time they might expect him to die and Haraguchi responding with his apologies for keeping them waiting for so long (158). Afterward, there were two reported suicides at First Higher School, one that year and another the following (Nakane 2015, 50).

7. Fukushima (2009, 41). In another echo of Fujimura, Haraguchi's friend Hashimoto called his death wish "incomprehensible" (*fukakai*) in the opening to his afterword to *Études* (Hashimoto 1948, 204).

8. Haraguchi (1948b, 96, 92).

9. Karaki's essay "Jisatsu ni tsuite," originally published by Kobundō in July 1950, opens with a lengthy section on kamikaze pilot letters in *Kike wadatsumi no koe* before turning to these literary men's suicides. An expanded edited volume with the same title *Jisatsu ni tsuite*, republished in 1974, also includes Karaki's short essays on a couple other individuals and on the topics of suicide notes and the suicide hotspot of Tōjinbō Cliffs, as well as an afterword that briefly touches upon Mishima.

10. Kimura (1970, 44).

11. Kuyama 1974 is the reprint of this 1968 volume *Seishun no kiroku*. Elsewhere, Haraguchi has been interpreted as symptomatic of a generation of "martyrs" (*junkyō*) who also include Fujimura Misao, kamikaze pilots, and Mishima Yukio (Hasegawa Izumi, *Junkyō* [Tokyo: Shibundō, 1973]) or alternatively, like the 1960s youth Kishigami Daisaku, emblematic of the "illness of the times" in Yoshimoto Taka'aki's *Jidaibyō* (Tokyo: Ueitsu, 2005). See Fukushima (2009, 82) for an account of the writer and Gunma native Kuboki Sōichi reading Nagasawa's volume as a Tokyo University student protestor in the 1960s.

12. Kuyama (1974, 19–20).

13. "Nagasawa Nobuko miryoku o saihyōka," *Asahi shinbun* Gunma edition, April 9, 2009, 23.

14. Kimura (1970, 44). Kimura claims that Nagasawa may have written lots of poems and prose but likely "had no intention of becoming a poet" (43), an especially odd assertion in a tribute to Nagasawa that includes a selection of her finest poems.

15. As noted in chapter 6, Kishigami's love interest, the eighteen-year-old Sawaguchi Fumi, foreswore poetry immediately after his suicide and seven years after he died published a novel in which her character resents the ways that the tabloids demonized and silenced her after his death while Kishigami's poems and "books got published and widely read" (Ogawa 1999, 28–29; see also 16–19).

16. Carson (1999, 94).

17. Kuyama (1974, 273). This statement appeared in a section of aphorisms that she subtitled "Nikutai to Tamashii" (Flesh and spirit)."

18. Fukushima (2009, 90).

19. Nosaka (1988, 148).

20. Carson (1999, 87).

21. As discussed in detail below, Nagasawa elides one line of Haraguchi's note here—"On this night, I too have buried one of my own" (*Boku mo mata, kono yo, hitori no nakama o hōmutta*)—indicating the elision with six dots ("……").

22. Kimura (1970, 49); Kuyama (1974, 275–76).

23. Nagasawa's friend Takakura Eiko bristled at the crass marketing strategy used by Tensei Shuppan in the 1968 edition for their title choice of *Tomo yo watashi ga shinda kara tote* and for irresponsibly intermixing and excerpting her poems, notes, and essays to appeal to young readers in the politicized context of the late 1960s (Fukushima 2009, 76–77). This title also appears on the cover of the earlier volume released by the local Kiryū publishing firm, as well as the subtitle to Fukushima 2009.

24. Kurihara (2006, 42). In this thought-provoking article, Kurihara suggests there are three "I's" (*watashi*) in Nagasawa's poem: the first "I" is constrained by family and society in life, the second one is the "image" that would be fixed in people's minds in death, while the third "I" represents "freedom" (45). Kurihara follows the genealogy sketched by Nakamura Fumiaki in his multivolume *Gendai-shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, Nōsaido Kikakushitsu, 2000–4) where Yosano Akiko is identified as the founding mother of three poetic strains later taken up by female poets, including Nagasawa Nobuko whom he identifies as representing the "haiku-esque conceptual ideological camp" (*haiku-teki hassō-kei no shisō*) (43).

25. Derrida (2001, 45).

26. Nagasawa's notebooks cited in Kuyama (1974, 273, 268).

27. Four volumes of Nagasawa's notebooks were nearly lost except for the fortuitous coincidence that the scholar Fukushima Yasuki salvaged them from copies saved by Kubota Sai'ichi, the writer who had cherished Nagasawa's poems as a student protestor in the late 1960s and who worked at the Hagiwara Sakutarō Bungaku Kinenkan in Gunma (Fukushima 2009, 74, 80–81).

28. In Notebook A, Fukushima (2021).

29. See Hashimoto's afterword to *Études* for his account of their decision to use this as Haraguchi's grave marker (Hashimoto 1948, 204).

30. Fukushima (2009, 42).

31. Nakane (2015, 53).

32. Haraguchi (1948b, 217–18).

33. Haraguchi (1948b, 3–4). His first memorandum, "Shisha oboegaki," was addressed to the Gunma police chief.

34. When reading through *Études* and recalling that it was composed in a mere eight days, at times readers can sense the author's increasing exhaustion and the diminishing returns of writing in the face of death. The majority of the work was composed in the first three days with 278 out of 406 numbered excerpts (20 were written on the first day, 105 on the second, and a whopping 153 on the third) while the remaining 128 were written over the next four days with just 9 on the sixth day, 16 on the following, and 34 on October 1, which was to be the last day of his life. The proportions dedicated to each of the three movements similarly suggest this declining arc in production, with each tallying just half the amount of the previous one (238–112–56).

35. Iiyoshi (1969, 28); Kiyo'oka (1975, 40–41).

36. In another excerpt, Haraguchi compares himself to Mozart: "It was unnecessary but after destroying all my past works out of a sense of indignation—or was it when I cut off my creativity out of a sense of distrusting expression?—at that time, I'd whisper to myself sadly these words of a poem in consolation: In the shadow of a single Mozart, never forget that there are hundreds of dead Mozarts."

37. See the May 1947 Maeda Shuppan edition of *Études*, which includes a Rimbaud quote on the cover beneath the title.

38. October 30, *Yomiuri shinbun* editorial, cited in Nakane 2005, 51.

39. Haraguchi (1948b, 101–2). See also Miyauchi (1969).

40. In a suicide note to friends, Nagasawa employed another act of creative citation and adaptation. In an echo of her most famous poem and Haraguchi's final lines from his suicide note, she writes, "If you are truly my friends, you will accept my death with cool

criticism, laugh it off as a bad joke, and soon thereafter forget, without even my name remaining in your memories." But in a pointed reversal of Haraguchi's own final lines, she follows by asserting the need for sincerity in this final communication in which she speaks, and they listen: "In the end, at least this one time, I do want to say this sincere goodbye (*makoto na sayōnara*)" (Kuyama 1974, 268).

41. Carson (1999, 82–83, 75). In Carson's reading, the pathos of this epitaph that reads in alternating lines of red and black—"Tomb Spinther Set" and "This Upon Spinther Dead"—stems as much from the poet's powerful rhetorical strategies that endow the dead with "double subjectivity" as from the reader's own complicity in pronouncing him dead when reading aloud these very words on the so-called talking stone (83–84).

10. DEATH IN MIXED MEDIA: MISHIMA YUKIO

Epigraphs: "It's good to be an actor, isn't it?": Mishima, cited in Iwasaki (1971, 92).

"We cannot, indeed, imagine our own death": Sigmund Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, 1918. (Freud 1918, 41)

"What is music, to me?": "Yūwaku: Ongaku no tobira" (March 1967) (Mishima 1967, 379)

1. Hirayama 1971, 231–44. In this fascinating chart, Hirayama tallies the "top ten" modern writers who feature suicide in their texts with Mishima at the top of the list and Kawabata in second. It is important to note that only three of the authors in his list died by suicide because it serves as a useful caution against presuming simple causality between acts of writing and acts of suicide. Most lived to ripe old(er) ages: Toyoshima Yoshio (died at age sixty-four), Tamiya Torahiko (died at age seventy-six by suicide), Fukunaga Takehiko (sixty-one), Mizukami Tsutomu (eighty-five), Izumi Kyōka (sixty-five), Mori Ōgai (sixty), Kawatake Mokuami (seventy-five), Tayama Katai (fifty-eight), Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (died by suicide at age thirty-five), Kikuchi Kan (fifty-nine), Kume Masao (sixty), Nagai Kafū (seventy-nine), Inoue Yasushi (eighty-three), and Dazai Osamu (died by suicide at age thirty-eight). A digest version of Hirayama's list is available in English in Iga (1986, 69–70).

2. Shinoyama (2020, n.p.). See also Yokoo Tadanori's prefatory essay, "*The Deaths of a Man* Chronicles," (n.p.) where he recalls being strong-armed by Mishima "in a predictably domineering move" to sign a publisher's contract in order to costar as a photography model in this collection when Yokoo was bedridden in the hospital. He recounts: "After Mishima's all-too-real death, it was no longer possible for me, his surviving alter ego and co-star to perform my role in *The Death of a Man* so late to the party" (n.p.). On the belated publication of this photo collection, see Cather (2021).

3. Alvarez (1971, "The Closed World of Suicide," 95–162).

4. Nathan (1974, 92), citing "Watashi no henreki jidai," originally published January–May 1963, *MYZ* 30, 445–46.

5. June 30, 1955 entry, *Shōsetsuka no kyūka*, originally published June 24–August 4, 1955, Mishima (1982, 17–19).

6. "Fushigi na otoko," originally published August 1, 1966, *KMYZ* 34:181; "Jieitai o taiken suru—46-nichikan no hisoka na 'nyūtai,'" originally published, June 11, 1967, *MYK* 34:406–7.

7. "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke ni tsuite," originally published February 1954, in Etō, Sono, and Nada (1972, 133).

8. "Nentō no mayoi," originally published January 1, 1967, *MYK* 34:286. In June 1961, Hemingway had returned home after being forcibly institutionalized and subjected to a second round of electroshock treatments. Although his suicide on July 2, 1961, was initially reported as an accidental death, Hemingway's wife publicly acknowledged it as a suicide in an August 1966 press interview.

9. Mishima (1968, 6). Recently, the kabuki actor Ichikawa Ennosuke IV, a descendant of Danzō's, appeared in the news after he was the sole survivor of a family suicide pact with his elderly parents on May 18, 2023 that was made after a breaking news scandal. He is currently on trial for assisted suicide with the prosecutors seeking a three-year prison sentence.

10. Etō, Sono, and Nada (1972, 135).

11. La Rochelle's first attempt was in July 1944 just before the liberation of Paris, and he died by suicide in March 1945 after months in hiding. Hasuda Zenmei, a soldier in the Japanese Army, murdered his commanding officer and then killed himself in outrage over the August 1945 order to surrender and the suggestion that the emperor had become just another citizen (Inose and Sato 2012, 88, 676–77). Saigō Takemori, leader of the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion in the name of restoring imperial authority, suffered a gunfire injury in battle and subsequently died, either by ritual seppuku followed by his beheading at the hands of a comrade or only the latter if, as is rumored, he was too weak to die by his own hand. Kaya Harukata died during the failed Shinpūren (Divine winds) rebellion of 1876 in protest of the government order for samurai to relinquish their swords. He was age forty-two, which as Mishima notes was precisely his own age when writing this piece "Nentō no mayoi" (*MYK* 34:86).

12. "Utsukushii shi" (Beautiful death), originally published August 1967, *MYK* 34: 440–41.

13. Inose and Sato 2012, 503, citing "Hinuma-shi to shi," originally published September 1968, *MYZ* 35:184–85.

14. Etō, Sono, and Nada (1972, 133–34).

15. "Furansu no terebi ni hatsu-shutsuen," originally published March 1966, *MYZ* 34:32. In his essay "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke ni tsuite," Mishima explains, "I cannot forgive weakness perhaps because of my own self-perception. I don't want to think of myself like that. … When I look at a weak spirited person, I fear that I too will turn out like that, and my fears turn to hatred" (Etō, Sono, and Nada 1972, 133); about Hemingway, he claims "to understand [his] feeling all too well" ("Nentō no mayoi," *MYK* 34:286); and as for Dazai, he notes that "I felt a physiological repugnance … perhaps because, according to the laws of love and hate, he was the type of writer who deliberately exposed the parts of me I most wanted to hide" (Flanagan 2014, 91, citing Mishima, "Watashi no henreki jidai," originally published 1964, *MYZ* 30:443).

16. Ultimately, his parents chose as his posthumous Buddhist name 彰武院文鑑公威居士, or Martial Illuminator and Literary Mirror Layman Kimitake (Inose and Sato 2012, 731). The date February 26, 1968, the day Mishima signed his blood oath was the thirty-second anniversary of the February 26 incident, a failed coup d'état designed to revive direct imperial rule in 1936, after which Mishima would pattern his own political coup attempt on November 25, 1970. On that day twenty-two years earlier, Mishima had announced starting his career-making novel *Confessions of a Mask*, writing his publisher Kawade Shobō to say he planned to start writing his first "I-novel" twenty-three days later, on November 25,

1948. On timelines for establishing the Japan National Guard (JNG), later renamed Shield Society, see Inose and Sato (2012, 540, 582).

17. See, for example, Kinya Tsuruta, who writes, "That gory Kabuki drama Mishima perpetrated at the Ichigaya headquarters must have been his most satisfactory work of art" ("Review of Mishima Yukio's *Bungaku zenshu*," *Books Abroad* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 345; or Marguerite Yourcenar who "sees Mishima's death as his final opus—a grand masterpiece towards which his whole career had led" (Shira Nayman review of Yourcenar's *Mishima: A Vision of the Void*, *Georgia Review* 41, no 2. [Summer 1987]: 439). For a stereotypical reading of Mishima's turn from words to action, see Stokes (1974, 188–92). See Seidensticker (1971) for a relatively sympathetic take on Mishima's "overt rehearsal[s]" in "Yūkoku" and in the *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy as well as on his "curious proclivities" (including his acting and nude photography modelling stints) as a quest for immortality (275, 280); on "symbolic immortality," see Lifton (1979).

18. See, for example, Flanagan (2014), who identifies this false either/or proposition between art and action only to conclude that art, not action, is what mattered (239). See also Peter Abelsen, "Irony and Purity: Mishima," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 3 (June 1966): 651–79, who argues that Mishima successfully fused art and action (*bunbu ryōdō*) by interweaving it with western notions of Romantic Irony (678).

19. "Mishima 'kikyō-hei' ni 26 no shitsumon," originally published June 11, 1967, *MYK* 34:420.

20. For a detailed account of Mishima's last day, see Stokes (1974, 29–51, 234); and Ueda Yasuo (1976, "Mishima Yukio: Yūkoku no shi, seizetsu ni yuku," 32–84). See also Andō Takeshi, ed., *Mishima Yukio "nichiroku"* (Tokyo: Michitani, 1996), 423–24.

21. Iwasaki (1971, 84).

22. *Shōsetsuka no kyūka* (June 29, 1955, entry) in Mishima (1982, 17), ellipsis in original. All citations of this text in this section are subsequently noted parenthetically; all translations are mine.

23. The associative logic of Mishima's daily entries in *Shōsetsuka no kyūka* conspicuously links the masochistic deathlike effects of music and film to aurality. In his next day's excerpt, he turns to describe the passing of a seventy-eight-year-old man whose death he knew of only upon suddenly hearing hymns come from the shadowy stands of trees over in the neighboring garden (21). Mishima frequently uses visual metaphors to explain his fear of music, as if only the language of visuality offers him a means of tackling this deficit. His usual metaphor of choice is the terrifying sea at nighttime contrasted with the clear beauty of the sea at daytime. See also his novel *Ongaku* (Music, 1965) where it is a woman's sexual frigidity that is linked to her inability to hear music.

24. Mishima (1999, "Bōga," *MYE*, 612–15). "Bōga" was originally published in *Eiga geijutsu* in August 1970. In November 1970, Mishima published his final installment of *Shōsetsu to wa nani ka* as well as an essay titled "Bungaku wa kūkyo ka" (Is literature vacant?).

25. Barthes (1984, 346).

26. Mishima blames both advertising and the liberation of sex for making "sex" the naked "protagonist" of the film, no longer "wrapped in the giant shadows of sex." Paradoxically, he speculates that explicit blue films distributed on video cassette may be the salvation of film since these make possible "the sexual monopoly of the image" (Mishima 1999, "Bōga," *MYE*, 613–15; see also "Eiga-teki nikutai-ron: Sono bubun oyobi zentai,"

originally published May 1966, *MYZ* 32:337–44). Mishima's own choices with *Yūkoku* seemingly offer an antidote to these problems; it was a low budget softcore production with "beautiful people" played incognito by himself alongside an unknown former pink film actress.

27. Barthes (1984, 348).

28. Barthes (1984, 349).

29. Yokoo (1986, 150); Rayns (2008, n.p.).

30. "Eiga no genkai bungaku no genkai," originally published March 1951, *MYE*, 121–22.

31. Goossen (2008).

32. "Boku ga tsukutta '*Yūkoku*' eiga no uchimaku," originally published May 1966 interview with Oya Sōichi, *MYE*, 560.

33. Baudelaire's original French phrase—"Et la victim et le bourreau"—is from his poem "The Man Who Tortures Himself" in *Fleurs du mal* (1857). Mishima quoted Baudelaire also when embarking on writing his first autobiographical "I-novel" *Confessions of a Mask* in 1948, which suggests that it is not just the medium of film that enabled him to enact these doubled roles of executioner and executed (Mishima's letter to Sakamoto Kazuki, *MYZ* 35:507 cited in Flanagan [2014, 97]).

34. The short story "Yūkoku" was marked with the completion date of October 16, 1960, and was initially slated to appear as a companion piece to Fukazawa Shichirō's controversial "Furyū mutan" in December 1960 of *Chūō kōron*, which went on sale on November 10.

35. "Yūkoku' no nazo," originally published April 1966, *MYZ* 32:302. Most English-language commentary on this story and film adopts a psychoanalytic/sexological approach that is mapped onto the relevant biographical details of Mishima's life. See Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit's "Review of *Deadly Dialectics: Sex, Violence and Nihilism in the World of Yukio Mishima* by Roy Starr" for a scathing critique of the "biographical reductionism and psychoanalytic orientation" of much Mishima research, especially the facile diagnoses of narcissism and nihilism in Starr's 1994 monograph (*Journal of Japanese Studies* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 177–82, at 179). See also Hiroaki Sato's critiques of both Starr's work and psychology professor Jerry Piven's 2004 *The Madness and Perversion of Yukio Mishima* for their retrograde assumptions and analysis ("An Ominously Familiar Japanese Contemporary," *Japan Times*, September 24, 2012, www.japantimes.co.jp).

Japanese-language scholarship has tended to interpret "Yūkoku'" through Bataille's theories of eros and death, which Mishima wrote about extensively. See Kamada Hiroki, "'Yūkoku' oyobi sono jihyō ni tsuite: Eroteishizumu no yukue," originally published 1988, *Mishima Yukio: Bi to erosu no ronri*, ed. Satō Hideaki (Yūseitō Shuppan, 1991), 192–204; and Hirano Yukihito, *Mishima Yukio to G・Bataiyu: Kindai sakka to Seiō* (Kaibunsha Shuppan, 1991). In English, see Rankin (2018, 102–14). For analyses that map the story onto Mishima's politics (or lack thereof), see Isoda (1974, 87–99); and Isoda Kōichi, "Seiji・Eros・Bi," *Junkyō no bigaku* (Tokyo: Tōjusha, 1964), 55–69; Shiba Ryōtarō, "Kannen-teki na bungakushi: Hito-bito no kenkō ni hannō shita," originally published November 26, 1970, in Matsuta (1972, 285–88). In English, see Susan Napier, "Death and the Emperor: The Politics of Betrayal," in *Escape from the Wasteland: Romanticism and Realism in the Fiction of Mishima Yukio* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1991), 143–59.

36. "Yūkoku' no nazo," *MYZ* 32:302–3.

37. Mishima's first film appearances were cameos playing himself, the literary author Mishima Yukio, in both *Junpaku no yoru* (Snow-white night, 1951) and *Fudōtoku kyōiku kōza*, (Lectures on immoral education, 1959). In his later film roles, Mishima sought to play characters distant from his literary persona, or as he put it, "Enough of being a so-called intellectual already!" (*iwayuru interi wa mappira da*). ("Boku wa obujé ni naritai," originally published December 1959, *MYE*, 290). He plays a cowardly yakuza in *Afraid to Die* (1960), a resolute military soldier-husband in *Yūkoku* (1966), a dead taxidermied statue kept in the basement of a beautiful jewel thief (played by actor Miwa Akihiro in drag, who kisses him in what is often regarded as Japan's "first" on-screen gay kiss) in *Black Lizard* (1968), and finally a samurai who decisively disembowels himself when wrongfully accused of an assassination in the historical drama *Hitokiri* (1969).

38. Scholars have painstakingly mapped the story's connections to the February 26 incident and to the young couple on whom it is ostensibly based: Ōnishi Takeshi, "Mishima Yukio 'Yūkoku'-ron," *Sapporo kokugo kenkyū* 15 (2010): n.p.; and Hong Yun-Pyo, "Mishima Yukio 'Yūkoku' ni okeru 'zure'—1936-nen to 1960-nen no danzetsu to renzoku" [A study on Mishima Yukio "Yūkoku": Continuity and discontinuity between 1936 and 1960], *Bungaku kenkyū ronshū* 24:89–112. Yumiko Furuhata persuasively argues that Mishima's suicide as a staged media event was, in part, a response to the anxiety revealed in *Yūkoku* over "the untimely nature of insurrections that failed to make history" (*Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013], 113).

For Mishima's contemporaries' critiques of using the February 26 incident in this work, see Etō (1971, 258) and Abe (1990, 154). For Mishima's own essays on the February 26 incident, see "2.26 jiken to watashi," originally published June 1966; and "2.26 jiken ni tsuite," originally published February 1968, *KMYZ* 34:107–19; 658–60. See also Mishima's own comments, where he sometimes discounts using "the mere anecdotal biographies of the 2.26 incident [*tannaru 2.26 gaiden*]" as source material for "the tale itself" (*monogatari jitai*) while at other times stressing the incident as a formative boyhood influence that became core to his later literary identity ("'Hanazakari no mori・Yūkoku' kaisetsu," originally published September 1968, 439; Mishima 1971, 234).

39. Sargent (1966, 100), hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. I largely rely on this excellent translation except, where noted, with slight alterations or my own more literal translations alongside the original when necessary to make my point.

40. Mishima (1980, 337). Sargent's translation in this latter passage refers to Reiko as a "witness" (113), but the original more literally reads, "She must watch. She must watch unto the end" (*Tonikaku mitodokeneba naranu. Mitodokeneba naranu*) (Mishima 1980, 351).

41. In an April 1966 *taidan* with Funabashi Kazuo, Mishima explained that the story hints that Takeyama merely needed to believe his newlywed status was what led to him being left out of the coup by his friends in order to maintain his memories of friendship untarnished ("Yūkoku o kataru," originally published April 1966, *MYE*, 534–35) Both the film's intertitles and the screenplay do, however, unambiguously point to this as the reason ("Yūkoku [Satsuei daihon]," *MYZ* 23:345).

42. Mishima (1980, 343). See Hasegawa Izumi (1971, 147–48) for an in-depth reading of the sexual politics of this reciprocated female gaze on the male body in "Yūkoku."

43. Goossen (2008, n.p.).

44. Mishima (1980, 353).

45. Mishima (1980, 350).

46. In his glowing review of Kobayashi Masaki's 1962 film *Seppuku* (released outside Japan as *Harakiri*) and its bloody visceral depiction of a samurai's disembowelment, Mishima expresses ambivalence over the Japanese tendency to rely on poetic metaphors that aestheticize and euphemize bloody death: "In our classical literature, autumn leaves and cherry blossoms were metaphors for blood and death. These metaphors buried deep in the subconscious of the people have endured for hundreds of years of training to transform biological fears into aesthetic form" ("Zankokubi ni tsuite: 'Harakiri' 'Nani ga Jean ni okotta ka,'" originally published August 1963, *MYE*, 459). See also Mishima, "What makes a good metaphor?" in his 1959 primer on literary style (Mishima 1959, 205–6).

47. Mishima (1980, 353).

48. "Yūkoku (Satsuei daihon)," *MYZ* 23:372. On the "money shot" in pornographic films, see Williams (1999, 93–120). Rankin (2018) likens the seppuku scene with all the bodily fluids on display and the final "finish[ing] himself off" to a "mega-ejaculation" (111). Kawasaka (2018) reads the lovers' twinned death scenes as a means of gendering and differentiating the two characters (5–6).

49. Mishima (1980, 340, 342). Garcin (2015) notes that even during these preparations for death, the "characters are already deceased, mummified within the solemn dirge that is Mishima's text" (233).

50. Sargent (1966, 93); Mishima (1980, 330). It is worth noting that the lieutenant's phrasing here points to his conflicted loyalty toward his army friends as much as to the emperor and is not identical with Mishima's cry—"Long live the Emperor!" (*Tennō heika banzai!*)—that he repeated twice on the SDF balcony.

51. Sargent (1966, 116–17); Mishima (1980, 354–55).

52. Bazin (2005, 9); Bazin (2003, 30–31).

53. "Yūkoku (Satsuei daihon)," *MYZ* 23:353, 360, 358, 373. See Isoda 1974 for a reading of Mishima's own body as torn between two poles, the "sculptural" (*zōkeisha*) and that of the "practitioner" (*jissensha*) (95–96). For a critique of Mishima for too hastily "killing off his characters" to fulfill his "poetic image" of a white, unsullied landscape, see Rizawa (1971, 139).

54. Garcin (2015, 230). Garcin convincingly argues that the story contains many intertextual allusions to premodern texts, including medieval epics of samurai valor, the eighteenth-century double suicide puppet plays of Chikamatsu, and an "aesthetic of cruelty" present in both kabuki and Georges Bataille's writings. In Garcin's reading, the monumental epic style of these first two genres entails an empty, abstract body that is in tension with the organic, visceral dying body depicted in the story's latter half.

55. Bazin (2005, 14).

56. In his lengthy account of making the film, Mishima makes just one brief reference to his memory of "how cold I felt soaked to the skin in that pool of blood" (Goossen 2008, n.p.).

57. Goossen (2008, n.p.). See also the video interview with filmmakers' forty years later for their memories of this scene and the use of pig's intestines for blood. As one crew member recalls, "We only had one chance to get it right" (Fujii, Watanabe, et al., 2008).

58. "Otazune itashimasu," originally published May 1961, *MYE*, 311–12.

59. Cather (forthcoming).

60. In "Seisaku izu oyobi keika (Yūkoku eigaban)," Mishima calls for the man's role to be played as a "robot" and the woman's as a "statue" (*zōkei*) (*MYZ* 32:315–16). Tsuruoka Yoshiko was the stage name Mishima gave to new Daiei actress Yamamoto Noriko (山本典子).

61. "Yūkoku o kataru," April 1966, *MYE*, 528–29, 537.

62. Clover (1993, see especially "Her Body, Himself," 21–64).

63. Kawasaka (2018, 6n7). In Izumo Marō's formulation, Reiko becomes a stand-in both for the queer *bishōnen* youths desired by Mishima (and by his protagonists) and for Mishima himself. Izumo offers highly creative interpretations of the closeted gay symbolism in *Yūkoku* in a series of what are called "associative games" (*rensō no gēmu*). For example, the figurines that Reiko prepares as keepsakes are linked to Tennessee Williams's 1944 play *The Glass Menagerie* that evoke an era of homosexual persecution in the United States and Williams's own sexuality (Izumo 2010, 116–20).

64. Dōmoto (2005, 61–62), cited in Izumo (2010, 115).

65. The Adonis Society (Adonisu-kai; also called the Greek Research Club) was established in 1952 and had a membership of three hundred by 1960, including Mishima and his filmmaking collaborator (and sometimes lover) Dōmoto Masaki. The original publication of "Ai no shokei" included four illustrations by Mishima Takeshi (no relation). All citations from the story are hereafter noted parenthetically and come from the reprinted version available in *KMYZ hokan*, 40–54. All translations are mine. For a recent complete translation of the story, see Bett (2022).

66. Mishima's choice of title here—"Ai no shokei"—represents an odd departure for this author who claimed to hate this imported Christian-tinged word for *love* (*ai*) and to prefer the native Japanese term *koi* (恋) or carnal love. See Mishima's January 1969 essay "Aikokushin." (*MYZ* 34:648–51). Translating "Yūkoku," which literally means "grieving, or mourning, the nation," as "patriotism" is somewhat misleading, as Mishima himself notes in his introduction to Geoffrey Bownas's edited volume of his translations; he writes that "the Japanese of my original title, *Yūkoku*, which is usually translated as *Patriotism*, conveys more than a hint of melancholy: the word *yū* is related to the verb 'to feel grief' and grief is the emotion sustaining this story" (Mishima 1972, 22). Curiously, when deciding on an English-language title for the film and retranslating it back into Japanese, Mishima chose not *Yūkoku* but instead *Ai to shi no saigi*, or *The Rite of Love and Death*.

67. See the December 1983 "Ai no shokei special issue" of *Barazoku*, which includes a reprint of the story and a series of critical essays that draw clear parallels between the two works (especially Arashi [1983, 102–12]). In part, the special issue's overemphasis on these similarities stemmed from a perceived need to convince readers that "Ai no shokei" was in fact by Mishima, a claim that was disputed at that time. When *Barazoku* was republishing it, his father is rumored to have called the publisher to request that it not appear under his son's official penname; see "'Ai no shokei' wa yahari Mishima Yukio no sakuhin datta!" (Itō Bungaku 2005). The 1983 *Barazoku* volume also includes photographic stills from a 1983 gay *poruno* film adaptation directed by Nogami Masayoshi that included a coy reference to the open secret of Mishima's authorship and his semi-closeted homosexuality with a title card "dedicated to M."

68. Arashi (1983, 106).

69. See Vincent (2003) for an incisive critique of scholarship that presumes that Mishima possesses "an identity which is founded on lack and which can only be realized through a performative expression of identity as 'identification' with the other." Vincent is especially critical of "the oft-asserted idea of Mishima's 'virtually erotic obsession with performance … that, for Mishima, took the form of 'identification as a daily practice'" (n.p.).

70. "Boku wa obujé ni naritai," *MYE*, 290, 291, emphasis mine.

71. "Barei 'Yūkoku' ni tsuite," originally published July 1968, *MYZ* 33:407. In his review of Kobayashi Masaki's 1962 *Harakiri*, Mishima praised the director's attempt to emphasize the cruelty of the seppuku scene with the bamboo sword that strives not for kabuki with its "fake effects" (*gomakashi* kabuki) but rather the shock value of "truth" delivered through film images. He worries, however, that contemporary audiences might not be receptive to this message ("Zankokubi ni tsuite," *MYE*, August 1963, 458).

72. "Yūkoku o kataru," *MYE*, 535–36. Mishima considered the nude bed scene in *Yūkoku* "appropriately abstract" for noh. See Yokoo Tadanori's print advertisement for the ballet at the M+ Collections Archive in Hong Kong, available online at https://collections.mplus.org.hk.

73. "'Hanazakari no mori • Yūkoku' kaisetsu," originally published September 1968, *MYZ* 33:439.

74. "Yūwaku: Ongaku no tobira," *KMYZ* 34:380.

75. Goossen (2008, n.p.); "Seisaku izu oyobi keika," *MYZ* 32:325; "Yūkoku (Satsuei daihon)," *MYZ* 23:345.

76. Goossen (2008, n.p.); "Seisaku izu oyobi keika," *MYZ* 32:324. The filmmakers used Mishima's own record, a scratchy 78 rpm recording made by Leopold Stokowski with the Philadelphia Orchestra in the mid-1930s. Donald Richie recalled being consulted on the musical choice, becoming "what Mishima jokingly called 'the music director,'" and noted the powerful experience of watching the final cut overlaid with Wagner's "Liebestod" at Aoi Studio (Richie 2006, n.p.).

77. "Yūkoku o kataru," *MYE*, 538–39. Wagner's opera scores have often been credited with anticipating the filmmaking technique of Mickey-Mousing where a film score perfectly matches a character's onscreen actions and movements. See Joe and Gilman (2010) for an in-depth consideration of Wagner "as a paradigm for filmmaking, film scoring, and silent film accompaniment," especially 1–9, and articles by Marcia J. Citron and Lawrence Kramer, 167–85, 381–407.

78. Hugo Shirley, "The Opera That Changed Music: Wagner's Tristan und Isolde," *Gramophone*, June 9, 2016, www.gramophone.co.uk.

79. Notably, Mishima puts both his penname and his character's name in scare quotes here. "'Yūkoku' no nazo," originally published April 1966, *MYZ* 32:304; see also "Jinsei no kyūkyoku no yume o … . .—Sakusha ken enshutsuka ken haiyū no kotoba," originally published June 1966, *KMYZ* 34:122.

80. "Yūkoku o kataru," *MYE*, 526–27; Mishima calls big studio filmmaking a "sadomasochistic" enterprise. Iwasaki and others have argued that his choices to produce *Yūkoku* were a way to avenge his previous failures as an actor at the hands of director Masumura and Daiei studio (Iwasaki 1971, 89–90; see also Inoue 2006, 44–48).

81. Goossen (2008, n.p.); "Seisaku izu oyobi keika," *KMYZ* 32:324–25. See also "Yūkoku o kataru," *MYE*, 538.

82. *Shōsetsuka no kyūka*, July 1, 1955 entry, Mishima 1982, 20.

83. Mishima (1959, 171, 176).

84. "Yūkoku o kataru," *MYE*, 532–33.

85. Goossen (2008, n.p.); "Seisaku izu oyobi keika," *MYZ* 32: 316–17, 307. For a critique of Mishima's assumptions about the antimodern prelinguistic medium of film, see Hasegawa (1971, 157–60).

86. "Yūkoku o kataru," *MYE*, 540–41.

87. Adorno (2005, 74). Originally written during the war, *In Search of Wagner* was not published until 1952. My thanks to my colleague in UT Austin's Music Department, Eric Drott, for pointing me to this fascinating essay.

88. Adorno (2005, 75–78 passim, 80).

EPILOGUE: DIALOGUING WITH THE DEAD

Epigraphs: Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* (originally published in 1927; 2023, 232); Licinius in *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (Doerr 2021, 47).

1. Enchi (1998, 246; originally published November 1971). For this densely intertextual rumination on her relationship to Mishima and to books, Enchi takes her title from Schubert's 1827 *Winterreise* (Winter's journey), one of his last compositions (as he was dying of syphilis at the young age of thirty-one) in which he set to melancholic music twenty-four poems whose speaker wanders through barren cold winter landscapes, tormented by unrequited love and existential angst.

2. Enchi (1998, 239, 243, 254).

3. I thank literary scholar Tsuboi Hideto for sharing the information that Mishima's translation of D'Annunzio's play bears a red cover.

4. Enchi (1998, 264).

5. Carson (1999, 99).

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