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.