

The One That Dies

by Greg Macon

I went on from there. I passed that time. I walked away. This is what I was doing at those times. Days which I would preserve in forgetfulness.

How shall I admit myself to this project? Where should I have begun? I have already forgotten numerous beginnings and am nevertheless compelled to recreate them, as if they would return to betray any I make here. What is not true.

For, as well, it would already be obvious what had happened. And I would be accused of laboring either the story or the facts, one with the other.

If I have been driven to cover up not only the evidence but the premise, you must understand that it is also out of the responsibility of giving the most thorough testimony. I say responsibility misusing it under its own charge, for I could not say strictly desire, compulsion, conviction, injunction, what would fall on either side of something like my will. Responsibility asks that all its members, its agents, be absolved finally, before its sheer demand. The demand to simply strip myself, and first, last or most of all, to strip myself of all this that is myself.

Already, I'm giving myself away.

That is why I am asked to start here, and produce the most incredible lie. Forgive me for this word trick. You must allow me this recourse, since it happens to fall to me and expresses my situation, even if it too is what it is calling something else. If it is perhaps only an expression that betrays my extravagance, ineptitude or laziness, then that too is part of my story.

In reaching for the most far-reaching or unreachable fabrication, I wanted to, I would, outline the truth. To make its figure appear, but I suppose as its space. I also saw there, in that, what would make the outline the truth, an outline of the truth, and there at the tissue of that balloon, on paper (did they ever think of this incomplete ideal: the circle), the truth blinked, delivering itself to its own fabrication. Each time one would out-line the other.

On the other side of this line, the truth asked me to say nothing. To *say* nothing. To speak it, to pass over each statement, expression, confession, indication, in turn, and eradicate the premise, the point. Was I afraid? Did I run from my incidence, from my marks, from the ineluctable facts? By what then would you understand this: that I betray myself? Would you not precisely make of me the lie which tells the truth?

No. Already the truth too must empty itself of every content, everything which is content, it must be a part of, apart from, every instant, in that it will not be merely circumstantial. Would it be unfair of me to say that it is the truth itself which already behaves in this way as if it were running from the circumstance? From each and every circumstance? But, then, I cannot only be afraid and be evasive, for I would just as much move away by following most faithfully the command to tell, to speak directly, or plainly, as some would say.

The target, too, is made by a circle. More than one, less.

To begin, then, I had to improvise, to launch or throw myself into a telling which raced and erased what it was going to say. For this I would also have to make or take up what was

already there to be told, moving away from it, breaking off into an open space away from it as the incident, the full, filled map, and at the same time approaching, moving towards this purpose. I must tell the story of what was *before* my story: there, left behind it as a pure past commemorated by forgetting; and there, ahead of me, as the destiny of this story.

I must start by never being able to begin.

Already I have read this somewhere else and I am convicted by an honesty which imposes on me the form of my testimony, my answer. Forced to be idiomatic by that which declares that the answer must be mine, I nevertheless must also take up, extort, a prescribed, repeatable form. As in swearing an oath. The oath forces me to say, even as I say it, I cannot take this oath. I can neither belong to this contract nor break it: I cannot give myself over to the community of these words, nor can I declare myself, my condition, unique, for at least the simple reason that I could only do so with these words, this generalization. Like the circle that is a frame: looking through or looking at. Did anyone know this? I?

Must I not be brief? I must go back. Already there, too, I cannot but answer, cannot simply answer. But you see, there is this “but you see.” It requires that it is required, but it works over this carefully, for it does not want to hear too much. I must go back, if only at that, to that, to indicate that there is that before, but I must not claim it, claim its specificity, that precision which I am nevertheless compelled to admit. Something else happened, and something else before to lead to, as I would be asked “why” of that event, of this whole thing that was devised, and divisive. I must explain myself, must tell what the path might have been, would have been. But, in order to appear, or to disappear?

You see, I am already there, at the end, the motive, at the point where I would have the task of explaining the motive. I have not then begun this, this project that I recount, but again,

here, now. If I tell what happened, I would tell of what would have happened, as if I could have then foretold the moment, the event, the site, of this retelling. Is this a faithful account, then? Or does it not let me go, acquit me, hide me away, let me off? Does it not betray me yet again in my attempt, a justification as merely so? A denial?

Would I be made to tell?

Along the way, I may have recourse to some phrase which could only sound with the very indication, the incrimination, of admission. One of those expressions that will betray me. These too must be taken up. By what authority am I made to make such a citation? I must tell you here that these statements must condemn me, that they *would* condemn. I know, already, *now*, that I will suffer conviction upon these sentences. But what will be made of this, that seeing where I may go, I cannot avoid doing so? Surely this is the most ridiculous justification. The most audacious. To say, "Because of the nature of these incidents and of how they must be recounted, I will be forced to say things that incriminate myself, what will be purely circumstantial, endemic to the form of the statement."

What, then, do I tell? What have I said by saying this? I ask to be judged. Fairly? Here, now, me? Is this not judgment's call, already? What judgment imposes, enforces, forces on me? And to ask it, do I not suppose some naiveté: either that the one who hears has not already asked of herself, or has not already been asked in general, has not learned this or of it; or that, catching that up in its own maneuvers, the respondent would not suppose turn upon turn, possibility upon possibility, for such an asking, asking in general, as asking specifically to escape even this general, asking in this instance, to be acquitted?

When, then, is one guilty? Before one speaks? Or after? Which one?

For what reason would I "admit" all this?

Has anyone, anything decided?

For that, it is necessary to have said everything at once. Would that then, supposing it were possible (supposing it were not), decide?

Besides that, it will not have been possible to have decided on the one who listens. They who ask, they who hear the answer. The same ones? Tell “them.” Tell who “they” are. Escape this motion?

Supposing scandal. The scandal that would envelop what is said, or the scandal of what is said going out to steal away the stage, the court, the setting. That the interest were known here, were presented, were to be presented. That any interest were discreet, or even discrete. Must this be supposed? How can it be? How can it not be? For what reason could I have done something, such as this, and for what reason could anyone want to know that reason? For what reason that one? And so on.

This, I’m certain, will already incriminate me, in certain ways. These implications, supposedly so precise for being unknown, on the verge of knowing, appearing, gesturing (what is revealed or what reveals, makes to be revealed), would open up at every instant, at every instant within every instant, dividing the instant. Implication like an irresistible movement, not movement but somehow irresistible to movement as well, or itself. And the implication of implication, which would bring something before its specific implication (would let it fall, a “cadence,” perhaps), would always by the same motion go on, refer, indicate, implicate.

By the time of my confidence, a shift had occurred. The trick that really can’t be told, because of telling, of being tellable. You get to that point of knowing, you reach it, but only afterwards, and you have no basis for its acknowledgment, except residually. They say, “One of these days, you’ll see. You’ll be there.” Which means there, of course, to me. But to get there, I

make that there my own, I make it my *here*. I am a link, a pure link, and turning back, I can neither leave that other place nor have ever had it. Always this passing. To say that I changed, to take responsibility for it, is to grant another me set against me whose radical difference is (also) that it won't part from me, won't leave me, singularly, alone.

It is to this passing that I come. A passing not purely a past. This is my passage.

I reached the point where failures lapsed, would not simply stand. Where I would forget about success, a certain activity. I know this can sound like yet another success, but so too does it fail to be crucial. Some would call me apathetic, cold, uncaring. Could they have known that passion carried me there?

Did this happen before or after? Was it my story or my prophecy? Did I predict this past? Remember such a project?

And where is this point, where will it come, where will it have been? Because the beginning and the end are so confused. Since I already know where I'm heading, I also start out from there, to see the unexpected temper of this repetition, the improvisatory dread of having known so many options, possibilities, of being able to anticipate.

It is also impossible for me to say anything. You must know this result of the urge to say what is precisely pertinent, relevant, necessary.

If nothing could really stop me, then there was nothing to be done. I have heard it said that such might be exasperation, or simple exhaustion. To revive myself each day, and that this would not even mean the rate of waking, but the day after the day (already in each day), to have to suffer this resuscitation, so that it is entirely mundane, the routine of an afterlife that wears away the miraculous, that doesn't have to wait for such a special case . . .

I had spoken to people. I had dragged myself through impoverishment in some interest, some task from which to derive a kind of minimum. But what else. I had even undergone the kind of dejection that sounds to others like a plea for good, since I would then discover that one had to be relatively content to feel able to refute. No, that perhaps can be taken for too tidy a maxim. I meant that this contentment gets restored to itself after the fact, that already too late turn which takes up what it no longer is, to say of it: that is what I *had*. And contentment also means forgetting the terms of its measure, which means forgetting what it is stricken from, which means no longer having means.

This too I dragged out. I emasculated myself in the presence of others, by virtue of their conversation. I deprived myself of someone before others, deprived myself of this claim for that someone, then took it all upon myself, an effect without cause.

And the more I spoke to others, the more I could get them to speak, the more I could disclaim them, the more I could then disclaim my own relation, my relation also to myself, since I too was one to disclaim. It is no good to resort to solitude, since that community too would have to be fulfilled, thus disclaimed, put off. If we cannot really communicate, then to whom can we communicate *that*?

I abhorred such romanticism, by way of this implication. And yet this was always supposed to be evidence against me. Why such sadness? Why such care, so painstakingly meted out?

With a practical decision, I found a solace from practical decision. I moved to a place on the condition that I would not subject myself to the question of its appropriateness. It would be an act to return to, to unfold again and again. And I found myself returning to that place, even without going out of it, as if to tell myself, "Here I am, again."

I worked. Not to admit the hell of this, except conditionally, and as if to hide away the spectrum of judgments, the discriminatory train that would have secured me, made me comforting to those who worked the very formalisms that were staged against such humanity. I wanted little to do with such formalities, less to do with the humanity, most of all where it was the formalism of a humanity. This made me uncomfortable for others and because of others. My own being uncomfortable returned to me making the very words I spoke ring false, contrived, justificatory, over-sincere, equivocal. I began to stammer, run blank for long moments in the middle of conversations. It was here I discerned that along with the desire to know was the desire to be acquitted of all knowledge, for speaking was a cycle of prevarication, the dread of betrayal, portrayal. Bad to act, worse to be, worst of all this duo, this set-up.

I learned to like it. Yes, even to thrill at the gaps, awkwardness, the situation that even being must act, that falling back on a just-as-I-am requires a catch, a catching up. I asked questions, entered statements that struck others as ridiculous removals, departures, exemptions, feints.

I made countless departures. Always this diversion, this diversionary push. No proclamation. Always the drift, the cross-implication, the residue, the over-run, the falling short.

But it must have been also that something was lodged about that other departure, the source of my earlier dejection. As if in a torment, I would have played for myself the proposal of an excision, that someone once near me had departed. Would it have been worse than a death that this person would suddenly refuse all contact with me? And for me to then do the same?

Jealousy played its part as well, despite numerous suppositions that I bore some strange immunity. I learned to follow its contrary logic, to return, perhaps, lap it, re-cycle. And desire found a way to outstrip itself, first as if I were the subject of some affect, some symptom, which I

shall not completely deny, like a short circuit. It was as if I had become so promiscuous that I finished off every impulse as soon as it began. Desire? Yes, that was it. To acknowledge it was to burn it up. Some, perhaps too assured, might call it the speed of thought, a premature climax that never even made it to the body. But this also would suppose too much that rate of progression, that line, literalizing both the mind and the body.

What about an other of this: to really do something?

To do something might be enough. Enough of a task, enough of a mystery, enough of a challenge or goal. Nonetheless, there always seems to be the need to add this “really.” It amazes me, the nullification, circling, redundancy involved. Annulification? These half-senses desperately tracing around each other in auto-suggestion. One hears the retort, “No, I mean *do* something.” There already in the emphasis doing has been deferred, pushed away, impoverishing the very act that is the statement. It has always seemed to me that the effort involved in laying this “really” over the statement, literally or by some other form, is itself a tremendous doing. For how does one really nullify what one is doing, or presume it already? Because, of course, every doing is thus tracked down, blasted, breathed, collapsed, resuscitated, sheered, emptied and re-stuffed with its own emptiness. Every doing is always also a not-doing, and vice versa, and it is perhaps more of a task to respect the not-doing, seeing as how even doing *nothing* is always made into a *doing* nothing.

A surrogate for doing? To make something else become this production vacated? Can there be something other than doing?

So what of an other?

The trick, itself, no doubt. For just as surely as one would devise the task of really doing nothing, that too would be a task, a doing something.

There, too, was the project and its duplicity. Already it came upon me. Between my own activity and that of another, in the overlap of experience, I found the scrape of obliteration, the rub, the pass. All the ways that one goes away, that one goes out, departs. Catastrophic, by the minute, momentarily. To walk out, to shut the door, to go into the next room, to think of something else, to fall asleep, to be distracted, to leave, to die.

To die?

To die . . . It was there, as if it belonged to that set of the others (“of course, one could die”) and yet, its case was not a case. For a long time I don’t think I quite got it, understood what was not quite – well, right. Right? About it?

There was always one willing to be the expression of desire. I’m not certain who, or whose, or to whom. But I always found that there was one willing to pronounce the good reasons, the positive, the reason. To fulfill. And to fulfill this idea of fulfilling. I no doubt had my own little smirks about their circles. And of course, by day, there was the little “why not,” the failure to note in what the exception consisted in order to take the issue only as one of the necessary encouragement. What am I saying? Well, of course. That I was doing things. Just me? Well, we. I and the one that was always there.

One told me once that, at bottom, when it comes down to it, we are all alone. We meaning every one. All alone. Basically. When I took issue, the result was that she got upset. She cried. Somehow I managed to present something, some picture, that could be worse, more bleak, than that. As if one could not even have one’s loneliness. Perhaps she cried because it left her nothing to be sad about. No, a joke. I said, “How do you know?” Or, “Speak for yourself,” or “You’re certainly not alone in that opinion.”

But I don't think I struck out the appeal of such a thing. I just thought it needed some reworking. Anyway, her solitude amounted to, or coincided with a rather aggressive determination of what she expected of me. How could she have been wrong? What could I have said that would even deny her? Somehow, however, she decided not to see me anymore, as if such a choice were purely hers, or strictly a matter of volition.

And I was, again, fascinated.

It was even easy for me to become indignant. Indignant about such a positivism, such a claim, such an entitlement. And then, of course, I wondered what sort of request, or claim, or entitlement I was countering with. Would it really be so easy to say "no" by saying no, by not saying, by not saying the same thing? The whole matter seemed so easy to resolve by distinction, the pitting of two wants. But I became aware of the yes behind this no. The disposition and the stipulation involved to say, "this, not that."

And here I found an in-between, a kind of blackmail whereby the stakes were absolutely determinant. How to consent, even in a duplicitous way, knowing that I could silence myself, lay myself out, yes even produce my own pleasure as if it were a willful accord, a sort of mutual action and reaction, that slipping in behind such an affirmation I could deliver myself up so fully that the failure to resist, the lack of any apparent variance, even of *desire* – as if otherwise one would know such a thing, be able to distinguish such a thing, hold it up, inspect it, etc. – could empty out my expression, top it out and exceed it into a nullity, or the blankness of its own space.

There it was, already. An earlier perception of what would later strike me more fully. Or do I merely go back there having decided what I will find in that gesture, armed teleologically?

Am I relating the earlier time only as convenient to reach this later place? Destining the later time to a previous one, to retrieve itself there, find its abode?

Where was I?

To a certain point, there is really nothing but these confusions to tell. I know that there is the demand upon me to be as clear as possible, for otherwise there is just as much a risk of the truth: the “truth” of a default consistency, the yielding to the ill defined, to the lassitude that blears the careful articulation, while at the same time allowing it, the historical, the precise, the specific, the analysis.

Which came first? The despair, or that which takes it up? Cast it back? Remark it?

At some point I must have thought of doing it. Still, it’s strange, for it seems I never thought of it that way.

To kill, to murder, to «take a life» – could this be of any consequence in a life without consequence? What could be a greater act of erasure than living itself, where the strange necessity of material consumption results in a perceptive system that could react with horror at this condition? Existence always at the expense of others, other existence. Life – one’s self – me – a trail of its own consumption.

Did I become infatuated with this – act? As an act? Fool myself, exploit the notion that this was any more a production than “life” could be? Imagine myself some Hegelian perversion, an avenging demon, like a child on a church pew who thinks defiance of every statement because

it can – be thought, is there to be thought – evil is there? A Cartesian antichrist because the idea of no god must come from no god?

Take a life.

In a flash, one of those moments or instants, a confluence, a sense, an impulse, I believed murder exquisite. The ceremony, the status, the effects surrounding it would reduce the ceremony of the event itself, that lapse or slip in which the moment of death already does not last long enough, but faces the mundane forgetting, or un-living, never has enough the chance to be forgotten. Murder, not enough – the form of a death as the activity of another. There beside the one who dies.

Perhaps it was also what I had read of the sacrifice in Bataille. Perhaps it was hearing this repeated in the phrase of Poe, “never more.” As if this that would be an active negation – the epitome? – were a kind of empty affirmation of a negative.

For this, the event itself is what suffers the “death.” And if murder, killing, sacrifice, could give its value to the event, a consumption, to speak (from, of) Bataille, then the event would there be seen as the “perfect” circle, the perfectly suspended circle, neither perfect in its fullness nor its emptiness.

To kill off. The form of this flinging away towards. Blanchot and the cadaver. The place that makes here a nowhere and nowhere a here. Being beside the one who dies. And what if I am the one who killed, who caused this death of the one beside me? As an accident? To ask this essential question of the event, that question that the reasoning of the event has brought with it, as essential to its form of the event. That there is some essential question of an event, this is what is essential to there being an event, the demarcating of an event.

Was there a cause? The detective question, the question of intentionality, of agency, would already float up and out to ask over itself of itself again. Yes, this one caused it. But at that point the question is freed again and still works, or un-works, the event. But *was* there a cause? Could there possibly have been such a thing as a cause?

The “accident” of death – as if already measured against killing, that intent, murder. This inevitable end of event takes effect from cause, even that intent. As simple as the fact that intentionality requires the other – another way to Levinas’s formulation that thou shall not kill because one cannot: this is no power, no ability, no capability, because no knowledge. To extinguish the other is to get out of *that* world, to take oneself from that life, from being held fast in that rendition that falls heavier than the fact supposed without it. But the one left becomes the phantom. As if one were to extinguish all of society and thereby erase oneself, the very condition of track, clue, alibi, evidence. To live on after the other is to experience this non-history, despite the relegation to the history of juridical or civic codification of morality: murder.

This will be the question never asked in investigation, trials, stories, plays, mysteries. Murder assumed. Never that the one who dies thereby extinguishes the effect. Of course murder will go on as routinely as the police, the news, the pulse of the city, or the demand of mystery stories. The facts of murder, in all its legal or civic reality, actuality, will impose themselves or be imposed no less formulaically than the rules of murder fiction.

And what if I were the one that dies?

If I were the one to die? Beside myself? To take my own life – can I murder me? Can one murder self? If more than a nominal distinction – suicide apart from murder – this is the effective circle of effectlessness, of un-effecting. The effectiveless effectlessness. If nothing else, it is the case which bears out the presumption of murder fiction/facticity. In this case, the *corpus delicti*

has removed the murderer. Perhaps this is behind the laws against suicide, but which only lift the paradox, the absurdity, to the level of institution – to threaten that which is to be taken away from the threat. Would it be audacious, flip, to consider this the origin of heaven/hell, a threat of effect after life? Again this raises the stakes of the law's resort, its scarcely mysterious confounding, complicity with, bleeding over into extortion, force, violence. Where the law becomes already not pact or vow or oath, memorial and heading, but threat.

If murder – as opposed to death as pre-emptive death, or fatality imposed of itself, or killing, which the law keeps as its exception, its right, as in war or even the punishment of murder – is a claim of life, a claim on a life, then suicide is perhaps its ultimate or ulterior case. To take another life is to leave one for the law to claim. To take one's own life, that is not even to deprive the law, the state, so much as to refuse this civic value, this proprietary interest, to suggest that at its very foundation, life cannot be given the possibility of volition for those who would exploit it and the living. This is perhaps behind the more recent state justification of psychology, which doesn't even have to replace religion. There suicide must only be seen as a symptom, pathological, a disorder or disease, but always of the subtracted individual and never of this supervening discourse, psychology, religion, law, society: the justified itself.

The easy way out. Always this has struck me as the easy way out itself, that is, saying it's the easy way out. As if a reflex has to be added to what being alive can only attest, which is the reflex to be, remain, alive. One does not choose life first. Choosing presupposes life, but not life itself qua volition. Does one have courage to remain alive?

Once I am dead – but when, what moment, what moment could that be, how could there be moment for that – I will have accomplished – «what I want». As an epitaph, here. Exactly what I want? Whatever I want? In the moment of my death, rather, the moment after, the

afterdeath, my legacy will go out precisely in its secrecy to gain its premonitory victory. What lives most is forgotten. This is the paradox, the ruse, the deceit of the tribute.

What is the moment of my death?

How can there be this step between experience and what is the end of experience? Unable to stand beside myself as the one that died, this undoing of death itself nonetheless inhabits me, division of me, the space of my step, the mortal interval, this pulse of obliteration, like, if not, life's consumption. This beyond/not of experience, this hole insinuates itself in all reference, the consumption of material in the very apprehension of it. The me that would not have itself shed in forgetting eats up its own tail in the memorial blotting over.

A play for death is to take conspicuous notice of life, if nothing else in the smug reassurance of life's "value" for those who would hold such a shiny epitaph. But to maintain the silence of life, to sliver in the camouflage of the obliterating emptiness of day that wastes away even death, mourning, honor, memory . . .

To keep myself alive would be more an obliteration than killing myself. Just as one can say "fine" to that everyday question to avoid interest, suspicion, even to avoid the repetition of grief or the appropriation by others, one withdraws that much better from the civic care that takes the life of the one that dies and the one that kills. To keep oneself anonymous in convention, to keep oneself hostage in the light of day, to abduct and hold oneself to the course of the crowd, this is to open one's own veins to the flow of attrition: living on, the scattering of seed and skin cells, past moment, achievement, spectacle, the monument of death – the dispersal of all in forgetting.

This is taking a life. I am taking a life. Again the circle, suspension, filled with its emptiness.

There it was right there. To take a life. What better way than by this taking of life that life is itself. To suffocate myself with going on. As if life gave me the choice.

Of course, to accomplish that, I could never confess it, not even posthumously.

But as you see, I did it.

I confess that life would not leave me. Even this to commit. Life would not let me be responsible for it, would not let me have it as even my own. With no choice, life leaves me only guilty of living – a life sentence, a death sentence. And who takes this confession, even as literature, already guilty of judgment.

It is not worth the bother of killing yourself, since you always kill yourself too late.

– Cioran

To write one's autobiography, in order either to confess or to engage in self-analysis, or in order to expose oneself, like a work of art, to the gaze of all, is perhaps to seek to survive, but through a perpetual suicide – a death which is total inasmuch as fragmentary.

To write (of) oneself is to cease to be, in order to confide in a guest – the other, the reader – entrusting yourself to him who will henceforth have as an obligation, and indeed as a life, nothing but your inexistence.

In the same way each of us ought both to be a free and speaking subject, and to disappear as passive, patient – the patient whom dying traverses and who does not show himself.

– Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster*