

# The Impossibility of Dying

(FRAGMENT\*)

By Juan García Ponce



I would like to begin by trying to evoke some works, by remembering accounts, by telling stories, in order to make appear the space of the extreme gravity of death in the space of the irresponsible gratuitousness of literature.

The impossibility of dying is an attribute of life. The one who dies stops being alive, and therefore we who are alive cannot die. While we are in the place of life the terrain of death is forbidden to us. No one is less alive than a dead person and no one is less dead than a living person, even if he is very close to death. It is a truth that is found within the necessary confines of common

sense, which we must always frequent and to which we must return once and again. Every living person will protest before the one who accuses him of being dead; but also, because we are human beings, because we possess reason, every living person will smile contemptuously before the pretension of the impossibility of dying. Like every living being, man dies. But, in addition, we humans know that we are going to die, we know that death exists. On the other hand, we do not know what death is and therefore it is impossible for us to die, it is impossible for us to enter—from the land of reason, from the field of knowledge, from the capacity to think, which defines us as humans—the space of death.

Death is an inaccessible state for our condition as humans. It is radical other-

<sup>1</sup> Taken from Juan García Ponce, "La imposibilidad de morir," *Las huellas de la voz*, vol. 4, Fijaciones (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1982), pp. 173-175.

ness. We cannot touch it even though we know of its existence. The impossibility of dying is nothing more than that: the knowledge that we die but we do not know what it means to die, that we are for death but we do not know what for; death is forbidden to us and it is inaccessible. We cease being personal pronouns—I, you, he, we, you plural, they—in the instant in which that otherness comes and does away with the validity of all personal pronouns. Let's enter then, let's try to situate ourselves in that terrain of the unthinkable in order that thought might enter the impossibility of dying and make of that impossibility something that is also ours.

But let's proceed cautiously. I cannot enter that space because I am alive. I cannot think the unthinkable because the characteristic of thought is that it belongs to the terrain of life in which my I is affirmed; but there is another space, perhaps, to which my I has access and which is not situated in any precise location, as neither is death for my I. That space is the space of words, the space in which literature lives. Thus I said that in order to make the extreme gravity of death appear, before anything else, I want to evoke that which occurs inside irresponsibility and total gratuitousness, that which has no commitments to anyone nor anything else but itself, and which, like death, affirms itself as radical otherness: literature taken in its extreme definition.

[. . .]

Bataille makes us see the impossible and constructs his literature on the impossibility of literature, because if literature rests on the reality of words and the reality of words is found only in that neutrality that makes them similar to the reality without reality of death, words cannot express the supreme anxiety of life that

finds itself in the knowledge of death. From Bataille's point of view, literature must destroy literature itself, before anything else. Only in the space of destruction, beyond every beautiful form, only in the contempt of form, which leaves us naked and unarmed before anxiety, can the truth of literature be found when literature turns and looks toward the space of life. Therefore, in order to continue having the right to its existence, literature must constitute itself as the supreme self-deconstitution; it can only arm itself as the definitive breaking of every order of life that implies the knowledge that death exists and insofar as I die I exist, as a well known verse from our tradition tells us.

[. . .]

We do not have to work very hard to realize, then, that in the final analysis we find ourselves before a writer, that the narrator is a writer because the writer is someone who does not exist, who has no reality but that which is at the heart of that force that strips him of all reality; that is, writing. Writing, in order to show itself, nevertheless needs to locate itself, to enter, to move, in the terrain of contingent reality, and should appropriate the movements of that reality in order to make itself communicable; but the iniquity, the corrosive character of writing, is found in the fact that it penetrates into that field, appropriates the movements of that reality, in order to convert them into the absence of reality through its own action. ■■■

**Translated by Margarita Vargas  
And David E. Johnson**  
State University of  
New York at Buffalo