

Waiting for Death

For every looking forward, there's a looking beyond.

I'm looking forward to my retirement.
I say that to myself, and to everyone who asks
I say: "I think of my retirement
as a full-time research fellowship—
self-endowed, of course." Heh, heh.

I looked forward to graduation from grade school—
and starting high school;
graduation, starting college;
then graduate school and marriage, and job and family...

On and on with promotions and raises, awards
(some won, some wanted), grandchildren.
With every looking forward, a looking beyond.
And now retirement—I'm really looking forward to it.

I've always deemed myself a thoughtful person,
a man truly of sense and sensibility.
A man of inner quests, unswayed by externals.
Then the flash: And after retirement...?
My first answer: death.

.....

The answer for a man of sensibility, of inner quests?

Well, that *is* a looking beyond.
If I thought of heaven as a Great Beyond,
that could do it.
But I don't,
and death all by itself is pretty much
the end of experience.

Some people, like Maurice Schwartz,
made the advent of death the great experience—
and even got a book out of it.
(I didn't read it; I shouldn't critique it;
but I don't think that's my sort of thing.)

Should my new definition of 'beyond'
be a sort of transcendence?
Betty is doing that, in a way,
or at least trying to.
All the things that came to mind above
were very much in the here and now;
not at all uplifting or transcendent.

Is there really some spiritual essence
worth uncovering at this late date?
Would such a quest get me up in the morning
feeling I had to get a fast start—
(after doing all my exercises that keep my physical essence
in some state of repair)?

That it's a quest I don't doubt.
But will it get me up?
Or can I learn NOT to have a quest, a goal?
Can I get up each day and just enjoy it?
Just do what I feel like doing
and not think of where it's going?

Realize that living through time,
without accountability for its expenditure is fun?
Is in itself fulfilling?
Always a great time-waster,
I've justified my idleness
by its rehabilitative effect on the psyche,
if not the soma:
a clear mind will produce.

But if all time is now fun,
then idleness is just a hole in a hole;
no justification for it at all.
Unless
it's that it just is. That's it:
it's not transcendentalism I'm in need of;
it's existentialism.

So that's my great beyond: I'm going to be
an existentialist and/or
die in the attempt.

David A. Buchsbaum
February 7, 2001