Chapter – IV

The Theme of Death
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Richard Eberhart has a high poetic conception of death. In defining 'What is poetry', he states the following as one of its chief functions:

Poetry is a spell against death. Poets are more conscious than others, perhaps are more articulate in the realisation of our temporality. Poetry is thus produced as a monument against the passing of time, against death. I do not say that it is consciously so produced by the poet every time he writes a poem, but that is what it becomes.

(pp: 10)

Having professed this realisation, he investigates death as an 'active man', 'intellectual speculator and a 'mystic'. More than providing a theme for Eberhart's poetry, death has given him the greatest stimulus to write poetry.
The concept of death, 'death in life and life in death' and death experience which is the naked reality of all realities has produced much of the best and most characteristic attitudes in literature, especially in poetry. This applies to the poetry of Richard Eberhart also. Cleanth Brooks commenting on The Burial of the Dead in The Waste Land has said, 'The theme of the first section is the attractiveness of death or the difficulty in rousing oneself from the death in life in which the people of the Waste Land live'. (Cleanth Brooks 61). The theme of death is contrasted with the idea of rebirth. Death has gained more attention and attraction today than it had before, because of the rapid sociological, technological, psychological and philosophical changes around. The theme of death and birth are always linked together. Mortality tends to recline on contradictions, opposites and irreconcilables. This very ambiguity constitutes the uniqueness of the theme because it deals with the mysterious realm. The undiscovered country from whose bourn/No traveller returns" (Hamlet). The theme of death in Eberhart's' poetry indisputably rests on multiple views, his divided sensibilities. Above all, there is the stream of realism, a potential undercurrent determining the theme of death. For life and death are an endless cycle, and to fathom into the mysticism of life is to have a knowledge of death.
Urged by over enthusiasm for Eberhart, Thorslev declares that he is the first poet for whom death has become a persistent theme. His concern is not merely with death as a concept or as a mystic attraction although in such a poem as "The Soul Longs to Return whence it came, death is an attraction, but with death and decay as a brutal physical fact" (Peter L. Thorslev 84). Eberhart cannot claim to be 'the first', although he is one among the famous, 'death-dealers' in literature. Among the widely popular thematic touchstones, the topic of death is the most fertile field for Eberhart, opening out new possibilities to exercise his poetic endowments. However, the field should be well prepared for cultivation. The poet is primarily obsessed with the theme of suffering and ultimately that leads him to its kindred theme - death. He declares:

There ought to be a suffering meter for poetry. But what a joke; How can you judge the amount of suffering, in a poem? Poetry is like fighting. 'Sir, there was in my heart a kind of fighting'. Hamlet was not averse to killing, but it is more like shadow boxing.

(PP: 311)

This theme of suffering, in Eberhart, culminates in the theme of death subsequently.
This death-concern in American literature is obviously a development from English literature. The Elizabethan sonneteers treated death both in its positive and negative aspects. The metaphysicals found death as a novel-field of adventure for their mystic voyage. As Jaqueline Banerji has pointed out, they battled with 'its spiritual implications'. It is the Romantics who dealt with it, in the words of Jacqueline Banerjee most 'luxuriously' (41). Death was the most familiar field to the Victorians and the proper sphere to exercise their sentimental and grotesque imaginations. Among the post-war generation, morbid death obsession characterises the nature of literature universally.

Eberhart must have been a little influenced by the pioneering 'death-dealers' in modern American poetry. Poet's fascination with death in his stories and poems is implicit. His aesthetic and moral vision combined with the theory of nothingness creates a sceptical view. To Whitman death is the leveller and the symbol of democracy. Death seems to be the very guiding principle of the universe to Emily Dickinson, and affects man, objects, and nature alike. The unique unsentimental ways in which she visualised death, combined with an air of intimacy, establishes a tradition of her own. Frost voices his lure for death amidst life's responsibilities ('Stopping by Woods on a
Snowy Evening") and meditates quietly on the prospect of death, after successfully fulfilling his responsibilities ("After Apple Picking"). Sylvia Plath's pre-occupation with death started early in her life and death for her is a personally experienced concept. Like Dickinson, she too realized death in various aspects. Thus, invariably all the renowned American poets developed a strong personal postwar fear of death and tried to transcend it in their own ways. Eberhart is no exception. No doubt, he echoes many current notions but still maintains an individuality towards mortality which is peculiarly his own.

While talking of death, one is led to think of war, a major agent of death. War creates an awareness of total annihilation and mass extermination within literature but it is more so outside. The social, political and economic factors in the postwar literature with horrid experience concretise the death-consciousness among the sensitive artists. The prevailing tendency after the war has furrowed ineffaceable scars in all dimensions. With the enormously increased perfection of weapons, the destruction in war becomes totally comprehensive and complete. As a gunnery instructor, during the world war II, Eberhart had witnessed the appalling horror with his own eyes. This should have aroused a sensitively conscious sensibility in Eberhart. Hence his attitude to death is synchronic.
Psychology has a major role in developing death consciousness among the postwar generation. Freud propagated the theory of a universal death instinct, thanatos, in opposition to life principle eros. These antithetical impulses are not only popularized but create a feeling of uneasiness and uncertainty. Freudian theory explains the life instinct and death instinct and teaches that they should be kept in perfect fusion and proportion in order to keep man a balanced and harmonious (nature. Thus Eberhart's thanatophillic thoughts have been partly aroused by the newly expounded psychological theories.

Philosophy also has its own contribution to make to the study of the theme of mortality. The Existential philosophy which originally manifested Itself in Germany First, and later in France after the world war 1 spread like wild fire in colouring the fundamental mode of thinking on both sides of the Atlantic. In one of his interviews, Eberhart confesses his admiration for Nietzsche for some time:

I was a hero worshipper of Nietzsche for years.

I read every thing he wrote, I adored everything he said. I understood it in a small way.

(PP: 271)

But he lost his admiration and feels differently now when he knows that Hitler and Mussolini were inspired by him.
The nihilism of Nietzsche has some bearing in shaping Eberhart's philosophy of life. Heidegger's demonstrations on the certainty of death, the necessity to live every minute in anticipation of alarming death, find echoes in Eberhart's poetry. The deliberate exclusion of the ethical core, among the forerunners of the philosophy, leads to Christian Existentialism, pioneered by Gabriel Marcel, the famous French Philosopher. He believes in the act of engagement which leads to God in order to avoid death obsession but in Eberhart, mostly the obliteration of morbid death paves its way to compassion and concern, hike most of the writers of 1960's, Eberhart manifests some traces of Existential philosophy in his poetry.

Eberhart is realistic because of his romanticism which is much congenial in shaping his outlook on mortality. Compton-Rickett defines romanticism:

"It is expression in terms of art of sharpened sensibilities, heightened imaginative feeling...... Romanticism is not opposed to reality. It is reality transfigured by new powers of vision and feeling". (Compton-Rickett 292)

The innate sensibility in Eberhart leads to the gradual reawakening of the sense of mystery and reality in romanticism and induces a speculative and inquisitive mind in Eberhart. He is preoccupied with the polarities between the worlds of
'infinite possibility' and reality. In seeking a reconciliation between the two, he is haunted by the most coercive reality of all powerful force, namely death. The horror of death is not simply a romantic pose in him but he is profoundly troubled by mortality and the transitoriness of human life.

'No one can operate in a vacuum', so the saying goes. All the extrinsic factors are invalid and nothing, if the artist does not have the seed implanted in his heart. The aspects of one's own life influence greatly and most profoundly in shaping one's own attitudes, Eberhart could not escape this natural phenomenon. His obsession with death started early, though not as early as in the case of Sylvia Plath. At the age of eighteen, his mother contracted cancer. The period from summer 1921 until the death of his mother on June 22, 1922, the poet's happiness and sunny outlook started ebbing away totally. His mother's fatal illness and an embezzlement in his father's business shook the family to its foundations. This is well dramatised in the poem "Orchard". When his mother was unable to move and was completely bedridden, sitting beside her the whole day, he read a good deal to her. He had watched intimately her pain and anguish, tensed moments and the period of stress and strain. "Orchard" reveals the strong bonds of human love that the children have for the mother. The mother herself pours out a
love "divinely magnified" by "imminent despair". The painful awareness of the children about the malignant disease of the mother is a miserable experience. Lena Lowenstein Eberhart was approaching the brink of death gradually and the sands of her life were running out already. Finally when she relinquished her life, there was a sigh of relief and the last poem he wrote during his mother's life, expresses the feeling of 'timely' relief brought by death. He declares that the death of his mother made him a poet (Engel 16). The terrible trial was (he urge for his poetic career. Numerous references to her suffering find places in his poetry and verse plays.

There is a positive and a negative side to death in the poetry of Richard Eberhart. The positive view which is uncommon, sometimes welcomes death as a reliever from the fret and fever of life. It puts an end to all our cares and worries. Death is visualised in his poetry as 'high sleep', 'high peace' and 'the mother of us all'. It is not surprising that the poem he wrote soon after his mother's demise breathes a sense of relief.

As a foil to the positive view to death, there are many poems expressing the negative or sceptical side of death too. This dualistic view is not confined to Eberhart's philosophy alone but is universal/ He ponders over the sheer pointlessness
of death which arouses feelings of disgust and frustration. Death deadens all sensibilities, kills one's fascination for life, causes separation and irretrievable loss, and leaves one destitute of all hopes. To crown the tragedy, he wonders why men should make efforts to proliferate suffering by waging wars. As death and fear of obliteration of everything that one cherishes in life are inevitable, Eberhart offers a consolation in confronting it. He writes in the poem "Only in the Dream":

Only in the mastery of love
Is anything known of the world
Death put aside
with pure intent.

(CP: 1960 171)

Eberhart's poetry portrays a recognition of the pervasive death. It is pervasive because it includes human as well as animal forms. He realizes man's true kinship with nature and all the objects in nature. The sight of the 'putrid lamb' a 'groundhog lying dead' and the husk of a cicada can evoke the same kind and intensity of feeling as the impact of Evan's and Viola Lang's death on him. He makes the truth known in "The Swallows Return", thus:
None knows the predator, but death

Is available to birds as to man in all weathers.

(CP: 1972 15)

Eberhart's musing on mortality does not pertain to one particular period alone but persists throughout his poetic career at different levels, with varied intensity. In the earliest and the first book of poetry A Bravery of Earth which is the chronicle of the poet's growth from childhood to manhood, while describing the first stage and its development, he reveals; "through intuition, life and death were unified". He understands death to be part of change: In The Fields of Grace published around 1972 the concern for death still persists and hangs over him like a cloud. The striking uniformity one finds in his work throughout is the recognition and declaration of mortality and its effects. This theme of death sticks to him, penetrates into the marrow of his existence and reflects its all pervading influence.

Though Eberhart is incessantly dealing with death and immortality - the twin subjects; his attitude is hardly consistent. Death is a palpable experience; there is more personal involvement and obsessive questions in the earlier publications as exemplified in the famous "For a Lamb" and "The Groundhog" whereas, in Fields of Grace, death, more a concept and an observation and less a personally felt experience, is obvious.
To be more specific and precise, in his early poems, he is agonized by and obsessed with the 'cancerous' and consuming power of death. The claim of the flesh was greater to the young man than it was afterwards. Thus in his earlier poems the narcotic obsession with death results in pessimism, meaningfulness, emptiness and uncertainty.

Joel Roache rightly observes that there is happiness in the poet's outlook after the birth of his son Richard Butcher Eberhart in 1946. He explains that for the first time in his life, after his mothers death and the family 'crack-up' he has acquired, according to Roache, in his domestic life and in his work as the Vice-President in Butcher Polish Company a 'niche' of peace and some benign power (132). This change in outlook is reflected in "Burr Oaks", and eventually there is an unsentimental detachment and lack of bitterness in death-dealing. Poems belonging to this middle career are retrospective in outlook generally. There is an assurance of continued existence after death as in 'Rumination' and 'Cover Me Over' which belong to his middle career. He has learnt to embrace death, pain and fear as necessary parts of life;

It is borne in upon me that pain
Is essential

(CP: 1988 142)
The assurance of continued existence after death, which commenced at his middle career, continues even in *Fields of Grace*. Man can win a measure of triumph, and some form of existence after life is certain. At times the assurance is based on Christian religious faith but it is not emphatically expressed. These are mere general observations and tend to overlap and cannot be contained in water-tight compartments.

The beautiful figurative poem Track* from *Fields of Grace* taking an analogy from sports, skilfully dramatises change in the poet's attitude to mortality. Poets have conceived death in different ways, but interestingly, with robust imagination; Eberhart envisions death as an invincible athlete and himself as the fellow competitor on the track, 'get set' and go, as a young man and beginner, bubbing with "I could not run a line as fine as his". Despite all possible changes in the mode of his running, he is utterly defeated:

I ran it square, I ran it straight, but death

was always out ahead of me, the Winner.

(*CP: 1988 307*)

The second stanza uses the metaphor of a relay race with the baton in his hand, in all enthusiasm and spirit of perseverance, he thought he 'strove better'; but ultimately he discovers to his great dismay that his adversaries-"the
attendants of death' - were ahead of him, 'cutting time thinner'.
The zeal of competition gets extinguished. This and age have
taught him acceptance and passivity and to realise human
limitations:

Now I walk as nature tells me to walk.

I like to think there is no competition.

I am myself. Whatever I am I am.

An end in itself. But death wants a new beginner.

(CP: 1988 308)

Not wanting to spare the poet at his humiliated defeat, death
gives him another chance, the role of a new beginner' in order
to give him another experience to colour his outlook and
savour his philosophy. Death which proceeds with the role of
an adversary, endsasa'paracleteunderpinner'. The movement is
from complaining lament to passive resignation which is
concurrent to that of the Chorus in T.S. Eliot's Murder in the
Cathedral. What is wanting in Eberhart's attitude is the
Chorus' Spirit of thanks giving and glorification. Finally, the
poet is puzzled at death's behaviour:

He cares for me too much, I think, God knows

What game he plays with me, ...

(CP: 1988 308)
There are times when the reader of Eberhart is baffled and wonders whether the poet is a believer in fatalism. He visualises death many a time as an agent of fate whose manipulations are enigmatical. He feels the sense of relationship with the small creatures and he is profoundly moved by their fate. Accidentally, one day he had run over a squirrel with his car and pulled the animal to the side of the road. He laments over the unintended fate of the creature in a small poem, "On a Squirrel Crossing the Road in Autumn, in New England":

He obeys the order of nature without knowing them.

It is what he does not know That makes him beautiful.

(CP: 1930 132)

Another poem of the same period, "Let the Tight Lizard on the Wall" carries a similar theme. The Poet's observation of the lizard lightly clinging to the wall provokes his thoughts and he ponders upon its fate.

I grieve thy black skeleton,
Still overlayed by fate
What protection, who the protector.

(CP: 1930-1960 43)

Fatalism is quite an obvious theme in "New Hampshire, February". Staying in a cabin in Kensington, New Hampshire near Exeter, during winter, some wasps fell into the stove.
Impelled by interest and curiosity in the creatures, he was pushing them out. He describes his curiosity in the following lines.

I first did this innocently, by instinct. However, I had early read much Schopenhauer and Hardy and soon decided to play with these creatures as the instrument of their fate: 'malice prepence' (PP 32).

Instead of his hands as agent, he uses his breath in the poem. His breath as the executor of fate controls their movements:

My breath controlled them always quite.
More sensitive than electric sparks
They came into life
Or they withdrew to ice,
While I watched, suspending remarks.

(CP: 1960 67)

In his deep concern for lives of the animals and birds, Eberhart reprimands the derangement of man’s mind which results in assuming an attitude of Plaster indifference" towards other's tragedy. Eberhart's philosophy is spiced with love, seasoned with deep concern for humanity. Whether animals or birds or human beings, they are part of nature. In "A New
England View: My Report" when "The deer faced death by
drowning or by shot":

The man did not dare to raise their sights,

Such was the condition of the animal kingdom.

"The anxiety I felt in Guanajuato" describes "a shaking and
reeling" experience of tragedy which illustrates the "plaster
indifference" not only on the part of men but also the statues
suggesting that they are in no way better than the heartless and
lifeless statues. The poet sees a small boy leading a blind man
down a "ruinous street" but unfortunately the man is run over
by heavy traffic. There is no one to draw the body aside except a
few small boys. This incident provokes grave thoughts on the
onlooker. He is led into a state of "frenzy of belief - the belief
about sudden cessation of existence, to which all are "blind".
Mankind, as embodied in the blind man, moves towards the
hidden tragedy; what manner, place and hour, is the top secret.
When Eberhart is critical about man's indifference, he finds
exactly a contrary attitude in the animal world. For example in
"Flux";

(When) The boy, in his first hour on his motorbike.

Met death in a head on collision,

His dog stood silent by the young corpse.

(CP: 1988 251)
David Gutmann in the book *Death in American Experience* observes that death-consciousness is prevalent in its youthful members as a peculiar mode trait. Death phobia dominates their thinking and action and this accounts for the increased number of suicides in modern times. The young man spirals slowly towards the psychological condition which is supposed to be normal and common among the aged. Being aware of the odd tendency, Eberhart gives expression to it in his poem. “Hardy Perennial” which appears in *Fields of Grace*. A detailed analysis of the poem would not only depict the idea of premature gerontocracy but reveal the ways the young and the old take death.

The distinct arguments or attitudes that of the young man’s and the old man’s towards death are vividly pictured. One might wrongly opine that in youth people have no thoughts about death at all: but in old age, being fascinated by it, as all other things lose their charm, they hasten to it. But the paradox stated is opposed to the accepted norm and a little thinking would convince any reader. The two points of views juxtaposed in "Hardy Prennial" in *Fields of Grace* are realistic and probable. The general structure of the poem divides itself into two parts - each consisting of two quatrains prefaced by a refrain.
In youth we dream of death In
age we dream of life.

While young, the author must have cared for life, and the
pleasures it offered. Life was characterized not by a breathless
pursuit, chasing and hunting after life's unknown glories. It was
a life of dream - believing in the possibility of the impossibilities
and the attainability of the unattainable. The enduring and the
most enterprising spirit was engaged in its "savage pursuit".
Death too, like all the objects in nature had its tremendous
fascination, may be due to the curiosity to probe into the
mystery of death, as exemplified in the poem "Hardy Perennial"
in **Fields of Grace:**

The paradox was my brimming blood, My
bright, brimming blood, my force And
power like a bride to the future. Could
not contain in white flesh.

The whole "youthful" being could not contentedly be
contained in "white flesh". The epithet does not stand for putrid
or diseased flesh because that is never the youth attribute, but
it symbolizes blankness and unsullied existence. This is typical
of Eberhart's altitude to mortality as a young man. His striving
spirit wanted to transcend reality - to go mysterious of all
mystery, he sought it in order to gratify his craving spirit.
In the second section of the poem, the bright picture, the spring in the young man's life has been reverted to its gloomier aspect depicting the fall in one's life. Death is conceived in its crudest aspects - in the most unrefined ways - nipping at the generation like a perverted problem child, the misanthropist, the fiend or the enemy to mankind; plucking life or lighting it like thick fog. The sudden falling of snow puts an end to all vegetation and life. Being utterly disillusioned at "death's savagery", the poet seeks a solution in the final quatrain. Love and concern for the fellow being is the only answer. The speaker decides firmly:

I would give love to every being alive,
Penetrating the secrets of the living.
Discovering subtleties and profundities in
Any slightest gesture, or delicate glance.

(48)

Some modern poets evince a stronger lure to death. Death has its fascination and beauty. Freud's psychoanalysis expounds the ambivalent impulses in man. "Excessive brooding over death is assumed to reflect one's morbid aversion to the thought of dying but it also bespeaks the morbid attraction". (Clark Griffith 140). Emile Dickinson's poetry is the classic example where these symptoms are found
abundantly. Sylvia Plath with the experience of a veteran artist remarks in "Lady Lazarus":

Dying is an art, like everything else
I do it exceptionally well.

Wallace Stevens has imaged death as "the mother of beauty". In "Sunday morning", he illustrates that it is the principle of change and in change alone can come fulfilment of desire and it is complete only in death. This dichotomy, similar to that of Keats' "Truth and Beauty" is shown in Eberhart's poetry too.

The poet perceives a likeness between beauty and death in "Whenever I see beauty I see Death". This idea originates from an incident when a woman died at the prime of her beauty. The poet declares that since death is everywhere, it follows that the beauty of death also is universal. In "The Horse Chestnut Tree" the poet enters the portals of celebration and expresses his wonder at the "great flowering world" created by the "law giver" namely, death. The peculiar experience of enjoyment, while being ravaged by the golden flies - the agents of death - is dramatised in "When Golden Flies upon my Carcass Come". The reason why "I walked out to the graveyard to see the Dead" is the golden pheasant sitting at the gate, is the centre of fascination, as the snow-falling forest to Frost in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening".
Death has been realised in many ways by Eberhart as it has been by other American poets. Dickinson images death as a gentleman suitor, with honourable intentions of taking the Lady to the "bridal rooms in Heaven". Eberhart's views on death are as ambivalent as that of Plath's in bringing out the pleasant as well as the unpleasant aspects of death. In "Hardy Perennial", the poet is not as much bewitched by the person Death, as the King and Emperor, as by its unfathomable mysterious kingdom. In "Horse Chestnut Tree", he compares death to a law giver. When men become "outlaws of God's property", death will drive them from the scene. He apostrophises death as a comforter, reliever; or sometimes it is a passage or a door to another world. In 'Track', death is presented as well accomplished and eager athlete. He presents death in its negative aspects with unpleasant and repugnant suggestions. The pornography of death suggested by Geoffrey Gorer can be rightly instanced in 'The Virgin'. Death is a "whore", "beggar", "designing lecher" and what not. He also pictures death as the "cancerous fiend", "Glowing death", "Heavenly adversary", and "Lung blasting Death". He is aware of "a living horror of common death". In "Ur Burial" death is a means of rejoining the dead as in Plath's "Daddy". He defines, "death is stiffness" and the dead are "voyager(s)". Death is elusive "He begins to loiter when I think". In no way is Eberhart's conception of death as a reality inferior
to Dickinson's. Eberhart can visualise the agents of death - in a queer way, as the power of poetic thinking as in "The Cancer Cells," from Undercliff justifies his choice of the symbol. In this connection it has been pointed out:

The artistic appeal ever of one of the instruments of man's death and the arbitrary and overpowering destiny that brings death, are subject matter for "The Cancer Cells", "Forms of the Human" and "Oedipus". (Engel 86). "The Cancer Cells" from Undercliff, opens with a simple but direct statement that the poet happens to see a picture of the cancer cells. He describes them as having sinister, inauspicious shapes portending danger which eventuates in "death. There is nothing benign or delightful in their attitudes except threatening, menacing and malignant association. He suggests that the violent and the agitative mood of the cancer cells have outgrown the test-tube. Not being content to be constrained in the tube, like the outlaws, they have violated their confines.

He is struck by the two outstanding prospects of the cancer cells. First, their sprightly nature brings to his mind the creative artist's agile mind; and secondly their virulent nature suggests the swift spreading of communism. The height of nimbleness implies poetic creation. A passive and calm mind remains
unproductive, whereas a troubled and rebellious mind, the con
gregation of exuberant and excited events, produces creative art. The cells are vivid and expressive enough in their deadly attitudes, yet sparking, whose course is as irregular, ominous and unpredictable, as the movement of the irregular stars found in the poem "The Cancer Cells" of Undercliff:

Nothing could be more vivid than their language,
Lethal, sparkling and irregular stars,
The murderous design of the universe,
The hectic dance of the passionate cancer cells.

(34)

Like the artist's alert imagination, they are boiling out of the container:

......... and in their riot too
I saw the stance of the artists make.
The fixed form in the massive fluxion.

(34)

Engel rightly suggests that the augmenting cells are a "warning against the spread of Communism" (28). Eberhart not only ponders upon death and its aspect but also on the 'menacing' agents of death and 'sinister forms like cancer cells.
What one finds in Eberhart's theme of mortality is the multity, variety which is the very spice of life. What the critics have remarked about the inconclusiveness' of his poetry is appropriately applicable to theme of mortality too. The seemingly disparaging statement is not directed against Eberhart alone, but against any intellectual or philosopher or artist who is profoundly perturbed by the problems of death. The belief one holds on death and what happens after death are founded upon one's ideas, faith and belief; and can never be a demonstrated fact. A universal cry of despondency is heard echoing Hamlet:

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,

Than are dreamt of in your philosophy (I.V. 166).

This does not incapacitate any person from being a good poet but it rings the very note of realism and humanism.

What is strikingly peculiar about Eberhart is that there is no nostalgic effect, no persisting elegiac, mournful and 'sepulchral' pose. There is no ghoulish or repellent sense in the poems dealing with the theme of death. In this connection Seldenden Rodman, in his "Two Poetic Voices of our Time", published in New York Times Book Review, Nov. 1953, points out: "For all his intellectual preoccupation with death there is a sunny disposition, even temper, a healthy optimism, a muscular goodwill that stamps his writing as, peculiarly American" (1953).
The statement compliments the uniqueness one finds in his treatment of death. It is true that his attitude to mortality is as varied as that of his poetry and his perceptiveness is nebulous. But he speaks with the human voice and his philosophy is tinged with realism.