Chapter- VI

Clawing Death
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CLAWING DEATH

Richard Eberhard consistently deals with death and uncertainties, the nihilistic and cynical attitude seems to be the starting and central concern of his early poetic career and tends to leave faint traces of it throughout.

The mention of death immediately recalls to one's mind, the 'Clawing', 'Cancerous' and negative aspect of death. When people are concerned with the physical loss of the body, the motionless and unresponsive lifeless object, they tend to consider death a blank wall and never a door to a better world.

The judgment pronounced upon man's disobedience was: "Thou shalt die" (Genesis 2: 17), and when man did disobey, the Lord God uttered, "Dust, thou art and unto dust shall thou return"; (Genesis 3: 19); these two Biblical statements carry the notion of unpleasant destructiveness. Webster's New International Dictionary too concentrates on annihilative and obliterative nature of death: It is, "the cessation of all vital functions without capability of resuscitation whether in animals or plants".
Eberhart's conception of the pessimistic view should not be misconstrued for ubiquitous tradition of poetry which deals with the traditionary nature of things alone. It should not be confused with 'agnosticism' which professes ignorance and uncertainty about the ultimate. Eberhart's realistic philosophy is that of a common man's, who has experienced the pangs of separation caused by death.

When Eberhart is obsessed with death and decay, he directs his attention on "the cruelty of reality"; when he is bewildered by the mystery of nothingness after experiencing loss, he lands on unresolved inquiries and when he realizes that victory over the 'invincible' enemy is impossible, he puts on a noble acceptance or utters a bold defiance. These views are objectively expressed in some of his poems. Death is in no way less cruel to the body that has experienced it than it is to the bereaved. Death has its horror or unpleasant attributes because the bodily corruption is made visible to the naked eye. The poet is awakened to the cruelty of death, "the grim ferryman" of Shakespeare who ferries across destined men into the land of decay and despoil. To cite an example, the poem "The Virgin" is a powerful expression of the feelings aroused by graphic details of cankering death on deceased bodies. The poem offers some difficulty as to the identity of the virgin, whether she is an
imaginary figure symbolising youth and beauty, or the poet must have had one particular sometime paramour of his life — the 'Maia' of his romantic dreams, whose death he poetises, is inconclusive.

The malignancy and virulence of death must have forged his vision and he limits himself only to the corroding decay. The counterfeited denial of intention to dwell upon the vitiated body, at the opening line, "I will not think of her in her coffin", idea being repeated more than once in the poem "save me Hiese picture", may sound "outmodish". "But the poem is saved by the freshness of imagery especially in the first twelve lines and by the vigour of lines 16 to 27 in which the speaker declaims in a neo-Elizabethan rant that is appropriate because sight of the girl is surely sufficient to touch it off (Engel 63).

The poignancy of the poem rests upon her inexplicable and extraordinary beauty which is devastated by savage death. It runs through a series of imagery all bringing forth the fierce nature of death. The worms are the agents of death in completing the destruction. All the three adjectives qualifying the cheek — 'red', 'white', 'soft' — are suggestive of the women's admirable beauty. There is a shift in the nature of personification, the harsh death, the "needling" giant cruelly visualised stands in
contrast to naughty 'boy winds' playfully fingerling her 'resilient hair'. The first process of destruction of the flesh is complete by the graphic description:

The virginal nipples pinched by stones

The silver belly sullied by slime, . . .

(CP: 1960 50)

The use of alliteration adds to the intensity of destruction. The order of decav moves from the fleshy body to the solid, less vulnerable bones once, but now bereft of its strength:

.......... bones, O

Without strength to round to womb.

And April skin-shine browned and fouled.

(CP: 1960 50)

The concept that whether the delineation of the mind corresponds to the deterioration of the body is debatable. But to the imaginative writer like Eberhart, it is possible:

Stinking under the sweating earth.

The minds whole marble disemboweled,

(CP: 1960 50)

Whether the poet refers to the retention of consciousness which he describes in "When Golden Plies upon my Carcass Come" or the remnants of the brain inside the skull is not clear. The poet
makes a pathetic plea to the "Captain worms of the gross earth", that he should blot out the picture of "formal decay" from his mind. The next four lines give a series of personifications of death - the pornographic nature of death' - with all loathsome and repugnant association of debauchery and obscenity. It is strange that even feminine attributes are quite possible to death. She is a 'bigger', and:

Whore, or baser, a designing lecher;

Equal to Helen, diced with jewels.

Putrid at the bawdy event, like her.

(CP: 1960 51)

The familiar Helen of Troy - the Queen of beauty is the agent of destruction and death in its destructive nature is likened to her. Even in its formal decay there is a fascination and a subtle imperceptible beauty.

The next few lines are about his poor Moll - the victim of death - who is "dead as a stump". He is partly consoled that he did not know her in that pathetic plight,

But in feeling's jammed proximity;

Doltish memory, cranky perception,

(CP: 1960 51)
he sees this "ruinous vision". These feelings of nearness and affinity bind them together. The impact of the "ruinous vision" leaves his mind vigorously morbid.

The destruction can be considered on three levels - the havoc on the body, on the bones and finally upon the mind, the realistic progressive deterioration under which the despoil has been masterly conducted by "Captain worms". The moment of great intensity is cryptically drawn by the picturesque metaphors. The grief on the part of the speaker is made acute by the contrast between reduced. The grave is an end by itself and there is nothing beyond that.

"When Golden Flies Upon My Carcass Come" is another vivid illustration of physical decay, an unsentimental treatment of his imagined death. On the superficial level, there is no sense of horror, mystery, morbidity or anything dreadful. Instead, he objectively views and enjoys himself at their play, the mission of completing the bodily decay. He seems to have felt that even physical decay is not as one imagines it to be.

The golden flies, "those pretty monsters", "shining globules" like "trustened oily suns" assemble the luminous gems upon one point and bloom like "burning gold". They work out a "diadem" decked with "their several gems". In a sarcastic manner, he
watches the devouring decay upon the "rotten flesh" brought about by the senseless' little monsters, proclaiming the passing of time and the consequent arrival of death and decay. He exclaims that there is still beauty "even at the guts of things". One might wonder whether it is possible to watch one's own decay, and is there anything surviving, soon after one's last breath. To associate flies with putrification and decay is quite common. Though the poet assumes a bold front, there are suggestions of inward fear and horror at bodily corruption and decomposition. He would have seemingly defied fear and dread, but frequent suggestions to the burning gold do not give pleasant and approving suggestions. The horror is inwardly experienced but he tries to conceal it. The flies are monsters and the poet is entrapped. This recalls to one's mind Dickinson's "I heard a fly buzz when I died". The point of attraction for Eberhart is the sight, visual; whereas to Dickinson it is the sound, auditory.

Toynbee remarked that death is a didactic event and the survivors' burden is greater. The cruelty of reality" reflects more terrible on the survivors than on the deceased ones. The effects of death are apparently manifested more upon the survivors
than on those who experience it. Eberhart has written quite a number of poems describing his mournful experience at the loss of some of the people whom he personally knew and frequently met.

Even while dealing with real death, very rarely does Eberhart follow the epitaphic manner and elegiac pattern. His beautiful lyric "Loss" which belongs to his mid-poetic career, is from the Quarry collection. During the course of Eberhart's conversation with Engel, he had expressed much admiration for one Viola Lang, an actress and writer of verse dramas. As a playwright, Eberhart must have known her personally and appreciated her extraordinary talents in acting. 'Loss" has come out very well - a poem with an unsullied and touching expression of grief. This is dedicated to the same lady and a sincere homage is paid by a fellow artist.

The first three stanzas are a realistic portrayal of the poet's honest impressions about her, the feelings which have the capacity to move the heart. There is a kind of magical spell which is cast upon the poem and there is a kind of elusive and mysterious fascination about her gentle personality. The enchantment is increased by the lucidity of expression and melodious phrasing. Verbal paraphrasing would be an utter failure and when attempted, full justice cannot be done:
Her loss is an something beautiful in air,
The mysterious part of personality
Become the blue mystery of the air,
The far and the near.

(CP: 1986 238)

As an artist and playwright, Viola probably had an artistic personality and bent of mind which, "become the blue mystery of the air". The colour blue suggests not only sunnier aspect but also an amount of clarity and unearthliness. It connotes nobility and grace too. As in Steven's "The Man with the Blue Guitar", it may also stand for the colour of the transforming imagination and its products. As an actress, she infused gaiety, joy and laughter into her life and that of others who came into contact with her is clear from the line, "She made things gay and severe". There is something austere about her personality. She must have successfully played many "roles" - may be directly referring to her part as an actress and indirectly hinting at the "roles" she must have played in the drama of life. The image "of dark and light" is skilfully adopted to single out the uniqueness of "her feminine grace of seeing" against the other "markings of dark and light".
The tone of philosophising fuses into the liquid simplicity of expression and in the concluding stanza the first two lines read as follows:

I do not know how to say no
To time that goes in any ease,

(CP: 1986 238)

These monosyllabic lines most powerfully and profoundly add to the sense of wonder the poem has successfully created. There is a note of disappointment, feeling of incompletion and failure of words to aid him for the appropriate portrayal of his sincere feelings over her loss; and a sheer inability to explain this abandoned feeble condition at The pure loss and the vision of her lace".

The diction is extremely simple and the lines, short or long depend on the melodious phrasing. The weaving back and forth of the same words and the repetition of the line, "Far and the near" to conclude the first two stanzas, are the artistic devices carefully adopted, to give the poem a sense of swiftness and a poignancy. There is a non-stop easy flow of words. What David Daiches has remarked about the diction of Eberhart's Collection of Poems. New and Selected can appropriately be cited here too. "Eberhart has succeeded in aerating his language, in breaking
down something of its over-solidity, so that each line and stanza responds more delicately to the idea which prompted it" (David Daiches 94).

Corollary to the theme and treatment of "Loss" is the simple poem "To Evan." It penetratively manifests the helplessness of the bereaved towards the dying. Death is not beyond children's ken. To Evan" describes the death of a small child. The boy is the first son of Eberhart's wife's brother. In what form and exactly at what age, death-stroke had fallen upon him is not disclosed, hence of no importance to ponder upon mortality. But he must have suffered from paining sickness and death must have been a prolonged agony as evidenced in the line dying slowly'. It is an impassioned but restrained cry that the angelic form has taken his deep sleep and the post is not able to prevent it:

I wanted to give him some gift,
The breath of my breath, the look of my eyes,
I wanted to give him some gift.
Lying there so piteously.

(CP: 1986 152)

The clever manipulation and the ringing repetition of the line "I wanted to give him some gift" - tellingly echoes the despair, helplessness and the poet's deep down desire to save
the boy at any cost. He comprehends his sacrificial gift of his life, but to restore life in him, would be "unwise". His outrageous cry against the sky "at the unequal fate hold over us from our birth" - is a universal and futile cry against death, a cry "man has from the beginning". Even the "weight of his experience" has failed the poet to get reconciled to the "king of horrors" /The Bible/. The universal truth about man's limitation, and his incapacity as not only to "suspend" death but also to apprehend the "secret from secrecy" is presented in the most affecting manner. The little one has made his exit into the world in spite of the poets pitiable cry. The poet passes "away silently and see[s] him no more".

The inequality of gorging death visiting upon "careless childhood" and a "slow consuming age" in "The Tobacconist of Eighth Street" can be paralleled. The intense ferocity and sorrow at dire "Hell's grim tyrant" of Pope is in no way mitigated when the death of a stranger, the tobacconist is, under consideration. The poet must have had a secret admiration for the peevish old man at his business - mixing tobacco and pouring fragrance into it. With a keen observation, the poet has established the character and the singular personality of the businessman. The stern voice of the man is exemplified by the phrase "Fields of Eire or of Arabia were in his eyes and on his neck time's cutting
edge". One day when the poet happens to pass the Eighth street, the man has already "taken the downward path of life". This particular incident becomes a wild lament on man's evanescence and mortality and how life hangs by a thread:

And I went howling into the crooked streets,
Smashed with recognition; for him I flayed the air,
For him cried out, and sent a useless prayer
To the disjointed stones that were his only name:
Such insight is one's own death rattling past.

(CP: 1986 110)

Sorrow overshadows him so much that he does not ponder over beyond death and takes it for granted that death is absolute and it is an end by itself and leads nowhere. The poems examined above describe the poet's depressed feelings at obituary of near and far, whereas "The Lament of a New England Mother," is an imaginary portrayal of the bereavement experienced by the woman at the loss of her husband.

There are some poems of Eberhart which take a narrative form. The narrative form treats an imaginary event. For example, in The Lament of a New England Mother", the treatment of tender human emotion is presented in the most extraordinary way. The specific occasion of which the poem treats is being disclosed. A woman has been deprived by death, of a loved one -
her husband. Presumably, she has lost her ways in sorrow, despair and bereavement. Concentrated capsule like phrases are suggestively used to illustrate her heartrending sorrow. In the castle of torment -"I swing in the winds of chance". She is shut up in the well fortified castle from which there is no possible outlet. Her helplessness against fate is more intensified by the next analogy how much she has been swayed "in the winds of change", implying that the course of the wind is unpredictable, hence fate unforeseen. The formidable fate is mighty and dominant like that of the potent wind.

She gets struck by the blow terribly and her whole outlook is altered. The world was most stable once, but now she sees it "rocking". Her once staunch will is trembling and measures the "panic" of her state. She realizes that the series of her miseries are the result of having affronted providence with spleen. But there is no sign of regret. Her fidelity to her husband is questionable when she cries, "When shall I trust in the love of pure husband?". She feels the impossibility of getting over her selfishness and hypocritical arguments. Her sincerity to her husband is at stake when she refers to so many of her lovers "gone into the garden".
Her vision of the world is a hostile one. The world crushes and humiliates man. Discarding the luxury and false sense of values, she yearns to "live in the rich simplicity of the earth". She thinks of herself as "the lost cornucopia of June" - the tone changes from indignant pain to the thought of her husband whose grave yard is on the hill. The sight terrifies her with the "rancour" of life. All her lovers have entered the "garden" and now she is companionless. Her fertile imagination is the "past" to the world and annoys the world so much. She gives a vivid description of her state "I am a checker work of secret" - "Knocking together in a burden of black action". Life has wrung her, Her "Despair is noncapitulatory" that is, it cannot be appeased. There is little in the poem to suggest why she seeks death except for the vulnerability to it and the fact of her solitude. The idea of death takes the same, attraction - repulsion - dichotomy, towards life and world. The tension built upon the poem pivots upon her committing "myself into the hands of the state".

Death is no doubt a reality but it is the cruelty of all realities as the poet has conceived it. cruel to the lifeless bodies and even more cruel to the survivors. From very early days, confronted by the "Cruelty of reality", realising their powerlessness against death, people have been questioning the
transient nature of life raging against fate as in the poem "The Wanderer". The splendour of the past, the revelry and the sensuous feasting have all become a nostalgic dream.

Such an inquiry is profitless. It leads man on, inevitably to intensified sorrow and increased disillusion. The most frequently anthologised poem "The Groundhog" for example which is discussed in detail elsewhere in this thesis serves as a vehicle of thought to trigger off and initiate philosophical speculation, metaphysical considerations and a series of unresolved inquiries on mortality and temporality of the groundhog in particular, man and civilisation in general.

The composition of the piece originated in "a high state of awareness, in a total charge and commitment of the whole being in about 20 minute", (PP 29). The gradual decay with graphic details about physical disappearance and how the poet has been affected from the content of this dramatic situation.

The opening lines of the poem locate the time and place for the drama which springs from the tension between the observing poet and the observed object over a considerable period of time. In the first two lines, the antithetical concepts - life and death are juxtaposed. Placing of dissimilar things together enhances naturally and simultaneously the great effect as it is always
exemplified in Shakespearean tragedies by the introduction of comic scenes. The opening with the suggestion of rich landscape of the spring season, a season of prosperity when the gardens smile at the sky sets a promising atmosphere. The narrator is amid the golden fields' and in the Vigorous summers'. Alter keeping the reader in anticipation of life and fertility, the poet subtly introduces "the groundhog lying dead". It is the month of June, when life begins. The poet, in this intensity of life encounters the creature at "the journey's end" as Shakespeare would like to put it. The poet's mood runs counter to the setting. The paradox is the part of reality.

The introduction of the syntactical order in the third line heightens the effect and shows how Ins senses have been stupefied. The shudder on him is not a mere outward reaction of having seen something unpleasant but it has run deep into the analytical mind which instantly ponders upon, beyond our "naked frailty". The use of plural possessive "our" in the fourth line identifies the paradoxical setting throughout "the senseless change" against the "vigorous summer". The concurrent existence of life and death is the mystery of reality.
"Aroused by what he sees, the poet obsessively decides to investigate further the relentless progress of destruction" (Mills 24). The process of decay initiated by death, continued by nature, is intensified by the maggots. The antagonistic nature too has lent a hand:

Inspecting close his maggots' might
And seething cauldron of his being
Half with loathing, half with strange love,
I poked him with an angry stick.

(CP: 1986 23)

The poet is torn between the conflicting ambivalent impulses - "half with loathing" and "half with a strange love". His loathing is natural at such an ugly sight but fascination is strange. He detests the mighty maggots because they have intrigued with nature in bringing about the decay. Even the stick shows its dissent at such a repulsive sight. He realises the futility of his violent act. The reaction cannot better be expressed except in Eberhart's own words:

The fever arose, became a flame
And vigour circumscribed the skies.
Immense energy in the sun.
And through my frame a sunless trembling.

(CP: 1986 23)
The poet is awakened to a still more frightening experience at the seething energy of the carcass and he is taken aback by the all consuming power in nature. This arouses a frightening understanding of the uncertainty of his own experiences. The poet makes all possible efforts to appease his inquiring and raging mind and to master his roused passion against decay. He stands there as a passive observer and keeps his reverence for knowledge. The inquisitive "scientific knowledge" (Sydney Mendel 64) is soothed and the sentimentalist's easily-tickled passion is quietened. Now he assumes the role of a serene philosopher and a detached interceder and kneels down, "praying for the joy in the night of decay". The poet prays for joy in himself amidst decay.

During his second visit in autumn, there is a scenic change in keeping with the atmosphere, an altered outlook in the poet too. The phrase "strict of eye" may qualify the eye of the scientist and sentimentalist is cast down, and narrowed down to realistic outlook. The dual nature of the autumn season is clearly drawn, it is the season of harvest and plenty. It is a prelude to winter. As usual, the antithetical nature of the season and the situation involved are placed adjointly. There is no harvest, nothing promising but only "the bony sudden hulk" remains and the year has lost its meaning. The trees start shedding their leaves.
The "Sap" of the poet's energy too is lost. In his labrynthine thoughts of deep intellectual involvement, the poet remains aloof with the air of detachment, confined to wisdom alone. The passionate response has turned into a slightly 'awful' wisdom.

During his third visit to the spot, the summer has resumed its "massive and burning" life lost once. The signs of decay and life are completely gone in the dead animal and it has been transformed and transmitted into a beautiful place of architecture, similar to that of the second process of decay:

But when I changed upon the spot
There was only a little hair left, And
bones bleaching in the sunlight
Beautiful as architecture.

(CP: 1986 23 24)

Now the poet puts a stick never In poke at it, but only to serve as a walking stick, an object of support and backing to the old man. "Full of wise saws and modern instances" as Shakespeare might have put it. Not that the poet has grown old but he has become wiser.

Exactly after a lapse of three years, since his first encounter, he discovers to his amazement that there is no sign of the groundhog at all. The poet is puzzled by the loss of life
and the loss of indication of any life which awakens his emotions. He cannot help feeling for himself and for the civilization of the whole world to which he is linked. He comes to the full realisation, that the drying up of life, does not pertain to that particular object alone, but it is the universal phenomenon. As he stands in the "whirling summer", he thinks of the civilizations of China and Greece, accepted to be outstanding; Alexander, the greatest conqueror of the world; Montaigne, the French philosopher and St. Theresa, the religious mystic who practised love (Aerol Arnold 31). No doubt it is a dreadful realisation, not only to the poet but also to the readers, even the things one holds so far like the greatest civilization, the political triumph, the philosophical musings and the love extended the fellow men motivated by love of God, pass away.

The thought of the dead animal has not only touched him deeply but impelled him to meditate upon great persons who embody love of power, love of knowledge, and love of God. The poet seems to imply the futility of all love here. He turns away with a "withered heart" because his inquiry, into the mystery of existence and disappearance, remains unresolved.
The narrator considers the meaning of mortality and consequently of life in the last four lines:

And thought of China and of Greece
Of Alexander in his tent;
Of Montaigne in his tower.
Of St. Theresa in her wild lament.

(CP:1986 23)

The above four lines are about the dead conqueror Alexander, the dead Philosopher Montaigne, and finally the dead holy woman Theresa.

The poem is an ambiguous statement. Does the narrator accept death in the end or not? James M. Reid explains the closing a little too forcibly when he says that "The poem ends, appropriately not with serenity but on a note of "wild agent". The narrator still does not philosophically accept death. It is not, alter all, the narrators wild lament (much less Eberhart) that is observed; certainly there seems to be some acceptance. There is a progression from the first visit to the last. Initially, the narrator reacted to what he saw with shaking senses. On the second visit he is wiser, through less happy than previously. Still later, the beauty of bleached bones is remarked and finally the narrator can see a universal meaning in the groundhogs death.
As a keen observer of nature, Eberhart is sharply interested in the objects around. Animal emblems must have prompted insect emblems also. The dry husk of the sloughed skin of a cicada, leads the poet to consider life, change and immortality. The title "The Largess" is deeply ironic because though it is suggestive of some gift or bestowal from God, the only "gift" left is subjection to fleeting time. The poet has no perception of any bestowal in the cicada's life and utters a cry of disappointment and disillusionment.

The miracle of the fly's organism and the path of its fleeting existence - build the poem's complexity. "Indian Insect Life" (Maxwell-Lefroy 178-720), gives interesting facts about the insect. It is a homoplean plant bug with two pairs of similar flimsy membranous wings. The chirping of the cicada is characteristic but it is quite unusual that only the males chirp and so the saying goes - "Happy is the cicada's life for he has a voiceless wife". It is quite amazing to note that in the early days, even time and seasons were calculated by the regular insistent chirp of the cicada and it changes its intensity as the season or the day becomes hot. This insect is the symbol of life and the fleeting time, and one is reminded of the lines:
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That strike and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(Macbeth V. 5. 24-28)

Life becomes purposeless and meaningless. It is quite but proper on the part of the poet to have chosen the insect to stand for fleeting time.

The poet has successfully accomplished his encounter with the dry husk of the lifeless cicada. The “nymphal skin” reveals the delicate and fragile nature of the wings. The third and the fourth lines build the conspicuous contrast in size between the onlooker, and the object viewed. It is so insignificant before the narrator that he has to "Let down my eyes to him". In spite of its significance, the poet attributes human qualities and refers to the fragile wind in terms of respect and regard him.

Instantly the sense of fear has encroached upon the poet and he is made to think of his own fate and mortality. Does the sad plight of the cicada drive his thought to his own end or is he cautious lest his more look would harm the most object? The following stanza gives the answer:
Lest the look I gave  
Was death's loving me,  
To every memory have,  
That himself he see.  

(CP: 1986 39)

It is described to every memory that it should foresee its end in somebody's demise.

In the third stanza the poet is so much wonder-struck at the "marvellous crispness" which is a "perfect a structure". Intuitively he sees perfection, wonder and beauty even on such brittle little creatures:

   Yet O marvellous crispness.

   Dun, but perfect structure,

   "Thin as matter is. It has its wondrous lure".  

(39)

There is immense fascination by its perfection, he holds it in his outstretched arm "in grassy (eel". He ponders over the possibility of any enduring quality in that "final form,". He considers that to be the final form because it is the last of the organs survived in that decayed body or the poet might have conceived that there in no renewal to this form and even if there is, it cannot retain its original form and its present individuality.
The following stanzas pose many questions. The poet wants to probe deep into the mystery of nature and brevity of human life. He wants to know whether he can let it mingle with the vibrant winds or "Must I not use you/ Then in every desire?"
The poet could not reconcile himself to the thought of change and, mortality over such a fragile object. The adjectives used carry greater weight – 'black' (lifeless) 'delicate' (fragile) and 'defined' (because its days are numbered) and 'crinkled' husk. Unable to find any answer the poem ends with the strong disillusioned note, eventually manifested in the last stanza:

My eyes soothe over him.

My hand tremble with force

What eternal hovers in Him:

Speak, are you corpse?

(CP: 40)

There should be another convincing and interesting reason for the choice, the poet has made above all. Among all creatures and insects, he has chosen cicada most significantly because it spends seventeen long years as a subterranean larvae, the longest period any animal, creature or insect has and when it emerges as an adult, it is very pathetic that it leads a comparatively brief life (A.I). Imme 427). So the brevity of
existence is succinctly suggested by cicada. What is the meaning of its brief existence? How would anyone account for its cessation? The question remains unanswered.

Before experiencing real death people at times experience the shadow of death, a state of "living and partly living". People endowed with better reasoning and more bravery of heart, learn to endure the dissolution more passively. Not only disappointments and failures alone, but fatal sickness, and awareness of imminent death which is nothing but death in life, are valid reasons to embrace death. Life has lost its meaning to the victims who ultimately become walking shadows, constantly carrying the thought of death in them. As Dylan Thomas expresses a similar notion in "If I were tickled by the rub of love", that he carries his own old age and death is already within him:

An old man's shank one-narrowed with my bone,
And all the herring smelling in the sea,
I sit and watch the worm beneath my nail
Leaving the quick away.

In the face of meaningless death, awaiting the doomed call, people living in anticipation of death, assume a noble kind of subjection. This great emulous virtue is elucidated in two poems of Eberhart - "Necessity" and "The Orchard" - analogous in theme and treatment.
"Necessity" - deals with a woman whom Eberhart knew personally. The most inwardly corroding disease namely cancer, weakens her. Eberhart builds up a characterization, vindicative of courage and integrity as the well fortified behaviour of a "doomed" woman dying of cancer. It teaches him greater truth that even human love offers no saving permanency and life is without any certainty. The title of the poem is indicative of her exemplary attitude and her plight necessitates noble subjection. There is a parallelism between two contrary forces equally powerful. Inward terror, consumption of life, corroding of the spirit are the counterparts to austerity, nobility and courage; she tries to put on. But the poet bemoans that in spite of the seeming fortitude, nature has sown "her blind seed" (cancer). May be blind, to its own malignancy and vicious potentiality. There are already obvious signs of destruction visible upon her. The poet even wishes for the agony to be ended soon. What is left is only despondency. "It is too late to will" for any hope even. Time, having committed a 'blunder is going to 'plunder' her life.

The poet realises the nothingness of existence, the meaninglessness of love, the hopelessness of all our endeavour and defenselessness of human situation. Men are not the authors of their happiness and sorrow but "something/Beyond our wills, is the prime mover". The poet does not linger on the
seemly side of the situation but illness is no doubt "a terrible thrill" while she is gnawed by "destroying fate/slicing the flesh, hot fangs on the bone". The "aloneness" gives her great divinity and stature. When nature bites one deeply, there are certain admirable qualities to be learnt.

    Silence is bitterness is the hardest thing;
    But nobler to ask the fire to burn more.
    If the mind can endure and sing.

    (CP: 1986 36)

Identical is the situation in the "Orchard" but the characters involved are many. As pointed out earlier, when Eberhart was eighteen, his mother developed cancer of the lung and suffered "a nine month birth of death through utmost pain". He knew that the integrity of the domestic bond had been broken. He admired his father for the moral stamina and brave front. He was always the source of consolation to the children. "Orchard" describes a highly autobiographical theme - when the poets mother was just on the threshold of death. Here is unusually a deep involvement on the part of the poet.

In the pleasant and desirable garden of fruit trees, there is already a "tragedy stalked among the fruit trees", when the mother is affected by the deadly disease-. It is like the happiness in the garden of Eden spoilt by the entry of the deadliest enemy
of mankind. He describes in touching and realistic words that the strong filial bondage has been challenged by mortality. The elders are aware of the hovering tragedy but have put on a lordly fortitude and courage but the younger are stupefied and overpowered by imminent fear and dwelling in horror:

   Strongest was the father, of solid years,
   Who set his jaw against the coming winter,
   Pure, hard, strong and infinitely gentle
   For the worst that evil brings can only kill us.

   Most glorious was the mother, beautiful
   who in the middle course of life was stalked

   By the stark shape of malignant disease,
   And her face was holy white like all desire.

   And we three, in our numbing youngness,
   Half afraid to guess at the danger there.
   Looked in stillness at the glowing fruit trees,

   While tumultuous passions raged in the air.

   (CP: 1986 45)

The second section of the poem is a restrained compliment paid to the members individually. The father in his pedagogian stature, stands indomitable. The reference to the mother who drenches the members in love is movingly pathetic. The brothers got the first insight into nature's brutality and the sister,
youngest of them all, "knew not the trial of fortitude to come". "The strong right of human life" is challenged by merciless death.

When the tragedy of death becomes inevitable, the awareness of tragedy made revelatory and human resistance futile, passive subjection to death is laudable. There is an implicit nobility in it. Every minute and second of life is spent in anticipation of death. They are so much obsessed with and saturated in the thought of death, the grim reaper of life. Life in anticipation of the inevitable hour is worse than death itself.

Another way of reacting to the invincible adversary is by "bold defiance". When human struggle is futile, people voice a cry of defiance against "the Heavenly fiend" and have the revenge taken in their feeble way. The unassailed passion is appeased and furious outer is obliterated when death is from the Quarry Selection. Eberhart tries to transcend defeat and defy death. He seems to have opined that poetry can sing of immortality and with the help of poetry he will tease and taunt death. In the society when there is so much of technological progress and commerce, poetry has been neglected on the grounds that it is neither practical nor profitable. But Eberhart felt that the grave is not the final destiny of isolated poetry. He has dramatised his
belief inspite of "wolf-circling" death's hold on him. He will tease
death with the love of poetry. Writing for Eberhart as for Wallace
Stevens, is a way of "getting along".

There are two possible "Ways and Means" of thriving, first
the intellectual stance, so that one can "light with the tools of
the mind"; secondly with "the love of the lamb" which
unmistakably implies Christian associations. The "lamb" standing
for Christ suggests the doctrine of love based on religion or
Christianity. Being aware of death's certitude and the fact that
"He (death) will always win", he wants to outdo death by his
decision as found in the poem "Ways and Means":

Will win: But I will abuse
His privilege with love poetry;
Its power put on, and use
The subtle songs of immortality.

(CP: 1986 267)

Death can be defied and grief denied by the firm belief in the
"bliss" of human renewal.

In 'The Day-Bed", the poet views a cot, used by a lady
whom he loved twenty seven years ago and now, used by a pair
of young lovers. It does not induce in him feelings of deep sorrow
but he is happy that the cot stands as a symbol for conjugal
harmony and joy and promise of "very future" (child). The poet
skillfully makes use of the cot ("The not estranging imagery") and its association to promote his thoughts and belief in the renewal of human existence through offspring and it is a sure means to flout the "friend". The cot which was for suffering and pain once:

So long ago that suffering form Slowly
grew to death through pain.

- Now symbolises life

Reality is a passing thing.
The Day-Bed lives, remains, reminds
of the eternity of change
To this same, writing finger

(CP: 1986 154)

The last stanza proclaims (he poets faith that the "Willowy Day-Bed" is not the symbol of termination:

The willowy Day-Bed of past time
That taught death in the subtratun
Couches now the bliss of man.
A bright shape, a green new dream.

(CP: 1986 154)

One can manifest one's disregard to death by maintaining pride and admirable virtues by means of the excellence one holds in one's own field. The sight of the dead bull-fighter in
"Matador" arouses feelings for the heroic man who is preyed upon by "savage mystery" and the poet is awakened to the rich meaning of necessity, that one should hold "that skill most dear that most dares". The moral he infers at the sight of the great proud and most accomplished man of excellence, is Matador of the spirit be you also proud and defiant. By grace and skill, accost hot sunlight without fear, Try nearer to the fetish tossing of the horns, Relaxed power best defies the brutal adversary. 'Clawing death' unmistakably deals with the string in physical death. It terminates all relationships and fills the heart with sorrow. There seems to be no escape to this climatic event - the final hopeless condition unless one nobly accepts it or boldly defies it.