Chapter – VII

The Theme of Assurance
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The whole theme of Eberharts later poetry is assurance. In spite of the odds man faces, he can win a measure of triumph in this world. He will continue to exist in some form after his life on earth. This assurance was, of course, voiced earlier. Eberharts early life was passed in a family that typified the ideals of its place and time, the product of one man's hard-won realization of the American Dream. He had all the childish dreams of the future.

But the theme of assurance appears more frequently and more firmly in his later works. Expression of assurance takes several forms. It is a declaration that "ripeness is all." It is also a readiness to accept destiny and the tryst that destiny is not extinction. It appears as an assertion that wisdom contains a knowledge man does not recognize, a spiritual element that originates from higher sources than man's mind. It comes in recognition of a levity in human generations, a confidence that past, present, and future are one harmony in a universe beyond
mans sphere. It is found that it watches man. It is man's tryst with destiny. At times, it is sensed as a cosmic love, and sometimes it is specifically Christian.

Having witnessed the devastating changes after the war and the spiritual bankruptcy it has created, the poet makes a sincere prayer to God, "At the End of War," The poem is a multi-angled criticism lashed against admirals, aviators privates and poets. He utters a prayer for forgiveness, a prayer or pleading to God for many things:

"Forgive, them for passion, and animality
Like a cloud vitiating their members.
Forgive mankind for its abominable stupidity
And fury of action,
And men for the misuse of intelligence,
And for the intelligence that must ever be misused,
For the impenetrable fierceness you have put into them".

(Burr Oaks 92)

There is a good humoured satire on the poets who await, like vultures, for a topical incident to be seized upon for creative art:

The poets raving in there incontestable ravening
The war poets who ever at war
Before the war and after the wars.
The second section of the prayer is a sincere
wish in the hortative mood: May they all be
established in the grace of time Far away from the
scenes of their crime

*(Burr Oaks 92)*

There is an unusual prayer for chastisement, God's wrath to
visit upon mankind and He is the condemner because man, by
nature is incorrigible. This is followed by a series of abusive
terms on man and final turning to God to teach him so that;

May he turn the other cheek
Not bitter yet by worm hate
May joy be his abandonment
In thy forgiveness early and late.

*(Burr Oaks 94)*

The theme of assurance in sometimes specifically Christian.
The ending of the poem "Protagonists" shows his appreciation
and approval of a doctrine based on Christianity. The first two
stanzas of "Protagonists" furnish detailed description of the
soldiers who have embraced death. Specific reference are
carefully avoided. "He" stands for any soldier whose jaw shot
away, falls to the ground "blood-badged". The deepest irony is
brought out in the following lines:
It is as it was in the beginning and ever shall be His
mother sent him a cross on Easter Day

(Burr Oaks 94)

From the above passage one can understand that the most
cherished religious sentimental acts cannot save man's life when
he is involved in malignant acts. God does not encourage
sentimentality and side with malicious involvement. The third
stanza is the picture of a gay warrior, returning home with many
achievements to his credit. Eberhart ironically admits ever,
"Homer never had a hero half so grand". Finally he comments on
the Christian attitude:

But I see a man in blue denim walking
Through the halls of conscientious objection,
Because he took Christ seriously, immured,
A literalist of the imagination! Who
Believed do unto others - Thou shall not kill!

(CP: 1986 182)

It would have been better if Eberhart had been more outspoken
and less subdued in the advocacy of love based on Christian
teaching.

"On Shooting Particles Beyond the World" is about the atom
bomb which shows metaphorically how it has replaced God
himself. It is based on a newspaper heading about the evils of
the atomic war with a suggestive warning that the end of it will be blowing up of the entire mankind. When one sees the deadly inventions of war, the (act that man's disgust which was in its embryonic stage has grown to the full, in obvious. The poet comments upon man's greediness and discontentment about the beautiful earth. His unconstrained ambition mitigates him to ascend into heavens. The poet's decision, and his disclaim for man and his destructive weapons, is displayed in the last stanza:

Not God he will catch, in the mystery of space He flaunts his own outcast state As he throws his imperfections outward bound, And his shout that gives a hissing sound.

(CP: 1986 130)

The theme of the "ageless ambiguity of things" (Babette Deutsch, p.372) forms the subject matter of his good humoured and light hearted poem, "An American considers His Power". During time of peace there is constant warring inside the man:

I was in the days of peace
Of warlike tissues made.
And that was a strange man
Fighting in a shade.
All things by opposites go.
Truth lies there his lease,
Peace has come with war,
War that came with peace.

(\textbf{CP: 1930-1960 91})

Whereas at the war front, he is not inspired to act. So the seeming paradoxical truth arrived at is:

From destruction is peace
In peace the will to kill.

This poem persuasively and concretely underlines "the incongruousness of the concepts of man and of war" (Babette Deutsch 372).

The result of war is that man has lost faith in God cind in religions and all his values of life have been shattered to pieces. A spiritual paralysis has taken place in man. Consequently man has lost all purposes in life. To him death and war have become purposeless.

Eberhart is for the human world. Here also his own later poetry pulls him over to this side. He has committed himself in his poems to certain large terms. One can see a term like love, for example. As a test case anyone can think now of a very recent poem of Eberhart's \textit{A commitment}, where he says, 'Love is long and art is good to stitch the time'. It is this pouring of the
feeling into a large term such as love, this kind of commitment seems to be terribly important. Really, Love is a great topic. And according to Eberhart this great topic is the central one for poets. This is the case with the state of American poetry also. For the Americans some of these great topics are birth, hope, love, loneliness and there are ideas of evil, hatred, and death.

One will notice that in the history of English poetry there have been more great poems about death than there have been about birth. It is interesting that birth is positive, life-giving, death is negative and life-taking away, and yet death transports the imagination of a poet much more than birth. But the fact is that one wants to keep the good poems and the good poems are more often about love. The truth is that love is a positive thing, however complex and subtle, than poems about hate or evil. On the contrary Eberhart admires deeply someone like, Baudelaire, who had a great deal to say about evil and hatred and decadence.

The readers want the love poems to comfort them in their affliction. Love is an Infinitely more comforting commitment than hate. One has to be careful when one talks about love poetry. There is not so much love poetry after all. May be 'The Phoenix and the Turtle" is one of the best love poems in the
language and yet it is a hard, intellectual metaphysical (Richard Eberhart 224).

"The Ineffable" is an excellent poem on human love and brotherhood of man. The Biblical theme of Cain and Abel is cited to illustrate the Fall of Man:

When Eve ate the apple
My woes began,
But I didn't believe then
That I would believe in Original Sin

(CP: 1986 61)

"On the Fragility of Mind" is an early poem of Eberhart. It is one of his most celebrated poems. But his poem "If I could only live at the Pitch that is near madness" is the better one. We can see that this poem epitomizes for him the 1930's. It was written in the heart of the depression years, which were fierce and hard. At that time Eberhart was a struggling poet. He was in the state of almost total love, psychic violence, which most poets have a long, long time. Eberhart calls it a platonic poem as it has a platonic idea. It is the idea that the child is father of the man. It goes back to Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" from "Recollection of Early Childhood". Eberhart envisaged the Platonic idea as a great world soul, a cloud in the heavens, as it were, and when we are born, part of
the world's soul is put upon our bodies, and the body and soul go together. This is rather like the Christian concept. Then at death the soul goes back to the world soul, the body goes back to the earth. So, this is dealing in a lyrical quick-tempered way with these ideas, and then one had to resolve the poem, so one will see that the resolution is in the last four lines:

I gave the moral answer and I died
And into a realm of complexity came
Where nothing is possible but necessity
And the truth wailing there like a red babe.

Indeed. Eberhart speaks of human love in the following stanzas also in "The Goal of Intellectual Man":

But it is human love, love
Concrete, Specific, in a natural move
Gathering goodness, it is free
In the blood as in the minds harmony.
It is love discoverable here
Difficult, dangerous, pure, clear.
The truth of the positive hour
Composing all of human power,
Love, for Eberhart is not a complete answer to the problems mortality raises. Like the Christianity with which he sometimes associates it, however it is a partial answer and one of the best available. In the poem The Struggle, the man of the poem seeks to live despite the chaos he senses in existence. He hopes that everything will "Become what it is not", that mercy and love will become dominant. In "Later or Sooner" the poet finds that, though he ages, the cannot yet make final statements about fate. Unable to give clear comprehension, he makes a declaration that in both an inspiration and a platform for aesthetic endeavor; "When man rose up, he loved,/And when he loved, he sang":

This clearly shows that "mortality is somewhat less frequently a theme in Eberharts later poetry, perhaps because of his increasing confidence in the possibility that death is not the end of existence. But the subject can still lead him on occasion to write powerful, sad, but unsentimental poetry" (Richard Eberhart 128).

For man in this life, Eberharts ideal remains the state of creative tension or balance. The thoughtfully imaginative man will be like the sailor of "Moment of Equilibrium Among the Island" aware that profound depths appear only to imagination, keeping in this life to the "essential" qualities of buoyancy,
delicacy, and strength". The philosophical man will see his fellow human beings as cosmic yet admirable to be sympathized with, though perhaps only from alar, because of recognition that all men share in destiny. He will be more than merely contemplative. He will struggle to live in spite of his realization that he will lose the fight. He advises a measure of grace, beauty, love and courage in this struggle. And always he remains sure that the ultimate answers to his questions are locked in mystery:

"Assurance continues also to arise from perception of an interinvolment of spirit and flesh. This perception may arise from meditation on the Yainscapes' of a summer afternoon; or it may come more transcendentally, as the reader is told".

(Richard Eberhart 113)

**Thirty One Sonnets** (1967) is a series of love poems written, according to Joel Roache, in connection with Eberhart's long, once close friendship with Louise H. Hawkes. The sonnets show youthful fondness of "Artistic" diction ("smote") and Shakespearean beginning. ("How shall I compare him to") as well as for the Elizabethan theme of inability to take one's love. The exuberance of the poems is too often given by the flat declaration and quirky syntax, rather than by vivid or original
metaphor and imagery. One considerable virtue is a quickness of pace that suggests that the poet has been impatient with the constructions of form. This virtue Eberhart recognizes in "A Note to the Reader" which says that though he wrote the sonnets about 1931, only in later years did he come to recognize "the uniqueness of their energy and passionate How". The sonnets must be considered early exercises, rather than accomplished poetry.

One means of ordering the universe is expression of love. "New Love", a melodic poem, is a complex one. It has colour symbolism. In afterlife, he will delight at last in the understanding of this world - represented by green willow that is denied him while alive. The whiteness indicates emptiness. It also symbolizes purity, wholeness of apprehension. Beyond earthly life, man will never die. The naturalness, the absence of merely intellectual approach that characterises the relationship of earthly lovers, is illustrated in "The Haystack" by picturing a boy and a girl who "understand neither the energies surge within them nor even the richness of the luck that gives them a fire fish".

The inexpressibility of a more spiritual love is celebrated in Section 1 of Love Pieces". Love, the poem says is a "poetry of the world". But such love does not live. Section II of "Love Pieces"
calls for the "Death of Love". When love comes to a man, he lives in brightness and glory. He is mastered by feeling. He cannot think. The poet celebrates this "paradise of the senses". But the mind has only temporarily been put aside it returns to "bring love down", to make one aware again of suffering and disorder. Thus fate blocks man's love, and the poet realizes that what he wants to celebrate is rather the death of such love. The implication is that the death of limited mortal love will make it possible to attain permanent love, a radiant state which will not be in the grip of time.

Like Robert Frost, Eberhart finds values illustrated in nature. In "Lions Copulating", he praises the naturalness of great beasts. In "R.G.E." - the title in his own initials - Eberhart reports a boyhood determination to "understand", to win permanence by carving his initials on a tree. But the gesture failed. The tree felt shame, for it existed in natural "brotherhood" with the earth and needed no belief in permanence, Realization that man can never surpass some aspects of nature is expressed in "Outwitting the Trees". One cannot outwit the trees. But one can admire their representation of qualities men long for. What matters is not nature or philosophies but assurance. Assurance is specifically Christian, as in "Recognition". It arises from clinging to a chastened belief in immortality, as in
"The Immortal Type". It comes, as in "Opulence", from delight in the riches of summer sunsets and human maturity.

Assurance of a sort comes too in observation of courageous or skilful behaviour. "Ball game" draws an analogy between a base runner and the course of a man's life, finding the player's dashes and retreats a dramatic symbol of all human activity. "Swiss New Year" reports how observation of youths holiday high spirits drew adults, people who had "known death", to suspend their disbelief and accept for the moment the "elegance and praise" of life that the youths express.

Assurance comes as mysterious birth brought on neither by action of man nor by any impulse that could be described as inspiration. In "White Night of the Soul", it comes suddenly. The title and the poem itself show that the prelude to reinvigoration is not the Christian mystic's dark night. As a poet of wonder Eberhart often presents and comments on incongruity and lack of understanding. The poet's hope is that the future is more" gentle than the present. The question of "Boston" "What do we do with our old histories?". The poem rambles conversationally through a series of allusions and anecdotes.
Many of them are from Eberhart's years as a preparatory school teacher. It is clear that the future is always prosperous, but the colour and individualism of the past are still there.

In "Mexico Phantasmagoria" the significance of the timelessness, the mixture of race and cultures, of worships and recreations, is clear. The rich variety makes one wonder about "the value of individual wail". It makes the ultramodern to realize that Mexico represents "man's passionate realization, the struggle of mankind for brotherhood".

The future Eberhart wants is indicated in "Sanders Theatre", the 1967 Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Poem. The poet recalls his attendance as a youth at sermons preached in the Sanders Theatre. When he thought of time and death, the emotions of fear and joy racked him. These recollections load him to ask whether man will bomb himself to death, whether space travel is anything more than man's attempt to avoid problems on earth, whether man can escape mechanism only by turning to the psychedelic. The poet answers his questions by hailing the source of spiritual unison. He remarks that there is a ritual pattern which requires suffering and indecision in this life:
"Under these circumstances, he values old myths but demands a new American international spirit - a world wide brotherhood of men who will love art. In the unity, the poet asserts, man will 'exceed himself, wail triumph over temptation and failure"

(Richard Eberhart 159)

These assurances are matters of belief, not of logical demonstration.