Chapter – IX

Conclusion
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A prolific writer with more than a thousand poems to his credit, Eberhart has not been accorded the position due to him in the galaxy of American literature. Though this phenomenon seems puzzling in the beginning, a deep contemplation and a careful scrutiny of the history of Twentieth Century American poetry reveals that this is mainly because Eberhart has defied all canons of classification as belonging to any particular school of poetry. A highly original writer who has resisted the Influence of the great masters of modern poetry like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams and others, Eberhart is strikingly individualistic and original. A writer with romantic temperament, Eberhart exhibits metaphysical concerns in his works which endows his poetry with an atmosphere of gloom, pain, tragedy and suffering.

Eberhart's distinctiveness is due partly, to the fact that his aesthetic origins can be traced back to Blake and Wordsworth, and to Tennyson. He developed his talents and matured in his
career without coming under the direct influence of his American contemporaries from either Pound and Eliot, or William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens. Thus, Eberhart was not a participant in the "modern" poetry movement.

Eberhart explores the possibilities of a personal lyricism enclosing a broad spectrum of human experience and boldly testing the forms and language for articulating what imagination gives and intuition seizes. Eberhart's poems set themselves in a curiously singular relationship to established canons of modern poetic practice. Some of his poems treat philosophic themes. In his handling of words, Eberhart is playful and witty. Eberhart is also purely lyrical at the opposite end of his emotional range.

In Eberhart's poems, one finds that emotional pressure or the love of wit exceeds the poet's control and discrimination. As a result, it is observed that there are faults in diction, tone and rhythm. But it is a small price to pay for many successes. The voice is recognizably original. Eberhart's notion of poetic creation, of the act of composition, and of the operations of the poets mind all of them so intimately connected with what he
conceives to be his essential artistic task. It makes him vulnerable to these dangers as well as leading him on to an abundance of fine poems.

Eberhart thinks of the poem at its highest level, inspirational in origin. He designates several of his pieces "as coming under this (Platonic) theory of creation". In view of the above, a reader often finds that the qualities of Eberhart are spontaneity and the immediate presence of involvement with a particular experience. The long autobiographical poem "A Bravery of Earth" achieves such effects. The poet loses himself too often and controls over his material in the current of his strong but conflicting emotions.

The qualities of inspiration, the emotional intensity, the earnestness, the moral and personal sincerity are there to conclude that Eberhart is in a way a twentieth-century Romantic. "Romantic" is a nebulous and dubious epithet. The Romantic Movement was a historical phenomenon with some measure of coherence. It is a matter of record that every literary movement since 1830 has either allied itself with one or the other of the great Romantics, or, more commonly in this century, defined itself in its opposition to all Romanticism.
Eberhart is a Romantic in a more definite sense than what Stevens implies in his assertion about the Romantic element in poetry. Eberhart is a nature poet. Furthermore, he has allied himself with no twentieth-century school of poetry. But Blake, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Whitman obviously influenced him in his earlier years. The themes of Eberhart's poems are just like the themes of the Romantic poets. But Eberhart's solutions to the problems are different. He offers modified and modernized solutions to the problems that concerned him.

Like all Romantic poets Eberhart frequently takes some object of everyday nature - a beast, a bird, an insect or a flower. Nature poetry of this sort is as old as medieval bestiaries. It is allegorical in nature. It contains moral illustrations. And nature poetry of this sort is still popular in American letters. Marianne Moore draws lessons from seagulls or fishes. Richard Wilbur has compiled a modern bestiary. Robert Frost Images forth truths of man and nature from birches or butterflies or cows in apple time.

Eberhart's short lyric lines with their irregular rhymes and rhythms are very much his own. But the stages in the poet's spiritual growth are remarkably like those Wordsworth describes in The Prelude: The first awareness of life as well as sensual force, the "fever" of the sun and of the world of energy and sub-
intellectual life. This is very much the same as the feeling for nature which Wordsworth described in his youthful days climbing over the Cumberland hills or along the banks of river Wye. Gradually the poet grows into the light of a new manhood, 'A Bravery of Earth'. The third 'awareness' brings a new understanding between man and nature. The vision is similar to Whitman's.

The elemental joy in physical nature is characteristic of Eberhart's early poetry. He achieves a pure nature lyric in his mature poetry. An even later poem "Summer Landscape" with its delicate observation and its richly sensuous imagery and sleepy rhythms reminds us one of Keats's "Odes To Autumn". But the joy in uncomplicated nature is rare in Eberhart's latest poetry. He moves on to consider themes and problems as more complex and tragic. The second 'awareness' comes for him as it came for the first Romantics. The Romantics did not come by their mature single visions', easily. A new mystic vision came into being when the Romantics had arrived at a new unity. Wordsworth found his new unified vision in nature in which all things were transformed into spirit. But Blake's synthesis is modern. He refused to relinquish the world of the flesh in the realm of the spirit. His God created both the tiger and the lamb. In this respect Eberhart is closer to Blake than to Wordsworth.
In a much later 'animal' poem, "Seals, Terns, Time", the poet illustrates man's dual nature by picturing himself balanced in a boat on the surface of the sea, drawn between the seals, those 'blurred kind forms that rise and peer from elemental waters', and the terns, wheeling gracefully in the free blue of the sky.

Eberhart's concern is not with how a man may find solace through nature but with how he may endure and win a measure of "bravery". Assuming that death is an event of significance, not simply an end to existence, he asks what this significance may be; and he alternately exults, cries out, and meditates as he ponders over the question of how man should confront destiny.

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 best available. 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, for instance, or evil. On the contrary Eberhart admires deeply someone like Baudelaire, who had a great deal to say about evil hatred and decadence.

Eberhart's themes are varied and striking; such as Nature, love, suffering, death in its multifaceted aspects, the evils and horrors of War, the futility of human life, the relationship between God and man, time and assurance. According to Eberhart, human suffering - physical and spiritual is the most interesting subject matter for poetry. He treats such themes in a highly original, simple, straight-forward and sometimes colloquial style. Particularly, death is portrayed as an inexplicable mystery in Eberhart's poetry. Death is a fascinating and moving experience for him. At the age of eighteen, Eberhart 'participated' in the lingering death of his mother. Philip Booth opines (hat, "Eberhart is repeatedly most incisive when his poems con front death. This 'savage mystery', has been lifelong concern, and he is most his own poet when considering mortality, he observes himself as man in relation to Nature" (22). In his poems he examines the concept of 'death-in-life', 'lie-in-death' 'birth and death', 'the futility of death' and clawing death'. The portrayal of the multiple aspects of cleath reveals his divided sensibility. In his treatment of death, Eberhart is obviously influenced by the pioneering 'death dealers' in
American poetry like Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman and Sylvia Plath. Apart from this, the impact of the Freudian theory of life-instinct and death-instinct and the Existential philosophy were also responsible in shaping his attitude to death.

This clearly shows that mortality is somewhat less frequent theme in Eberhart's later poetry, perhaps because of his increasing confidence in the possibility that death is not the end of existence. This preoccupation of Eberhart with death is a different attempt to see the inner. Sometimes Eberhart takes a Shelleyan consolation in the fact that death and decay are a return to nature. Nothing alive is ever wholly lost. But the poet does not always find such solace in the thought of death as a return to living earth. From a strictly human point of view, the tragedy remains, and this is the theme of some of Eberhart's most famous and most often anthologized poems like "The Groundhog."

Another way to face the central issue of duality in man and nature is to approach it obliquely. Here one has to probe the ultimate mystery of death. This theme was also a favourite theme of the Romantics. A realization of the evanescence of sensual beauty in the face of death is the central agony of Keats' greatest odes. His solution was aesthetic. The life-long
development of Shelley's thought is traced in his changing attitudes towards death. In the concept of an impersonal immortality, he found his peace. Eberhart is the first poet for whom death has become a persistent theme. His concern is not with death as a concept but with death and decay as a brutal physical fact.

The pervasive theme of Eberhart's later poetry is assurance. According to him, in spite of the odds he faces, man 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. The theme of assurance appears more frequently and more firmly in his later work. Expression of assurance takes several forms. It is a declaration that "ripeness is all." It is also a readiness to accept destiny and the trust 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 from the recognition of a levity in human generations, a confidence that past, present, and future are one harmony in a universe beyond man's 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. Assurance of a sort comes too in observation of courageous or skilful behaviour.

Thus, Eberhart does not portray death as a mere annihilator of life. For him the enigma of death holds endless possibilities. Death is not merely the end of life as is commonly perceived, but the beginning of a new life. This brings in the concept of assurance which one comes across in his later and mature poetry. The expression of assurance takes several forms in his poetry and the message that he wants to convey is that man should accept destiny and this tryst with destiny is the adventure of his life. This focus on destiny leads him on to stress the supremacy of God and tradition in shaping man's destiny. This theme of assurances often acquires Christian overtones.

For man in this life, Eberhart's ideal remains the state of creative tension or balance. The thoughtfullyimaginative 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 afar, 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 inter involvement of spirit and flesh. This perception may arise from meditation on the 'rainscapes' of a summer afternoon; or it may come more transcendentally, as the reader is told" (Richard Eberhart 113).

Eberhart is neither an anti-religious poet nor a grossly materialistic one. Some have considered him a religious poet. But his poetry is spiritual in the sense that it is hazy or it is ethereal. His poetry is imaginative and religious without belonging to any set church. He has no dogmatic poems. So he is not dogmatic. He has one poem in the new book called "The Meditation of God". The poem deals with the concept of God versus man, good versus evil and absolute versus relativity.

To conclude, the strength of Eberhart's individuality lies in the poet not getting entangled in any poetic group or mainstream of American poetry. He has managed to keep an independent profile. He is an interesting and an intriguing figure who has earned a significant place for himself among the leading
literary poets of America. A close study of the selected poems reveals that Richard Eberhart is a Neo-Romantic, a relativist, a dualist and a cultural poet, a metaphysical poet and a poet of assurance that death leads to life: a more glorious one.

In essence, a close scrutiny of Eberhart's poems reveals that he starts as a romantic because of the early influences of Wordsworth, Blake and Tennyson. In several poems, especially in his first book _A Bravery of Earth_ there are several minor poems that celebrate the various aspects of Nature and the kinship between Nature and Man. Basically a poet of intuition, he believes that every poet is a mystery unto himself. It was during this time that he came into contact with writers like Auden, Kunitz, Frost, William Empson, LA.Richards and became familiar with the tenets of New Criticism. In spite of his best efforts to remain independent and original, Eberhart has come under the influence of the above poets and critics to some extent. This accounts for the change in his poetic pursuit. From being a mere romantic he has moved towards divided sensibility thus bringing in varied dimensions into his poetry. Another major factor that shaped his creative career was the inescapable influence of T.S. Eliot's theory of poetry, his concept of tradition
and his preoccupation with the essential nature of Metaphysical poetry. Added to this was his interest in Whitman, Frost, Longfellow who enthused a spirit of joy in life, a quality of affirmation and love of natural things in life. This strange amalgam of the Romantic and the Metaphysical elements produced a unique poetic sensibility in Eberhart.