

appear but not so frequently. The contraction "'48ers" does not improve the appearance of the page.

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The Poems of Max Ehrmann. Edited by Bertha K. Ehrmann. (Boston, Bruce Humphries, Inc., 1948, pp. v, 183. \$3.00.)

The Poems of Max Ehrmann, a compact little book of rhymed- and prose-verse, reflects social and political crises in recent American life and includes meditations on the beauty and serenity of the outdoor world and on man's search for values which attained stimulate to further intellectual and spiritual restlessness. There is wisdom in the book—wisdom garnered from a lifetime of sensitive response to a variety of experiences—wisdom characteristic of a high prudence that has learned to evaluate the physical and the ideal, doubt and faith, matter and spirit.

Throughout the work are echoes now and then of Whitman, Wordsworth, the Bible. "I See There Is a Good Deal of Grandiloquence" is reminiscent of "I Hear It Was Charged against Me." Part II of "My Native City," especially the lines, "O my native city! thou knowest not how often I have thought of thee when far away. When I have wandered amid other scenes, and other men and women and children have passed by me, fondly have I thought of thee," has the prose form and shares the pathos of the 137th Psalm, with phrasing that suggests Wordsworth's

How oft in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer through the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

"A Prayer" has been compared for simplicity and majesty to the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians.

The chief themes are the tranquilizing serenity and beauty of the outdoors, the charm and depth and promise of love, social injustice, the tragic aspects of war, the worth of the ideal, even when it seems fated for disillusionment, the value of faith and spirit.

I have remarked on the wisdom of the book. The main question that now confronts us concerns the ability of Mr. Ehrmann to transform that wisdom to poetry. He is a far

cry from those of our young poets who insist on obscurity, who refuse to be lucid for fear of being obvious and banal, but who mistakenly attain their obscurity from incoherent expression, freedom from the restraint of design, and the use of exotic, dissociated images rather than from philosophic depth and from that right collocation of right words, which exhales an unidentifiable essence of mystery, wonderment, and profundity. In contrast to their too-frequently-unreadable productions I think of the simple utterance in Emily Dickinson's "New Feet about My Garden Go," of Robert Frost's in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and of Frances Frost's in "Atlantic Lullaby," each deep like a well where the water is clear but the bottom unseen.

Mr. Ehrmann's verse has the distinction of being always clearly written. But it fails frequently in overtones—in a stimulating suggestiveness. It does not often enough excite the intellect and emotions with what is only implicit. By telling too much it does not tell enough; it neglects utilizing to capacity the reader's imagination. One is aware of the distinction I attempt if he reads Mr. Ehrmann's "Dream of Youth" and then turns to Ben Johnson's "To Celia." In the former, youth's dream is set out explicitly; in the latter, the reader is momentarily the youth ecstatically dreaming. And would not "Simple Fishermen" be a better poem if the thought of the last two lines were left for the reader to supply? One gets the impression at times that the author feels his convictions so strongly that he cannot dissociate himself from them to view them objectively, as the artist must. Didacticism, at times, results and the sacrifice of what might have come of finer artistry. The compositions which seem to me freest of the fault are "Wanderers," "The Old Philosopher," and "The Dead Wife."

My pointing out what seems to me a weakness in much of this work of Mr. Ehrmann, would not, I believe, have had his disapproval. He had the courageous modesty to write in one quatrain:

Oh, that in youth but once could I have sung a song that held
The magic music of my soul, which ever inward welled
Against my tuneless lips! I sit alone and know the truth
With broken harp beside the ashes of my youth.

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Frank Davidson