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## BOOKS

### UNDER THE SUN

AUSTRALIAN NEW WRITING, No. 2.  
Edited by Catherine S. Pritchard, George  
Farwell & Bernard Smith. Current Book  
Distributors.

NEW ZEALAND NEW WRITING, No. 3.  
Edited by I. A. Gordon. Progressive Pub-  
lishing Society.

(Reviewed by A. R. D. Fairburn)

"IT appears (say the editors of *Australian New Writing*) that what our readers demand is new writing that is really new — in the sense of having something to say about present-day ideas, trends and problems. They have shown themselves less concerned with subtleties of style, highly-polished technique than material that gets down to fundamentals." David Hyman, in his article "Literature and the People's War," elaborates the theme. He attacks Hemingway, Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Joyce, Proust, Gertrude Stein, Steinbeck (*The Moon is Down*) and Gauguin as escapists, decadents and so on. The function of art, he says, is "to create a complete picture of man." Joyce and Proust give us "the psycho-analytic man, the intellectual or emotional man, but never the complete man." I am not at all sure that Mr. Hyman isn't trying to offer us another heresy in exchange—that of the political man. "It is the task of the artist," he says, "to awaken new sources of energy in the people, for the struggle against Fascism."

If we are to understand from this that (for example) Millais' picture "Bubbles" would be great art if only it contained anti-Fascist propaganda, then I must disagree. The primary task of the artist, as I understand it, is to produce good (and if possible, great) art. If he is out of touch with social reality, so much the worse for him and his art. But there is something more to be said: even if the artist's grasp of social reality is strong and his instincts are healthy, his vision must always be a *personal* one if it is to be of any value. I feel that the "new writers" I have quoted above are reacting too violently against romantic individualism in art. In any future state that is to be tolerable, the creative freedom of the individual must be the end of social organisation. The artist is both a symbol of this freedom and the means of its realisation by other people. He has a function, and he must not be hindered in fulfilling it, or bullied into being a mere propagandist. He also needs skill. If the readers of *Australian New Writing* are, as we have been told, indifferent to questions of style and craftsmanship, then they are indifferent to art. They should be content to make their approach to politics, or to life, by some other path.

The best thing among the prose in this collection is a short sketch by the New Zealander, A. P. Gaskell, in which a familiar type of "Imperial Army Man" is vivisected with expert malice. Another sketch, by an anonymous author, "Splinter," is as thickly sprinkled with exclamation stops as a schoolboy's essay, and is a good example (though not the only one) of the sort of exaltation of amateurism against which I have been protesting. It is altogether a very crude piece of work.

The poetry is mediocre, except for John Thompson's "Traveller" and Muir Holburn's "Australian Film Studio,"

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