

complicity of the news media in the invasion of Iraq. Like Laurie Duggan, whose wry humour is echoed in 'Notes for a Day at the National Gallery' – "I don't think I like/ seventeenth century French painting" – Gardner has a keen eye for the mundane minutiae of what sometimes passes as culture in the West. Further, one sees more than hears in this collection the potential for the performance of these poems. The title poem, for instance, is stunning in its use of language, in its quirky repetitions and energetic enjambment:

*They let fly in registers
without elision
jolt overhead outgo
out from stolen sound
intake diminish to
doubtful letter-spaces
in limping and dubious
from a harsh flood
they admonish
exceptions in pronunciation*

There is something edgy and explosive about these poems, and about the process of reading them. The same can be said for Paul Mitchell's *Awake Despite the Hour*, whose black cover (a somewhat restrained affair from a publisher perhaps not renowned for its design ethos) engenders a sense of foreboding. Mitchell is a well-known poet on the Melbourne spoken-word scene; he is also developing his skills as a prose writer, with a collection of short stories, *Dodging the Bull*, published in 2007.

Awake Despite the Hour could be described as Mitchell's 'difficult' third album. The early themes of suburbia and the dark corners of relationships are still here ('My Wheelie Bin's Big Day') and might be considered trademark riffs, often based on turns of phrase or gallows-humour puns. 'Screenprint Activist', a first-person narrative spoken by a Che Guevara T-shirt, would be vintage Mitchell if he weren't still so young. It's also, more than any other poem in this book, hilarious:

*Another bloke who had me on
(sweaty fella, don't know if he showers)
thought I played better guitar
than Hendrix. His mate said,
Nah, Guevara's a rhythm guitarist.
He thought 'Redemption Song'
was my best.*

This is sharply satirical and funny, telling us as much about contemporary Australian ignorance as the re-appropriation of political icons, and yet it manages to do so without appearing superior or arrogant. By contrast, in a poem like 'The Devices We Are Left To', the reader is advised to "Sit back and enjoy. Hum along if you like." There's something sinister and at the same time droll operating here, something altogether disquieting. 'At the Gates' yearns, almost tragically, for a better, perhaps more lyrical world:

*I will gather up my breadsticks and be
somewhere out wherever floating is allowed
wherever the locks of the river are opened,
whatever information the boat beneath my feet is
leaking.*

This poem like several others in the collection (see 'The Bells Flying', 'Ode to a Frying Christ') also references spiritual and existential themes. Mitchell has never been shy about exploring in verse his religious beliefs but this does not make him the kind of poet who dedicates his books "to the glory of God", despite the presence of an 'Essay after Interest/ after Les Murray'.

The cover of Anita Heiss' *I'm Not Racist, But ...* is dominated by a fantastic image by Adam Hill, whom Heiss describes in the acknowledgements as "a Koori artist known for his 'Hip Hop on canvas' style of subversive political and social comment". In terms of these books' cover artwork, this is the pick of the bunch. The cover also announces the book's contents as "a collection of social observations". This description is certainly an accurate one. Heiss is a sharp observer of modern-day Australia, and from the opening poem 'Apologies' she addresses her reader head-on:

What do you want me to do with your apology?

*With your lifetime of entrenched racism
Wrapped up nicely into one word
"Sorry"*

In many of these poems Heiss' treatment of the dressee is clearly non-indignant and mostly well-meaning, although more than once she does her "entrenched racism" and probably captures of the daily reality experienced by Aboriginal people in Australia. In this respect, they are certainly to create discomfort in the reader and they do so exactly this for me.