

# Higher visions and dark webs

Toby Davidson

Paul Kane

A SLANT OF LIGHT

Whitmore Press, \$16 pb, 32 pp, 9780975776223

Brendan Ryan

A TIGHT CIRCLE

Whitmore Press, \$16 pb, 32 pp, 9780975776230

**A**NTHONY LYNCH, enterprising editor of the notable but short-lived *Space* magazine, also produces signed, limited-edition chapbooks under the moniker of Whitmore Press. Paul Kane's *A Slant of Light* and Brendan Ryan's *A Tight Circle* join a list that features Maria Takolander's *Narcissism* and Cameron Lowe's *Throwing Stones at the Sun* (both 2005).

Paul Kane, an American, is known for previous collections such as *Work Life* (2007) and for his critical writings on Australian poetry and poets. Dividing his time between New York State and Victoria (he teaches at Vassar and is the artistic director of the Mildura Writers' Festival), Kane offers a unique perspective on all things Australian. *A Slant of Light*, subtitled *Australian Poems*, is a new and selected set of twenty-three poems featuring Kane's responses to Australian poets such as Peter Porter and Phillip Hodgins, and meditations such as 'Hard Light in the Goldfields':

That we should exist at all seems unaccountable:  
a happy accident, we say – though no one believes  
it at heart. Were it not for all our cruelty,  
we might live in grace, as hatred is darkness  
and darkness the absence of light.

Kane's penchant for being in two places at once operates on multiple levels, nostalgically in 'The Grand Tour 1968', cross-culturally in 'Two Liners: Dreams Compared' and contemplatively in his poem for Hodgins:

On the horizon, trees in silhouette  
stand distinct and black like shadows thrown  
on the wall of a cave behind a parapet.

('Dawn at Timor')

Details such as which type of tree or where in Timor play second fiddle to an empire of signs and reflections from Plato's cave to Walter Benjamin's copied souls ('In the Penal Colony'), the poet road-testing transcendence.



Paul Kane

Such activities can of course be done at home, and in 'Black Window' the wiles of philosophy are brilliantly back on themselves:

In a world of mirrors there is no beyond:

we take ourselves for what we are,  
one image imposed upon another

we half believe and half ignore.  
Turn again, says the room, but this time

vanish into what you are doing  
that you might be seen for what you do

in that other world.

This vanishing represents the ultimate negation, an end to half-belief at the command of the room which connects to 'that other world'. In his elegies, the focus changes from the vanishings of self to the vanishings of those who have 'left us your life' ('Dear Margie'). *A Slant of Light* is the better for it, 'Third Parent' rounding out the collection:

But we'll go back, and back, until we find  
in the genealogy of the past the source  
of a hope born of despair, some hill or field  
to call our own, to call to our own: come  
and walk with us over the common ground.

Kane's style is well crafted and assured. By refusing to 'half believe and half ignore' his Australian impressions, he has created a series of interior landscapes within the interior ('Past Cooper Pedy', 'Salt level', 'On the Murray'),