

cities ('South Yarra') and islands ('Phillip Island'). Yet, as 'Black Window' attests, some of his most stirring poems are set off-road, in silence.

Brendan Ryan's *A Tight Circle* takes up where *Why I Am Not a Farmer* (2002) and *A Paddock In His Head* (2007) left off, exploring all manner of arrivals and departures before the larger backdrop of the rural-city divide. Ryan is also in two (and more) places at once, but unlike Kane he has recourse to a high degree of specificity, and with it a sense of stark anti-tourism:

Dim light of milk bars
a *Streets* logo promising summer
traffic stalled on Toorak Road.

The sense of loss, of leaving the city
That used to live inside me.

(*'Driving out of Melbourne'*)

In a similar mode to Les Murray's 'Thinking About Aboriginal Land Rights I Visit the Farm I Will Not Inherit' (1974) or Judith Wright's 'For a Pastoral Family' (1985), Ryan laments 'Like hot tea filled to the brim / I've inherited a world / that doesn't guarantee the present'. While *A Tight Circle* is painfully aware of family silences, it is also a tribute to family resilience, especially by the women:

Her skin is wrinkled
as a farm in Tyrendarra

his enlistment at lunch
a soldier settlement in Tyrone

a brick veneer in Koroit.
Like entries in a farmer's diary

her stories shadow Aboriginal history.
She lives between the friends who have died

And cards each fortnight.

(*'Talking to Auntie'*)

Now a father himself, Ryan marks the past through a series of changes in others ('Burying has aged my father / softened his handshake' [*'A Tight Circle'*]). 'In the park' draws on Gwen Harwood's poem of the same name to hold a mirror to the male experience of parks, parenthood and fathers, 'dutiful, polite, distant / wondering how they landed here'. However, 'Choppers', with its saleyard story of 'skin and bone cows / cast out from the herd', more faithfully reproduces the bleakness of Harwood's original, a feat in itself. Cows play a beautifully understated role in *A Tight Circle*, from the title poem to 'Winter Morning', where 'The paddocks have been eaten down to dirt / Heavily pregnant Friesians regard me with suspicion'. Ryan is a deceptively versatile, uncompromising poet who lives between worlds signified by the contest of often tough facts which in time reveal their own higher visions and dark webs.

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