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

rendan Ryan's A Tight Circle takes up where Why 1 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 ruralcity 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.

To celebrate the life and work of John Button (1932–2008), Australian Book Review invites its readers to decide

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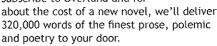
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