

## Round Again

*Lawrence Pettener*

Fazackerley Hospital, Aintree:  
horses surge forward on the TV screen,  
breath steaming out their nostrils. With  
the sound down, I try to discuss my father's

impending death with him. This, like meditation,  
is out of bounds. I mention Tibet  
and The Book of the Dead. *To bet*, he says –  
*Which horse? Dalai Lama*, I retort.

*What time's he running?*

*Nineteen-fifty-nine*, I tell him.

He looks at the clock, incredulous.

When my father dies, I sit up all night

watching Internet animations  
on the Bardo realms: the soul's race  
to realise its death and get a good rebirth.  
Social Services ring me after 49 days

to say they have a possible placement  
for my Dad's next life: a stable  
near Heydock racecourse.

Do I think that will be OK, they ask;

I tell them, *I wouldn't bet on it.*

## A Sense of Self

*Lawrence Pettener*

In Rawson Road, Sandy Road  
and points in-between  
plus in behind Seaforth Road,  
the toughness was settling, dry as dust.  
It lived in flexed jaws round chewing gum,  
in frozen eyes, in stiff-legged walking.

From hoardings city-wide,  
a pale alpha male  
hawked sportswear.  
he looked hurt and he looked nowhere  
with vague grimace –  
which is to say he looked *cool*.

On the streets, all that hardness  
had long-since settled in; the air  
was heavy and thick with it. We all stared,  
looking for a semblance of our selves  
in car-crashed walls and the bloodied ground.  
We came to see our own shrouded faces there.

We stared so hard, we hardly seemed to notice  
what it felt like to be able to feel.