

Ark

They sent out a dove: it wobbled home,
wings slicked in a rainbow of oil,
a sprig of tinsel snagged in its beak,
a yard of fishing-line binding its feet.

Bring back, bring back the leaf.

They sent out an arctic fox:
it plodded the bays
of the northern fringe
in muddy socks
and a nylon cape.

*Bring back, bring back the leaf.
Bring back the reed and the reef,
set the ice sheet back on its frozen plinth,
tuck the restless watercourse into its bed,
sit the glacier down on its highland throne,
put the snow cap back on the mountain peak.*

*Let the northern lights be the northern lights
not the alien glow over Glasgow or Leeds.*

A camel capsized in a tropical flood.
Caimans dozed in Antarctic lakes.
Polymers rolled in the sturgeon's blood.
Hippos wandered the housing estates.

*Bring back, bring back the leaf.
Bring back the tusk and the horn
unshorn.
Bring back the fern, the fish, the frond and the fowl,
the golden toad and the pygmy owl,
revisit the scene
where swallowtails fly
through acres of unexhausted sky.*

They sent out a boat.
Go little breaker,
splinter the pack-ice and floes, nose
through the rafts and pads

of wrappers and bottles and nurdles and cans,
the bergs and atolls and islands and states
of plastic bags and micro-beads
and the forests of smoke.

*Bring back, bring back the leaf,
bring back the river and sea.*

Simon Armitage