

Lockdown

And I couldn't escape the waking dream
of infected fleas

in the warp and weft of soggy cloth
by the tailor's hearth

in ye olde Eyam.
Then couldn't un-see

the Boundary Stone,
that cock-eyed dice with its six dark holes,

thimbles brimming with vinegar wine
purging the plagued coins.

Which brought to mind the sorry story
of Emmott Syddall and Rowland Torre,

star-crossed lovers on either side
of the quarantine line

whose wordless courtship spanned the river
till she came no longer.

But slept again,
and dreamt this time

of the exiled *yaksha* sending word
to his lost wife on a passing cloud,

a cloud that followed an earthly map
of camel trails and cattle tracks,

streams like necklaces,
fan-tailed peacocks, painted elephants,

embroidered bedspreads
of meadows and hedges,

bamboo forests and snow-hatted peaks,
waterfalls, creeks,

the hieroglyphs of wide-winged cranes
and the glistening lotus flower after rain,

the air
hypnotically see-through, rare,

the journey a ponderous one at times, long and slow
but necessarily so.

Simon Armitage