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