

## Fell Ponies

They have got up  
out of the dirt, the first  
hauling the buried boat or ramshackle cart  
of its own self

from a ditch.

Then four more follow,  
the props of their legs  
fossilized limbs of oak,

because there were forests here once.  
Not ponies as we know them  
but big-engined,  
an early design,

leather straps and hardwood cogs  
at work when they move,  
boulders for ballast  
swinging in rope sacks

strung from a crude frame,  
the flesh  
an all-over daub  
of soil and mulch that won't set.

But a lean burn all the same –  
just enough breath  
on the oil  
to keep the lamp in flame...

All this gone wild,  
Ashington escapees grown moody and mean  
on aloneness and sleet.  
They trundle forward

into some old war, then forget,  
or blink awake from a dream  
of pack road or pit,  
of ploughs or sleds

at their heels,  
then lower their heads  
to browse on root and weed.  
Wherever they halt

is the world's edge,  
or they wait  
just an inch from the future's wall of glass,  
seeing nothing,

taking it all in, at any moment  
to turn into mist, or re-emerge,  
come lumbering  
out of the flooded mine,

now cut-outs up on the ridge,  
now barring the path to the bridge,  
seaweed fringes and axe-head stares,  
their hides

knotted rugs of rags  
slung over the beam of the spine,  
all smoke and steam,  
ignited by lightning strike in the first storm,

put out by rain.

Simon Armitage