

Ode to a Clothes Peg

It hasn't evolved much from the humble forked twig
or a single finger of pine whittled into a split pin
that gripped britches and bloomers between its loins

to the pair of lightweight plastic opposable thumbs
hinged by a fusewire spring, or the toothless baby croc
that bites down on a nylon washing line.

I'm staging this thought at the rotary dryer
trying to conjure Keats, wondering whether
he offered his small hands to the salty ropes
or coughed stipples of blood on the white sail
while the brig's bowsprit needled for Rome.

The pegs in this peg-bag (stitched in the shape
of a saucy scullery maid) were handed down
like the bony relics of women saints and I'll guess
have never been touched by a man until now;

mouthy car-horns summoned a terrace of wives
to their doors and out they came, flustered and vexed,
extending the wooden props, masting clean sheets
into the April air so husbands and feckless sons
could nose their Ford Cortinas along the street.
The wide afternoon skies were pinned with clouds
the colour and shape of death masks and shrouds.

Simon Armitage

Written to commemorate the bicentenary of the composition of John Keats' six famous odes, *Ode to Psyche*, *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode on Melancholy*, *Ode on Indolence*, and *To Autumn*. Among his greatest works, the poems are also some of the most famous in the English Language.