



# The Poetry Object

## ANTHOLOGY OF OBJECT POEMS

Includes commissioned poems by poets from The Red Room Company's Poems and Poets Archive <http://redroomcompany.org/poets/>

Poets who participate in the Papercuts national poetry education program are commissioned to compose a poem for their allocated school community.

All these poems are available on The Red Room Company website on the Poems and Poets page.

<http://redroomcompany.org/poets/>

The Poems and Poets page of The Red Room Company's website was included (for illustrative purposes) as a suggested text for study for Units 3 (Perspectives) and 4 (Making Connections) of the National Curriculum Senior Literature Course (Draft Consultation Version 1.10).

A number of Papercuts poets have composed poems about objects that are special to them.

Judith Bishop worked with students at Sunning Hill School in 2010. Sunning Hill Education and Training Centre is situated within Juniperina Juvenile Justice Centre. Juniperina is the only Juvenile Justice facility that caters specifically for the needs of young female offenders in New South Wales.

Judith's talismanic object was a piece of music that is important to her: Tchaikovsky's ballet score for *Swan Lake*.

joanne burns worked with students at Abbotsleigh School in 2007. Many of the girls at this school chose to write about dolls that were special to them. joanne wrote a poem



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about dolls from her childhood and some Guatamalan worry dolls she owned as an adult.

Gareth Jenkins shared special objects and the place he kept them with students at Killara High School. This moment of sharing was then transformed into his commissioned poem.

In 2011 Blue Mountains poet Craig Billingham visited Adelaide as a Papercuts poet and worked with students from Pedare Christian College. An object held in the collection of The Art Gallery of South Australia inspired his poem: a painting from early in the career of Jeffrey Smart. His poem Holiday Resort is a response to the small oil painting of the same name.

Louella Pleffer is the illustrator and animator who designed the logo for The Poetry Object. She chose a boot for the logo for a deliberate reason.

*"The idea behind is that collage itself symbolises a collection of memories surrounding my own talismanic object; my boot. The collage forms fragments or a patchwork of my experiences and senses associated with the object.*

*I chose orange as my central colour as I believe it reflects the idea of a treasure box and how the objects inside are glorified and often almost kept in a shrine like fashion."*







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## Swan Lake

As music curves through the body, the swing of it  
lifting mind's invisible feet, so it happened

a ballet I'd gone to in the days after breaking up  
with someone who had found me rather clumsy

left behind a troupe of swans in my heart.  
Now the inner band played on, a waltz as searing

as a light too brightly shining in a room that should be dark,  
and the swans, pirouetting through the dark

and joyful moments of the plot, took my heart  
dancing, till the grief that remained

turned to a mood of gentle swanning  
through the fine, vacated ballroom of the mind;

till the swans evaporated with a cry.

Judith Bishop

Sunning Hill School NSW 2010





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## It's not about display

I have this special spot: It's a secret.  
I will tell you though, now we know each other, a little.  
There's this space  
at the back of my kitchen cupboard  
above greased-up tiles,  
above scarred glass elements.

It's dusty dark but dry enough  
to store precious objects: a volcanic rock  
from the top of Africa's Kilimanjaro  
and a tiny cup  
with which I was fed poison, sold jewels and almost died.

The jewels are here too, Aquamarines in a little box with a cat on the lid.  
In their oblique surface I see his reptilian face,  
eyes without lashes  
long fingers spooning liquid,  
rapping the table like impatient spider's legs.

There are other things here too - amid them I place  
a blue book and its formulas.  
I close the cupboard door. My cabinet is a secret one -  
it's not about display, it's about keeping things  
safe.

You won't tell any one -  
will you?

Gareth Jenkins

Killara High NSW 2010







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## sand

did i leave them or did they  
leave me; i don't remember  
any farewells, i didn't ask about  
their futures or dream we were  
re-united; i can still glimpse  
joan, i dropped her on the dirt  
at the bottom of the toddlers'  
slippery dip as i ran off to climb  
the high ladder of the bigger dip,  
the silver coated letters of its rungs  
calling up up higher higher, for that  
thrill of whooshing down, airborne  
- i didn't need a doll's hand then,  
joan the felt doll, did she feel  
anything - her mouth smitten with  
dark sand as i flew down, my mouth  
wide open to adventure's wind

margaret and sharon  
stuffed together in their blue  
white pram for a day at the beach  
in the big front garden, swimming  
lessons through the bindi-eyed  
tormented grass they didn't  
understand you had to kick your



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legs, they stared at you in doll  
solemnity their thick eyelashes  
didn't seem to care as they filled  
up with ants –

dinah my china doll  
was the one who seemed  
alive, or was it more my  
guilt that thrived, at not  
being able to restore her  
black forehead's lacquered  
gloss, chipped when she and  
i fell down the back porch  
steps the scribbled greyblack  
pencil marks across the gap  
where black paint had chipped  
to pink – an early moment of  
a buried sense of failure to get  
things exactly right

like a large almond  
the miniature box of worry  
dolls, each smaller than a  
match, sits there on a bookshelf  
fading in the sunlight like all my  
good intentions down the multiplying  
years; these dolls stay pristine, bright  
inside like cocktail onions – i do all  
the worrying, bleached of any colour,  
while individually unnamed they bide  
their time –

joanne burns

Abbotsleigh School for Girls NSW 2007







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## **Holiday Resort (after the painting by Jeffrey Smart)**

Winter morning, the moon  
shocked by sunrise. Seabirds, salt-breeze,  
the sand as yet unbroken

by human feet. Are we the first  
to walk here? No, such early thoughts  
are foolish. Like us,

the beach  
has been washed  
by a second language,

by the slow  
nocturnal rhythms of black water –  
see how they recede

and what they've left  
of us.

Craig Billingham

Pedare Christian College 2011





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## Object Poems By Other Poets

### The objects in my room

My eyes fall sometimes on the objects in my room  
A stolid desk the cabinet that holds my music's breath  
The bookshelves colorful and slim an Afghan rug still  
Clinging to its rhythmic red the busy reproductions  
On the walls the table buried under scribbles much  
like these  
All familiar housemates co-conspirators of dreams  
Who in their kind restraint ask nothing that I do not  
ask of them  
These gentle things enablers of my living  
Neither unforgiving nor forgiving but in a state  
Of readiness when in my need  
I turn to lean on them

Maurice Leiter

<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2008/08/friday-poem-the.html>

### Grandma's Teacup

Grandma's favourite teacup  
sits on the kitchen shelf  
she gave it to me to remember  
our tea parties—  
the two of us sipping  
cinnamon apple tea  
eating oatmeal raisin cookies  
and playing card games







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But every year that passes  
I remember less and less  
So now and then  
I take her teacup down  
and make cinnamon apple tea  
just the way she showed me  
and all the sweet memories  
of Grandma  
float back  
with every sip

Linda Kulp

<http://lindakulp.blogspot.com/2010/07/poetry-friday-poems-about-objects.html>





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## Object Poems by Young Adults

### Camels

Hidden behind dusty trophies  
carved wooden camels linked together by a rusty chain,  
A paperclip replaces a broken chain,  
One leading another  
traveling to an unexpected place.  
At times seeming stiff and serious  
at others alive and carefree.  
Not perfect like me,  
delicate like my mother.  
Holding a mystery inside.  
Not knowing where they are going,  
where they came from,  
passed from mother to daughter,  
than grandmother to grandchild.  
Traveling through each generation  
capturing a new memory,  
my wooden camels.

By Stephanie T.

<http://home.earthlink.net/~jesmith/Treas.obj.501.html>







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## My Ring

On the sandy sun-kissed beaches,  
I found my golden band of luck.  
Small, round, and glimmering,  
a special imprint of a shell at it's center.  
Looking much like a fossil,  
Resting on my finger  
Telling a story of its journey to sea.

Like my mother,  
sparkling with wisdom.  
Bits of jewels shimmer in the sun,  
Staring out to sea,  
Making me realize,  
how big the world really is.  
My golden ring.

By Laura W.

<http://home.earthlink.net/~jesmith/Treas.obj.501.html>





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## The Thimble

It came in a tiny blue bag,  
resting in a churning ocean  
of pale wrinkles.  
Trapped in a cage of brittle bone  
and fragile membranes.

Tauntingly ageless it waited,  
hidden behind azure satin.  
The drawstring seemed  
to be made of iron.  
A noose around a vein.

A sky bag filled with clouds  
I thought,  
tugging out the cotton balls.  
Where is the sun, I asked?  
Where is the sun?

At first I thought it was bone:  
slick slither of bone.  
It wasn't though.  
Filled with hollow ice  
and tipped with gold.

But not made of bone.

Heady blossoms permeate  
the white. Sparrow's cries  
pierce the quiet gold.  
Rendered silent as snow.  
Ceramic, not bone.







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Ancient wisdom of dried out  
powdery hair. Eyes blue and red  
and yellow. And white of course.  
These things are gone now.  
But the colours don't die.

by Lillian C-G





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## Under the bedside table

Under the  
bedside table  
a sleek  
smooth  
round  
child's gold bracelet lies.

For seven years  
it has lain  
under the bedside table,  
not ever seeing  
the outside world.

Yet  
it has seen  
what very few have  
seen:  
the true delight  
in a child's eyes.

by Josephine D







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## The Swingset

Wood rots,  
ropes fray,  
metal rusts,

memories stay.

It stands there  
deserted in the midst  
of many times climbed  
and swung from.

Sometimes it was a ship  
escaping from the storm.  
Other times, many times,  
it was the Saab convertible a friend and I  
drove to McDonald's.

Now years of playing cease.  
It's just the goal for flashlight tag,  
where people sulk after losing  
or  
preen after winning.

At times I want to shed  
my childhood,  
but somehow I can't cart it away  
to the dump, where  
swingsets are shredded, where  
times past  
can't ever  
return.

by Grace W.





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## AN OBJECT POEM AND ACCOMPANYING ESSAY

### A Coal Necklace

My father gave me a piece  
of solidified night.

Remember me,  
he said, then coughed  
with black lungs,  
climbing up from the deep basement.  
I was eight years old.  
I clutched the stone. T  
here was fire within  
its lake of smoothness.  
A fellow coalman designed  
the pendant—  
a teardrop crowned with silver filigree—  
it embraced the stone  
with a hard lace.

My father and others  
fed the earth,  
extracted somebody else's plunder,  
loved their wives in furious silence,  
gave kids mule rides on angry backs.

Now their offspring recycle luck  
or leave behind a scarred map.

But for some, the Earth is a jewel box.







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I've searched for years  
but still cannot find that fossil tear—  
my father's half century of night,  
congealed.

Maria Jacketti

Published in Etchings Issue 1

<http://www.ilurapress.com/E1-Sample.htm>

## Objects of Poetry

**Maria Jacketti**



How do I write a poem? I've often wondered about that one, especially when the poems materialize elusively, and I think that I may never write another. But even after a very dry spell, the psyche, which at its core level really wants to sing, finds trigger for the poetic experience. Maybe, it is an object crystallized in memory, some sense-luscious thing from childhood.

From the archives of my young days, I remember many treasured objects: dolls, books,





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models, gadgets. In particular, I adored a red and black plaid jug. Now this was not your basic curvy moonshine jug, but something cylindrical, fat, and very space-age in appearance, except for its decoration, which also made it look quite parochial and familiar. Back then, I called it the “Scotch jug” because its plastic plaid jacket resembled the familiar roll of Scotch Tape, and my school uniform. Everything about the jug said 1960–something: something old, something dreadfully new. Now, entrenched in memory, it seems this jug could have contained nectar. However, I remember well the refreshments it held—nothing as mystical as the memories which have grown around it—but mostly lemonade prepared by my mother—sometimes tinted pink with maraschino cherries—and iced tea, and once in a while neon Kool-Aid. It was a manifestation of a flagrantly innocent time—nobody seemed to care about artificial colors, flavors, fragrances, or their underlying ideas. In fact, my generation thrived on myriad artificial things as we played Vietnam in our backyards.

Today, my precious jug may exist somewhere: in someone else’s garage or deep in a landfill; but wherever it is, it carries the energetic imprint of the lost refreshment it gave me. It is after all, a perfect poetry seed, something which connects me both spiritually and archeologically to a childhood which swirled and vanished into the great past. It’s fascinating the way linear time can become a molten thing in poetry. And so when I retrieve objects like the Scotch jug from the depths of memory, I become molten, too, and less a prisoner of time.

These days, I am trying to recover more of those seeds, mostly lost things. I want to try to preserve them for my daughter who will grow up in a much different age. It is not that I am interested so much in passing on heirlooms, but I would like to give her a sense of what my past was like. The things we take for granted, household objects, the junk artifacts of our lives, are extremely absorbent. They hold time, emotions, events, extinct music. And when they speak, I pray to be ready for them. Sometimes they chatter, moan, weep, curse, or holler like the unascended dead. Then they keep me up at night trying to find forms to fit their stories.







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These objects, however, don't always make poetry. Some are more comfortable in essays or vignettes or in some genre-less form. In fact, as I look over the notebook which currently holds all the poems I've decided to keep because they whisper some small truth, very few seem to have direct connection to objects; but one of my favorite early poems, "A Coal Necklace," was generated from just such an object-seed.

To a certain extent, we are all by-products of our native geographies, channeling the vital chi of place, time and live object; sometimes in moments of raw awareness, I've sensed the geopathic wounds of maternal soil, and I am sure that my blood must contain molecules of coal dust. It was hard to grow up in Hazleton, Pennsylvania without some overt bond to coal. My Italian immigrant family quickly made deep roots in this cold, mountainous town at the beginning of the century. They were from Foggia, an agrarian blip in Italy's solar plexus, and no doubt they were accustomed to lavish sun, olives, green winters. And of course, they were farmers, not miners, but coal was the only stratagem for survival around these unglamorous Alps. They were not special; it didn't take very long for the family to experience Earth's wrath. Within a dozen or so years, my grandfather Jacketti was crushed by a large rock in the mines and instantly killed, leaving a house of orphans wondering what kind of future might rise out of the great black holes gouged out around them.

My father ended up working at the breaker, where he stayed for forty-eight years. When I was eight, he gave me a coal necklace, a charm of sorts made by a co-worker. It was tear-shaped, polished to a high gloss and tipped with a bit of silver-filigree. I remember my father telling me—or perhaps my mother—that I should use it to remember him. At that moment, I realized that this touchstone contained a message: his lungs were mineralizing; he couldn't inhale without pain; in fact, he was going away breath by breath. I felt this in my bones; it had no articulation, but even then I sensed that my father had lived a life of small hope—one of unvoiced lamentations, and fury. This nugget of anthracite, which I lost, then found many years later, became the seed for this poem which explores our bitter legacy, and I believe, the legacy of many others.





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Hazleton today is a much different place, and coal has become a rather antique topic. The anthracite souvenirs that sometimes find their way into gift shops here look mass produced and soulless, compared to the small coal necklace, a shard from our deep would in the planet. A single solidified black breath of God, it continues to embody my father's burdens and our crushed dreams.

Now I'm not so sure that "A Coal Necklace" is such a great poem by the standards of the powers-of-poetry-that-be. It still remains unpublished more than a decade after I wrote it. But I treasure it because of its ontological connection to my daily bread, the energy behind the words: a text of texts. Hindus call this substantive record akash, the finest, imperishable substance of the universe; and I hope, that above all things, the objects of my poetry when translated into words may reflect those akashic records. It is a funny business—being a poet. Almost any other vocation or avocation must be simpler, and outwardly more rewarding. But the deep lessons I've learned continue to sustain my breath, and I suppose that as long as I am writing, I'll continue to search for poetry in the ruins of the simple things we leave behind.

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<http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/jacketti.htm>

