

Poetry Series

**Jacqui Thewless**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**  
2016

**Publisher:**  
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

# Jacqui Thewless(November,1955)

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The author, whose surname before marriage was Hardman, lives in  
Pembrokeshire, West Wales.

## 9 Haiku For My Kids

Rowen, my first child:  
her first glimpse of me / her mum's  
first hint of glory.

Jessie and Rowen:  
two stars I steer by. Each day,  
the sun and the moon.

Winter of '80:  
children see diamonds in snow...  
The heart's lens freezes them.

Julian pee-pees  
as soon as he's been born - its  
huge arch, triumphant.

Twin boys who are dead  
on arrival. Empty pram,  
and not even names.

Jules, like Paddington  
Bear in duffle-coat and red  
wellies on the sledge.

Shift to Pembrokeshire:  
Jess and her bro rifle  
wet bogs. Watch out, toads!

Rowen, the eldest,  
keeps to herself in her room,  
drawing Tutankhamen.

These, my final babes -  
twins, sharing one crib - sucking  
each other's wee noses.

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Jacqui Thewless

# A Good Poet Is Also A Weaver

A good poet is also a weaver.

No two cloths are the same  
but the fabric of one wears well  
while, soon, the other falls apart.

A few short years is for me the testing time.  
Or one verse. Or a single line.

Jacqui Thewless

## A Poem Contains That

A poem contains that  
wee moth-like thing you may call interest,  
fixing itself at a distance  
on this independent life.

In this instance,  
let us view the white moon which,  
till now, has been reflecting something else's  
light without your notice.

A few words are  
enough to cause the ego's own eclipse;  
a net lifts, over you.  
When sunlight  
goes, you notice the stars.

Jacqui Thewless

# Advent

Christmas approaches.

Every star-struck sense

shuts down for the snow

though a cappella codes of carols -  
interpreting the tingling elements  
as if nipped noses and chapped lips  
were necessary notes -  
assuming the means,  
make fingers do jingle bell dances in pockets and bags,  
snap purses open and unhand  
wads for gifts (wrapping with bows and ribbons  
being the best bit  
of Baubles-and-The-Tree  
or cards carrying Robins and Santa through the letterbox) .

But God's scot-free and

rebirth comes unplanned.

This makes me shiver, as always. O...

Jacqui Thewless

## Advent 2

Till March saps spring,  
Everything falls away,  
all passes, except this

mysterious spiral I  
am moving in. You can call here  
winter if you will:

invisibility rules  
as single leaves  
in the wet woods begin disappearing,

losing all mass,  
all weight,  
all shape -

and the sky widens eyes  
glimpsing  
the nearest thing I'll see to infinity.

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## After 3

After 3 the air's  
sucked into the chimneys  
as if it were grenades;  
force ten gusts  
batter the windows with ram-rod rain-shot.  
I note  
the violence of walls'  
battles with the elements.

In my room,  
there's a yellow door  
lit by a cool bulb under an innocent shade.  
White curtains  
fall like Swiss mountain mists  
from the frame of the closet where I keep my clothes.  
Most of us  
in this street are asleep.

Jacqui Thewless

# All I Could Want In Life Is...

1. A mega-fantastic Lotto win (£3,000,000 would do. I'm not greedy) .
2. Somehow, and despite the 1st item, to retain my soul and
3. To paint some good pictures.
4. To write some half-decent poems and
5. To ride, even once, in a sleigh pulled by Reindeer over a snowy white landscape in Finland and yet
6. Not to die, because of this guilty pleasure, of bronchitis, flu, pneumonia, or just of cold.
7. Not to outlive my kids or my favourite poet or my sister or my best friend, Elizabeth Henderson.
8. That my most favourite female poet keeps writing her wonderful poems, well into her nineties.
9. That Scotland shall get its deserved independence and soon. And
10. That every one of the world's mercenary, two-for-a-penny, Politicians gets its rightful come-uppance and
11. That Mharie Black becomes ever-more universally-popular than the Windsors were.
12. That Scotland gets its independence, much sooner than you could guess.
13. That all of the psychopathic elite shall fall dead in their sleep, sooner than later.
14. That I get to ride, twice, in a sleigh pulled by reindeer in snow fields in Finland.
15. That Scotland gets free of England. SOON! !

Jacqui Thewless

# Apocalypse

in council houses  
and manicured estates -  
imagine whistles!

conducted by wind  
the chill shriek of the first notes  
like any banshee!

Hark! I hear a flute  
they say, Krishna's returning -  
everything's at stake!

our armies  
are terrified -  
bag-pipe airs and brass-band  
anthems ricochet

instead of gunfire.  
sax riffs rip up  
banks and sergeants  
and road-workers

drill to the rhythm  
of clarinets.  
do people  
change their tune  
or do ears hear differently? –  
a cappella

vocals shift pitch.

football fans roar like piccolos,  
grannies natter like bassoons;  
lovesongs sound like  
alpenhorns -  
and when the saints come marching in  
they blow  
kazoos.

Jacqui Thewless

# Apologia

I gave up churches,  
even the ones that recognised  
silence as a river of sacred possibilities:

diving for pearls  
-of-wisdom by priestly-permission, the faithful  
servants were won with prizes, while I

still preferred poems  
that open their shells by themselves  
to fickle folk with searching

attitudes, who're secretly fervent,  
ravenous for truth – and  
fed by fluke.

Jacqui Thewless

# Autumn

Too much spoils the fruit:  
theft, the inclement weather,  
a season of loss -

despite the long hours  
and toil of our arms, our backs  
stiffened by the wind.

In the flight of these  
crows – free-wheeling and scandalous -  
there is much to praise.

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## Autumn (2)

I admire you, Crows.  
The Heron is more like me:  
slow, careful, alone.

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## Autumn (3)

The year falls. Again,  
a grey wind rifles the sea.  
No travelling geese.

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# Autumn Wood

The whole year's answered  
prayers in these quiet leaf-falls'  
whimsical landings.

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# Ayer's Rock (For Katie)

over Uluru

I can almost hear the sun's  
new boomerang of light

can almost see those  
rivers of rain then the wind  
leaving a green trail

even in retreat  
the sun dreamed Ayer's Rock red  
on its cooling plain

the rock wave resting  
under its crest of matter  
even the lens dreams

the rock is not rock  
that is not the sky either  
the bush is not bush

there are no landmarks  
but an awful sheltering  
in ochre and blue

that is not a bird  
perched on another sacred  
branch of the sun's dream

with its eye on fire  
this is the storyteller  
and she knows everything

Jacqui Thewless

# Betty

I never saw your dad -  
hard, dark  
at yon hot  
Stirling foundry -  
digging your pit  
in sand and  
pouring your dangerous metal,  
hell's-bells bent  
over  
your cradle..

I heard  
of your dear old mum's  
closeness extolled in sounds  
of your towered soul -  
near, pure, like water  
in a bowl  
of glass.

That bell cast  
at your birth  
is still singing  
in peals  
of your girlish laugh

though I  
envisage you  
swinging freely -  
free! free!  
over all of your kin -  
and hear your own top-notes  
ringing, bright, braw Betty.

Jacqui Thewless

# Birthday Gifts

on this grey morning  
a bowl of sea-silver-winks  
and trees holding shores;

a brown heart - broken  
edge, locked, lovely, in a wall;  
a scarf of warm wool

woven on Arran;  
pennies from dad and heaven;  
Richie Havens songs...

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# Blessing For Your Heart

On your far journey,

with the sun at your back,  
may you be always meeting  
Kindness, Gentleness and Pardon,  
on your way to the Sun of Christ,  
coming home to the Sun of Christ.

Jacqui Thewless

## Blue Mood Rules (For Lloyd Merritt)

The good have been a.w.o.l. for a long time  
and the blue mood rules  
Europe, making fury futile,  
reconciliation necessary as middle-aged bathroom-  
trips in the night. O big-hearted man, you could move it  
though, in your day of beatniks - alone in your room with  
the tape-deck, electric guitar, a drum-kit  
and syncopated rhythms - with angry lyrics.  
I mourn the news that you, too  
have left the sham party, early, in silence. Your last night -  
ironic lips, stilled; huge eyes, closing. The picture of you  
slips when someone younger's coming - it didn't seem right  
for my kids to know why this old hippie's weeping,  
given the mess they're in and we are all leaving.

Jacqui Thewless

# Boris

Surely, it's more British to do what you can  
for those who can't:

to say kind things about those who don't have  
two smart sentences to repay you in kind, with interest;

to do your English job, with a social conscience  
behind the smirking gob. If not,

what's an Oxbridge fellow known for but for  
his friends in high places? –

Educated better, meant to care more;  
not as the poor do, actually.. scribbling on the walls

of London's history, poorly spelled but graphically:  
over the cartoon of a clown with floppy hair:

"N E 1 remember diss prick? " – over which your  
infinitely betters will have written in a few years: "No, thank you".

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# Carningli

a friendly mountain:  
three graceful figures meet me -  
Rowans in berry

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# Christmas

this year, for Christmas  
both daughters receive dressing-gowns  
from their lovers.

for me: island songs.

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# Christmas Candelabra

Thank God for Gaia's winter refusal,  
that she turns her back on the sun  
and the expense of growth;  
inside the deeps and darkness occupied  
with roots that are no one's business  
but her own.

Let's be quite clear about the matter:  
the bleak status quo is her sanctuary  
and the long barren night, her need.

Thank God cold comes,  
closing the door firmly  
against human incontinence:  
Go away, it says,  
If you want more floral festivity,  
you will have to wait till March.

Waiting is good  
and refusal is fine by me.  
We'll take a leaf  
from Gaia's book,  
light our invisible lamps and  
be our own Ash tree.

Jacqui Thewless

# Church Rock

She wants to know  
what is so special  
about this beach –  
been here a hundred times before  
under a hundred skies unnoticed  
arched across that rock  
that is the only constant  
in a hundred seas –

today  
the sea is luminous;  
a string of single purple clouds  
forms a bruised line across the blue –  
I say: it's just a rock, out there:  
it doesn't have to mean the same to you.

Jacqui Thewless

# Conversion

My old head melts  
on a rose-red bloodstream:  
Where have you been for so long? says the Flame.  
Let me dissolve those antique eyes;  
I'll have no more  
peering at the banks,  
fussing about their slow collapse as though  
land-life was yours.  
Talk to me  
and I will answer:  
You must become all wax  
and I, the constant  
change of heart, will hear.

Jacqui Thewless

# Crone

I fold the towels by night.

The longer I stay and age,  
the more I'm like the moon:  
patiently waning, waxing  
lyrical for white sheets.

I place them,  
multi-coloured, on a shelf in the bathroom  
and smooth them flat.  
A vase of flowers  
punctuates the right-hand  
corner of a small table.  
I read,  
before I sleep in a small bed, in the small hours.

This kind of thing is my handwork:  
painting with objects in rooms of your house.  
It's not  
rocket science.  
It's what I do:  
from me: for you.

Jacqui Thewless

# Crop

Lying  
caused this blight:  
half-light  
filtered through chiaroscuro  
windows.

Things that trick us are named  
routinely with antonyms:  
it's said that oil glistens  
and ignorance  
is bliss.  
Each family's bed-rock  
of faith is mocked.  
Has common sense grown so un-  
fashionably dangerous  
to the health of our heads? -

I tell you:  
politics is dead.  
Personally,  
I will shut my mouth this year  
if it will mean less  
terrible damage to the heartlands.  
I intend to nurture the wood-stock,  
and bring home fruit in my hands.

Jacqui Thewless

# Damselfly

damselfly resting  
on a pinpoint in the air  
changes direction

Jacqui Thewless

## December 13th 2014

This time, last year:

the prayer flags, rain-blackened  
rags, limp on a rope; air-less  
hopelessness, pain-racked; daughter's  
dad, teetering on death's frost edge. Then, gone.

O, spring

sun came to me with summer breath and seashore salt,  
fresh as life always is.

My grief is a dangerous flame

time doesn't quench at night or dim by day.

Only his photographed smiling face

softly lit by candlelight,

next to the Buddha I'd brought from the town where his body lay,

gave me back stillness;

gives me safety, still.

Jacqui Thewless

# Dylan T.

I was twelve years old.

The one-man band from Duluth  
with harmonica  
blowing in the wind. Not you, true  
boyo  
destined  
to die forever  
young;

a few of us

kids brought your into-  
nations back to life  
on Saturdays after classes  
at the Dundee Rep.  
The others read.  
Fumbling into love  
with consonants and tones,

the idea of Wales

suddenly began to regurgitate a mouth -  
organ for blowing raspberries  
and getting lost and passionate, and all  
without even knowing  
I had swallowed  
Llandudno  
at the age of two.

Jacqui Thewless

## Easter Is Cold In 2016

Clematis leaves are greening the tangles of vine  
but I am not painting a canvas  
with five-coloured prayer flags.  
Even the hands' dry  
upper surfaces are unconvinced;  
no winter of our lives has been as cold as this time is  
with its too many madmen,  
too much violence,  
too many lies of the filthy rich for too long.  
I am waiting for warmth  
to take us by surprise  
and show us something smaller than the planet we know:  
an opening  
the size of a palm, an un-clenched fist,  
or a baby's first, free,  
miracle steps in a room, on grass, on sand, on a rock, in the sea.

Jacqui Thewless

# Easter Saturday,2010

today's violence  
an ice-cold front sleets in  
crows squabble over crusts

Jacqui Thewless

# Easter Sunday,2010

remembering Him  
clouds open above our heads  
the first butterfly..

Jacqui Thewless

# Egos

Some flow. Some, like rocks.  
Some are like impatient winds  
driving the world's ships.

Jacqui Thewless

# Et Tu

Love's loss is  
endless.

There will be no recovery  
of the thing that is lost –  
whatever shall I call it? –  
something prime, key, critical,  
required.

In feeling this  
I'm not alone.

Millions of people every moment every day -  
old wo/men, children, teens, our mothers, fathers, friends -  
have this invisible  
enclosure ripped away.

Love  
only has short use, now. We should expect it  
to flick out,  
the instantaneous blast  
to rip our homes apart, the after-shock  
to break our hearts,  
the loss of what makes him, him,  
or you, you  
to bruise the innerspace we crawl into.

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# Exhibit

a modest ash twig  
enhances the raku pots  
with lichen flowers

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# Faith

the number-cruncher

coolly informs me that stars'

bright light has gone out

it's an illusion

he says with serious eyes

- I don't believe him

Jacqui Thewless

## February 2011 Middle East Memorial

I'm a romantic, myself.

Culture's my own hushed garden as much as, say, yours, ever -  
which is why, my true loves, under today's blue sky,  
I'd be pruning my rose arch, wearing leather gloves,

were it not for, lately,

noticing that all the roses are shot - nipped in the bud -

and I'm asking myself: what colour is blood?

- does the ripped skin-colour matter when the hacked-at head is severed?

Do I care

whose kin are spattered with red; battered; dead; not coming back and never  
had a chance?

So - as I say - instead of gardening or popping up to the shops, I stay  
hugging the web as if you weren't just here - safe and well - but 'there'...

- Romance? Tweet streams are the only love songs, now, I tell you.

Jacqui Thewless

# Fireworks

They were still  
sorting it ready we thought  
you never know the time  
in Wales and dinna bother tae  
read the programme it's usually late not eight as they write  
when  
the fireworks went off  
boom on the hill  
and the night over wir castle lit with a big wow-  
wee of explosions fifteen minutes before  
we were ready for it.

Boys! Boys! stop it wi they mugs of tea –  
run! –  
then there's me  
thinking about getting my coat down from the peg –  
they've skeltered up the street  
halfway round the millpond before I'm  
slow-  
ly catching up with them  
because  
I've put on weight

too many fags, too,  
and – let's face it –  
I'm no a kid now, either  
and comin home after all  
agree with them  
there's nothing better  
than a real storm  
wi fast  
crackin forks  
of lightnin. Wicked!  
-We didna miss it  
much.

Jacqui Thewless

# For Alan Thewless

stories of marriage

re-write themselves in my sleep

- always the same end

Jacqui Thewless

## For Haiku Writers

at war with the sea  
we build our own sand-castles  
and take photographs

Jacqui Thewless

# For International Women's Day

Check the calendar. It's March.

And, technically, winter's

over.

I go for a walk in the cold

wind, feeling the scar

and wondering what has changed

for the girls

that men get their hands on.

Permanently tangled.

Picture the still

image of single wild cherry trees in white

bloom in front of a massive castle, built on rock.

Nothing

alters the shock

of rape

if it happens to you.

Jacqui Thewless

# For Kai At Easter,2010

a greeting heart,  
this is what I'm thinking:

the wee honey bee sheltering  
in a white shell:

his hill burial  
the clay without a flower;

the hail, his  
cold cradle;

wind wailing  
his name.

Jacqui Thewless

# For Lloyd

You didn't believe me at the time:  
how could I be so fond?  
But it's true, I said:  
poets are always  
falling in love for life with a single line

and I wanted the others  
to hear who you were  
as I'd heard you that year  
by phone so I  
wrote the haiku  
of the story, three times over

losing those beautiful  
spoken links  
to distance  
between then and

later  
began to  
file your own poems to me  
by email;

it was easier to show them  
even though nobody could know then  
I really loved You.

Jacqui Thewless

# For No Reason

Sometimes a marriage goes  
to plan, as when a girl wheels barrows of hay  
over a frozen hill, for the cow and her calves.  
Before this, though,  
the same obedient person  
ran amok,  
chased by a cock in the farmer's yard,  
shouting with out-  
rage,  
or giggling, when he pecked her,

depending  
on the whims of the air -  
as winter ferries from The Dock to Rosslare  
have to crash into Irish Sea troughs,  
because storms blow,  
or middle-aged men in pleasure-boats will skim  
the surface of Ceredigion's blue bay  
only when low grades of wind make  
this pastime  
possible..

And, being female, there came a hollow  
afterlife for Mrs G., when even the moon  
left the farmer's wife  
and the lap once filled with baby boys -  
from the hubby who is dead -  
then, emptied itself.  
No matter  
if someone's hopes  
or schemes of happiness  
floundered in a single sunk ship,  
torpedoed by Gerries, far out from the Haven;  
later, there can be more venturing.  
For no reason at all

this old girl,  
raised, from the backside of the Great War,  
by two siblings and a bitter widow,

didn't just die gently in her nineties,  
but tumbled down a well.  
Perhaps you remember the fairy  
tale of Hunda Land -  
more or less as Fraulein Wild described it to Grimm?  
The 'too, too, solid' earth that was this solid person's life,  
softened to liquid and she melted  
for miles - or those long years, decaying in limbo-land

until her limbs forgot what treading to and from  
the local village Spar once was, when she was not  
nursed round the clock but still  
her own, strong, swimmer in the fizzing ocean..  
And Mrs G. returns from timelessness - to time  
for meds and sips of sweet  
potions through a bendy straw,  
now, with her head  
propped on its bank of pillows -  
giving a master class in how to shine like starlight  
on this thin, last, stubborn phase of the night,  
with two smiling eyes admitting sunrise.

Jacqui Thewless

## For Now

Living without plans is easy.  
The sunlight helps..  
Spring races by itself overland and we  
have dozens of yellow  
low-growing glowing  
dandelion rosettes to show for it.  
Returning crowds of butterflies  
will not desire more - and  
nor shall I, for now.

Jacqui Thewless

# For Suzy Chaple

travelling alone

I follow the flight of birds

the song of sky-larks

Jacqui Thewless

## For The Big Rock Outside Scapa Studios Orkney

The silent potency of a big rock  
seems more intensified under the buzz  
of that electric light at night,  
as pungent Ransoms are in grass -  
not in the shock of their white stars over green  
leaves, but in their stalks' three-cornered awkwardness  
so clearly not like easy roundness from which unseen seeds depend -  
as if identity itself,  
once glimpsed,  
breeds all the difference.

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# For The Girl In The Shelter

Brick by brick  
we are building a future  
with our own hands -

this is not easy:  
we have not been trained;  
our ground's un-  
even and our spirits re-  
fuse the equilibrium  
of rest;

at best,  
no one  
will kick us  
out of the place we've made,  
at worst  
our future -  
like our past -  
will shake  
and that will be that.

At any rate,  
no unwelcome rat-a-tat at  
a door  
will close us in.

Meanwhile,  
this  
picking up of bricks,  
this  
careful placement of  
impossible storeys

makes up our Life-  
story.  
Our house  
is  
lifted

up in our hands.

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# For Troy Anthony Davis 1

I prayed for him. Last night  
no holds barred,  
his life-my-life.

Stars in the firmament  
of my biography were  
on death row with us in the dream that came later,

as though changing places levels injustice -  
or there's no difference between us in bad times or good.  
The some-when-saviours of mine

stood in his shoes; I witnessed them  
who'd showed the way, in the death cell losing their light.  
My innocent

brothers  
shuffled with his feet.  
We punch the air -

if the killers do not come. There  
were the mentors of mine, I swear, wearing his face  
in place of these white ones.

Our fingers fold slack hands on dead wrists  
if such miracles might not be shared by midnight.

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## For Troy Anthony Davis 2

Three mandatory drugs are made in factories  
for Georgia's homicides.

It goes without saying that the crime's as organised  
as the factory lines that make cars.

I want you to pray about this:

at first, the lackeys  
strap a living victim to a gurney

as if this was a medical act.  
There may be a long wait..

twenty years. In Davis's case,

we count the torture of three false alarms  
designed to destroy the spiritual part.

At a signal, they introduce the first drug  
into an artery, via an IV drip. This poison makes you sleep.

If you wake later, there will be no eyes for you to open.

Regardless of the candle vigils of millions,  
two medics must agree at this point

that your consciousness has been completely snuffed  
and it is safe for them to proceed with the next, lethal, injection

which stops your heart. They need paralysis

before the last drug finishes it. This  
is enough.

For Troy Anthony Davis, Martyr.  
Murdered 10.53pm 9.21.11.

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## G14 (A Cave In Dewisland)

For us,  
communion gifts were otherwise.  
We went to sing the song O,  
                                  Thou, pure, divine  
Virgin – when Easter stripped the beach of tourists,  
sowing the sand with rain. You harvested  
rich harmonies, so close, my God in silent rock...

Midsummer, once,  
we found a single flower, glowing  
                                  on the cave's hearth-stone.  
Out, in the inglenook of sky,  
the sun blazed afternoon.

By moonlight, at  
Michaelmas, it might have been Non nobis,  
Domine – we sang, heads bowed,  
under the low roof, just  
for you, One God, Who' s listening.

So it was not myself in G14,  
all night at Christmas, wreathed  
in the duvets. They slept soundly,  
                                  - though the long sea boomed  
                                  to the pitch of a gale. He

split to the West,

                                  and I've come home in the south  
                                  to the cave of my mouth.

Jacqui Thewless

# Glen Gairn (For Elaine)

i

Native loneliness -  
thigh-deep in that bracken moor  
under standoff skies -

the flight of a single bird, or a God -  
an eagle - and me, a child.  
Then, winter; the cold blizzard

catching me again, alone  
on the Tor; a drift  
in the midst of the white-out:

what is God meaning?  
Spring at the long since crofts;  
forsaken, forlorn

rainfall rivulets; my own  
self hearing unexplained songs;  
then, June, sheep-shearing -

the shepherd's unforgettable  
smile, his head tilted: ah weel...  
- himself and the dog.

ii

Wynding down the stair,  
my slippered feet on the pine  
bare treads, to morning

breakfasts, where fire smoke  
in the peaty-smelling room  
mingles with syrup

floating the porridge;  
scaling the brae at the back;

fetching birch-bundles:

it is the same lass  
practising her soprano  
vocals by the burn –

Lizz-y Lind-say.  
It is my dad's favourite.  
I win a silver

medal for singing  
this: the Lang prize, in the school;  
Mr Patterson's

nails clipping the keys  
as he's playing piano,  
softly, tenderly...

iii

When I was grown up  
I took my own child; the Dee  
wide as her brown eyes

under the stone bridge.  
She had no shoes; the pebbles  
as smooth and rounded

as slippery toes.  
In the cottage, gas lamp glows  
and thin candles lit

the girl's room, our room  
under the same old apex.  
After prayers at night,

the Skye Boat Song sung  
over and over, she'd sleep  
in the same high bed;

her days, not like ours;  
our days not like the others'

who dwelt before us.

Jacqui Thewless

# Grey Seas

I stayed in Scotland as a girl, on the East coast:  
a kind of salty smell and gritty sand.  
When I was ten I learned about selchies;  
those seals who are only sometime-seals; sometimes human

standing on my rock with deep water  
washing about, I could imagine  
a seal  
rising from the waves.

There was a crevice like a kind of cave nearby,  
that was sheltered from wind  
and from the ordinary people passing.

We dwelt by a lighthouse. There were stories  
of whales, once - stranded on the big shores of Dundee.  
I saw  
seal pups on our small beach one day,  
their mother keeping her distance.

My mother said - Keep off the bay till they have gone.  
Look! You can see them from up here.

I might have wanted to go down  
to hold them  
as the grey seas had held me.

Jacqui Thewless

# Haibun 1

The winter of 2009/10 will be remembered by many folk across Britain for its arctic temperatures, deep snowfalls and fearfully prolonged period of ice. The hard weather – experienced all over Europe and Russia - forced thousands of people to change their plans, stay at home, look for other ways to do business, and – often –to struggle to survive. Two elderly friends of mine both slipped outside their own back-doors; each breaking a limb. - A terrible shock!

The young and middle-aged live in their limbs with more-or-less easy confidence. Unless life deals them sudden blows of severance, they don't perceive the awful difference between their urges and their possibility to act. Old stalwart trees which, in the Fall and through the Winter, lose their leaves, become like skeletons but, after a short time only, surge forth potently again as in the last year's summer. We people are not fastened to the ever-living earth. Our old folk have seen decades pass, have walked through countless human passages, on the same legs they were given to begin with. With the same hands, now worn, how have they spoiled, salvaged or recharged and enhanced the world – often invisibly to others? Our feeling of respect for life increases with time.

On January 7th2010, a satellite image of Britain revealed two uniformly white land-masses, covered (in the case of Ireland) or surrounded (in the rest of Britain's case) with cloud that looked like sheep's wool, roughly teased with frosty fingers. Here in Pembrokeshire, on high ground above Cresselly Quay, a vista through an opening in the hedge offers a frozen silence:

in the bottom field  
a single frosted oak tree –  
the last leaf, falling

Jacqui Thewless

## Haibun 2

Every year in winter I forget what spring is like. Here in Pembroke, and throughout the county, the first harbinger is a white froth of Blackthorn blossom – before the first greening of trees. Yet white is cool; a chaste colour. Later, when the first young green leaves in the hedgerows peep, a sense of warmth to come is quickened and our spirits lift.

At home, I feed the garden birds until the end of March. It is a rare treat to catch a glimpse of the wren.

buoyant winter bird  
hidden in the dead thicket –  
no bigger than a leaf

Jacqui Thewless

## Haibun 3

A fine rain falls as the two of us stand quietly on the path before going indoors. Joan is pointing to the snowdrops: I'm listening to the lively sounds of birds singing inside the hedge, when, all at once, we hear a single, startlingly deep, loud, rook's croak.

Joan turns, quickly, points up into the sky, her arm behind my head: Look! There he is! Can you see him? I follow her directing finger, peer across the distance to the branches of the giant fig that grows by the barn - another croak! - but I can't discover the source. Look! He's moved! Joan's sense of everything in this landscape is almost uncanny: ubiquitous, laser-like, sensitive, precise.

We spend the day by the fire; chatting, reading. She lets me fall asleep, and when I wake I'm astonished to find her standing in silence at my elbow. On looking round, the bay branches are already scratching at a black window. While Joan cooks supper, I stand on the wide doorstep leaning on the closed front door. The dark is almost absolute, except for the strangely mesmeric slow winking of solar lights, lining the garden path.

so many dark nights -  
even the day seems to listen  
with a fox's ear

Jacqui Thewless

## Haibun 4

Where the present church stands now, legend has it that St Deiniol built a simple hermitage on this brow of the hill in the 6th Century. The much developed structure has once more become a home for birds and, no doubt, other small creatures who find access to the ruin. Ivies grow where they will upon the roof and walls, and, all around the building, wild flowers - such as double-headed daffodils, snowdrops and Wood anemones - grow in careless freedom in the spring. Saplings have seeded themselves. Thick brambles yield abundant fruit in summer. Walking on from here, you can look through a break in the hedgerow, downwards onto Pembroke town; and, conversely, from the old town walls or from the railway platform, you can see the tall church spire as a feature on the southern horizon.

I make my own way to this site each spring. It's said that there was once a holy well here - where now the lofty spire rises from the place.

drink hangs from a rope  
hand over hand it swings  
into the daylight

Jacqui Thewless

## Haibun 5

At my age, I am often surprised. I count this willingness to wonder about changes as one of the blessings which came naturally when I tumbled 'over the hill'.

As in many villages and small towns, the Pembroke Post Office is an important place, far more personally so than any other institution. From here, folk deliver hand-written letters and parcelled gifts to friends and family who live so far away. There is a curious solemnity about the ritual weighing of packets at the threshold of the Post Office counter, and in the liturgy of questions as to their appointed 'class' and value. Oddly, I've never seen two of the three persons who sit behind the counter anywhere else in the town. If I were a child, I might believe that they lived and worked under house arrest! Maurice is the exception.

Maurice's local is 'The Waterman's Arms', a fine old pub at the far end of the bridge across Pembroke millpond, which has outdoor seating from which you can watch the swans pass or congregate - or see otters, if you are lucky. Inside, on weekend nights, I've seen Maurice 'let down his hair', propping up the bar with pints and conversation. Tie-less, in mufti, he loses his influential air: one of the rest of us on this side of the barman's counter. On Monday mornings, however, his long face framed by a neatly parted hairstyle which features a short, thin, straight, fine fringe, Maurice represents all that is enduring about one of the oldest British social institutions. His droll, dark, voice and melancholy features, the laconic tilt of his head and shrugged shoulders which answer to questions as to the scale of his hangover, are as familiar as the sight of one's own right hand curved round a pen.

En route to the train station last week, I noticed that the Post Office was locked except to workmen, whose large white van was parked outside. On Wednesday of this week, after shopping for groceries and flowers, I went to fetch some money from my Post Office account. At the entrance, I stopped; surprised. A doorway to the right had disappeared! Now, the blank entrance porch - without familiar posters or notices - gave into a new door to the left. Inside - more strange chaos! The whole interior had been gutted, deepened, and re-vamped, reminding me - in a disconcerting way - of the bland and featureless Post Office in Tenby. There were now three counters: two at the far right and one at the far left, and the back wall - which had used to lie behind the single Post Office counter, lined with shelving, bearing Post Office equipment and the Post Office clock - now served for fixed-display of infants' clothing, toys and fancy-dress costumes. Islands of turnable cards-racks, like free-floating icebergs in the post-deluge Post Office landscape, confused a unanimously disoriented queue. As each

new-comer entered through the door, a look of bafflement and disbelief fell swiftly on her face. Glancing round the room, eyes straining to take in multiple counters, soon afterwards would come the question: which one is the Post Office? One of the staff – flustered, but anxious to inform us that it had been ‘high time for the changes’ - acted as an usher, directing bewildered folk towards the next vacant window or base. Mercifully, I found myself being sent to Maurice’s counter, his unchanged appearance a welcome haven in the newly obliterating flood.

Later, I received an email from my sister in Orkney, enquiring, among other things, about our Pembroke weather. I told her: here, primulas are already thickly budded, snowdrops are in bloom, leeks - like fleurs de lis - are fully grown. The weather is mild and we are on the cusp of spring.

Maurice’s parting  
divides flat hair to the right;  
his fringe, a staple

Jacqui Thewless

## Haiku (5) : For The Way The Wind Blows

i

before it recedes  
a tide brings you the present  
of a star-shaped fish

ii

asleep on the train  
a child and his grandma are  
folded together

iii

the earth-bound seed speck's  
still held by a pale thin thread  
the spider has left

iv

green long willow leaves  
shooting from this new spring's tree  
gathering showers

v

the world's sands shift  
when you begin to notice  
the way the wind blows

Jacqui Thewless

## Haiku In July (2015)

Sparrow

Thin clematis shoot,  
not without purpose; tiny  
claws grip, before flight.

My weather

For pliant stalks, dry  
roots: rain. Sun soon, favouring  
roses, sends West Wind.

Jacqui Thewless

## Haiku In May

entering this world,

the scent of Hawthorn blossoms

and grass: new old friends

Jacqui Thewless

# Haiku In October 2015: Slow Leaf-Fall

The TV programme

tells of trees' survival fight.

Why this peacefulness?

Jacqui Thewless

# Harvest I

the most perfect drupes  
caught in spiders' spiral nets  
the white moon cuts loose

Jacqui Thewless

## Harvest II

at last, the brown year's  
homecoming from the fields –  
grey skies, white billows

Jacqui Thewless

# Hermitage In September

There lived  
a single soul  
with his just plea for life  
in no more darkness than these  
islands knew in winters past,  
with no less brilliance  
than his difference of consciousness.  
Silence accompanies  
the urgency of clans to kill  
while solo innocence refuses death  
till breath's oblivion.

This year, a travelling Visitor  
entered the hermitage in September  
bringing talks.

No tribe or Church or School of Thought can  
go the distance with me,  
the Guest said,  
though inner men and women walk this way:

the hand that barred and gripped and bruised's the same  
that later fails, is powerless to fend,  
then folds and prays and mends  
and tends and soothes but may cast pity out again  
until the cycle's run its course [...]

A simple spider's web, the Traveller said,  
like confidence, hangs in a window,  
glistening. The sun  
rises  
and its moon sets on authentic remorse.  
You just don't see the links, the symmetries  
as often as I do:  
truth and real  
kindness  
must  
come sooner  
or later...

Jacqui Thewless

# Hermit's Romance

Saturday night:

two

dancing feet.

One red shoe

swings to the same music as its  
footstool partner.

Jacqui Thewless

# Ho Hum

Unemployed for months,  
folk paid for me to work at intervals, over decades  
when I was younger - think of scrubbing ovens,  
cleansing sinks, toilets, all surfaces - madly spring-cleaning;  
polishing mirrors, windows, wooden chairs and tables, metal taps;  
dusting skirting boards and ornaments and the backs of pictures;  
vacuuming rugs, mats, stairs and vinyl floors – piped or not - and  
ironing shirts, bed linen, dresses, knickers! , socks! ! ;  
un-blocking loos; washing pans and dishes...  
leaving other people's flats, houses or schools or  
even multiple-use buildings spruce, as if  
a cheery Wren had sprinkled magic dust  
from a feather in its wing, leaving  
unexpected notes  
of cheery goodbye, sometimes  
with a gift of fragrant blooms...

Maybe it's as well my Eagle-eyesight has turned dim:  
I'm thinking homely debris settled in those rooms like virgin  
winter snow in weedless gardens.

Jacqui Thewless

# Home

in His own county  
the sun still makes small rainbows  
in wild flower bays

Jacqui Thewless

# Housemates

How do I explain  
the still silence of haiku  
to a barking dog?

Jacqui Thewless

# How Important Is It To Have Even A Small Mountain To Look Up To?

How important is it to have even a small mountain to look up to? -

Not conquered but always near you;

the huge size of it, always higher.

How much more so are the few marvelous poets I admire

and turn to

as you turn to it, morning or evening sun-lit,

sinking in mist, or target

for sudden lightning.

Jacqui Thewless

# Imaginary Spring

let me believe  
the outside  
possibility

you call me  
or else  
miraculously

the doorbell rings  
you wearing that hat  
at the door: I've come

requiring the love  
I was scared of  
before. I say

ok I do not  
fear any more  
ice. I imagine  
a thaw.

Jacqui Thewless

# In My Wintermonths

I don't say that perfectly formed green  
beginnings, rising from the thaw, did not  
to me once hint of wheat, though empty  
grass;

or that I never longingly  
spied good seed scattered  
with glass on fields I tip-toed over,  
lonesome in autumn.

These things that happen  
to doves, occurred for me, too.  
Nothing is perfect.  
I couldn't be

the same bird in my wintermonths,  
losing the ability to cluck or coo,  
I began to  
tar myself

black as the Ravens,  
with awful feathers and a voice  
even I am still  
partly afraid of; picking and choosing

among words,  
endlessly concerned with everything contrary  
and just so. Like a strange  
hen, finding grain of my own. I became Crow.

Jacqui Thewless

# Jessica!

Stunned by the bolt  
of genesis, high-browed,  
big royal-blue eyes  
wide awake,  
pale-faced princess,  
we gave you the title  
of a queen - Elizabeth, the third  
girl, our fifth off-spring,  
sister of twin, John;  
our last-born  
sugar-darling.

As soon as you could  
shuffle over our floors  
you found that you could open a door  
by pulling yourself upright  
with the aid of its knob.

With this  
inside intelligence  
there was nowhere safe:  
our stuff was yours, and the house  
became your pen.

Rowen, the eldest, Jessie and Jules -  
even then were your slaves,  
stooping and skivvying for you.  
I caught your sister,  
scooping you  
from your nest-bed like a bird.  
Pointing  
an imperial finger,  
Jessica! you said - with zest -  
your first word.

Jacqui Thewless

# Joan

my cherished photograph of her -  
the silver weave  
of Seer's hair

Jacqui Thewless

# July 2014

From west to east, a baby beams

like sunlight in a wicker cot.

Grandmas fold hairless grandsons two days young

in the crooks of their bare arms;

grandfathers hold the spheres of their new heads

easily in their old palms,

smiling. From north to south,

an infant is playing in dust

with water and a stick.

A military man stops on the track: "did you see it? -  
the red fox, caught in a wire trap";.

Your grown-up daughters, sons,

graduate from school, at last:

all pals in their group, like them, gowned, capped, photographed.

In the middle of the world -

in little Palestine - light's snuffed out.

There is no one to carry. There is no one to hold.

There is no one to catch.

Jacqui Thewless

## Keeping It Real (For Jessie)

Keeping it real, a snake makes progress  
through a desert of baked clay. She can  
only imagine the flight of eagles,  
the strength and faith of lions, by tasting the spoor  
of Life in the grit of rocks  
with her scissors-tongue.

The snake, who is lonesome, grows  
tired of sand, hatches a brood of her own kind,  
calls it 'man', bites her tail, and changes into a river  
of blood. - This red stream etherises.  
Worlds die. Still burning, no one speaks, yet  
people out themselves and enter the caves.

There are deep pools left from the deluge  
of words in mountains: shelter  
from heat, short passages to green  
fields where everything edible is food  
but anything written down is not bread. Again,  
the sun in the heights waxes language, but the new air

tempers it with clouds, balancing drops  
of spring water on the filaments of glass. A kind of  
Serpent/lion/eagle-man sees Gods/ the Big Bang/the Apes/  
the Ancestor in smashed splinters of a mirror. In fact,  
though, the snake's only daughter is a lamb.

Jacqui Thewless

# Kindness And Mercy (Easter,2013)

Kindness and mercy  
outlast the lesser virtues.

Something in the sap's  
rising and falling arranges this,  
knowing the heaviness

of all the rest will be jettisoned  
when both weigh too much more than  
the human I Am that passes

almost unnoticed  
into paradise

when something more than peace  
between old enemies is lost -  
a core of surplus

bitter behaviour ripens, with unseen  
shame, always gaining density; one day  
it drops from the tree of life

and budding continues, as green  
and plenteous as new grass.

Jacqui Thewless

# Late Summer

After days of rain  
flowers open their blouses  
to butterflies' lips

Jacqui Thewless

# Lent

Sometimes,  
the door is shut.  
There's no entrance: a wall.  
My friends' songs, a long way off,  
rising to the place my heart can't reach,  
are the voices of strangers.

I want to know if He's waiting  
for me to speak –  
to kindle a confession  
He has never heard:  
words spoken to the three walls where they meet  
in these tri-angled cold corners.

Yesterday,  
there was an angel near me,  
patiently translating tongues and shouts:  
all day  
was Easter-easy as our praise.  
Today,  
my lonesome soul is choked with  
spiritual clinkers.  
Flames that flickered in my bricked hearth  
have burnt out.

Jacqui Thewless

# Lunar Eclipse

Now I can compare  
something huge and tangible.  
(No) imagination.

Jacqui Thewless

# Ma Bod

The auld conjugal body jist went bust  
so this one's for me:  
thighs thicker than they used to be, its waist  
has billowed fit I dinna care.  
All innocently I wear these flowing garments  
under which the corpulence sits  
like fat cells relaxing in a warm plasma bath.

My unmolested mouth smiles more. I laugh, and plod where  
before I thinly skimmed the air like a long-legged gnat.  
You could say that I shouldna lick the buttered toast  
as though midnight bara's a greasy kiss.  
Wi' flicks of my imaginary tail, sich a  
qualm's dismissed. Tho' I might fancy a bit o' fond fuss  
from some ither kind o' bos taurus...

Jacqui Thewless

## March 8th 2014 Day

Someone once said  
(though how he knew this,  
no one knows) that women  
are re-incarnated men  
and vice versa: both primitive  
sexualopposites play their parts  
in everlasting time, he opined.  
Thank heavens, then, for the new gays, bi's,  
trannies and lesbians, I replied...

Jacqui Thewless

# Market Day

... those moments when my lip-stick's applied, hair's brushed and scrunched and three scarves of different colours are hung from my neck and the big bright orange bag that crosses my chest lands on my hip...

I pause in the doorway,

stop leaving

and ask: what was I needing to buy, beside tomatoes?

The mind is blue, open.

The only cloud, ephemeral: the tang of a vine...

Jacqui Thewless

# Memorandum '09

In June, we tackled weeds.

Big clouds brewed  
while we pulled, on our knees,  
nubs that gave way to the gouging of prongs.

All day, we barrowed roots

from beds to compost bins, through static air,  
finding a few words. We made openings  
that longed for this rude awkwardness, all-thumbs;

the awesome fall

of hush before a thunder crashed.  
Just this: us, guileless,  
criss-crossing your grass.

Jacqui Thewless

# Metanoia, While Walking To School

I was struggling to find  
links to the Things that were new  
and coolly alien, originally: gifts  
from the Unknown Word  
God, including  
my peculiar first  
taste  
of lentil soup and Scottish consonants,  
aged six.

It was an awful difficult thing for an English kid  
to put a face to the name  
'sleekit'...  
till  
encountering a Vole,  
picked up  
and held by its tail,  
while walking to school.

I found it, mind...  
'timorous', as Burns said.  
It never made the journey  
in my hand:  
just slipped  
from its thin mouse-skin  
into oblivion.

Jacqui Thewless

# Midwinter

With a two-fold cleft  
this solstice sets about its clearance  
someplace separate –  
maybe it is stellar – in space.

First light  
shears the landscape,  
cold spears everything  
and frost  
forms an edge  
for every margin.

Then, coming suddenly,  
each brittle question  
cracks:  
Open.

Jacqui Thewless

# Minutiae

I stay up all night -  
three discordant visitors:  
my past, my futures..

Jacqui Thewless

# Mood Swing

I get the lonesome blues sometimes  
and turn to those who  
do not,

like this butterfly, mimicking flowers-on-wings  
while sipping the last mead  
from the beds' last blooms -  
this tender slip of light, so much more rarely seen  
in withered late October than in fresh July -  
or these rough birds on the roof:  
Rooks, with impeccably tough feathers;  
eye-balls and beaks and claws of cleverness,  
racing from the Rookery for just one thing:  
fast food;

and truth to tell: I do not know  
why my black heart aches so.

Jacqui Thewless

## Moving (I)

Why do we go to the sea,  
for solace? Here, at the vertical  
edges of the steady place we stand our lives up on,  
we have to assume repeated storms'  
savage attacks to the surface of land  
mass. And then, the sand flat opens horizon,  
splitting the rocky chaos from flows.  
I know people who feel like this, talk like it, sometimes.  
Even so broken open, grit holds the assumed interior.

Jacqui Thewless

## Moving (Ii)

Any one of these stones on the beach  
could be It. Picked (and pocketed) by me for form -  
circle of quartz, cross, spiral, fixed in a sea-smoothed bit of grey cliff, black cliff -

or else chosen for being rosy pink,  
mauve, green; gem with sparkling trails of light in it.

But I am holding myself back now, leaving the strand alone,  
unnoticed, contents random and unspecified.

It will not be long before I'm home,  
sitting quietly at table  
with my own milky white stone, green-flecked, rust-tinged, like a flat planet  
or like an egg, left by a goose  
back in the time  
when people were giants.

Jacqui Thewless

## Moving (Iii)

A cold, concrete, block on the beach was where I sat  
when we talked about old loves. His ex and mine.  
My grown-up son was standing, walking, sometimes still.

The wind remembered the month, bitter February, giving nothing warm away  
and the sea  
was as far off as summertime. I said: I blame myself,

then, steeped in stories; Once Upon A Myth,  
despite the facts. He said: And yet...

I think it's best to hold for keeps the memories of kindness.

Jacqui Thewless

## Moving (Iv)

With each extra year,  
the heel-treads sink  
deeper in sand, in mud:  
weight, unimaginable

as my self. I open  
poetry books as slim as every one of them is.  
Spiritual  
whale, swallowed whole,  
inverted Jonah, I

read only a single poem's five  
brief lines and slip,  
naked as the familiar sea,  
into me.

Jacqui Thewless

## Moving (V)

Out in the road, quick  
big cars carrying  
single people, zooming  
past walls  
where  
armies of millions of  
mosses hold up their heads to the sun.  
Still.  
Standing  
between half  
a centimetre  
and one  
inch  
tall.

Jacqui Thewless

# Muse

When I discover new poems from her  
on the fresh pages, she takes me softly  
to an evening window to see stillness gather  
and lightning flashing, a comet's slow trail  
lingers in darkness everything alters in  
a cosmic moment. But after  
this – forget about that, says my sun-lit soul.  
And even the memory of magic leaves me alone.

Jacqui Thewless

# My Nights And Her Mornings

If someone asked, I'd say:  
I wanted something  
made of matter or not  
that comes once-only in a lifetime.

This means I've lived  
ages watching daybreaks and waiting  
for my shadow to stop re-  
counting the old moon's arcs and phases,

weighing the new night against sun-days;  
so, growing comfortably used to  
lonesome evenings,  
even anguish becomes a friend

with acceptable habits.  
Sometimes she moans:  
if only, today...  
and I listen, as always

with an open mind. I know  
my lengthy passages through nights become  
her mornings, but every  
single light is mine.

Jacqui Thewless

# My Old Man

Sometimes, a body cannot see.  
There was a blight on the rose tree,  
a rat among the strawberries  
and I cared not, ladies,

I cared not, though water reeked  
in glasses wherefrom posies peeped  
on tables laid, so neat  
I couldna' see.

Jacqui Thewless

# Nant-Y-Cwm Steiner School, July '13 End Of Year Festival

Biding its birth in stone, the unborn place  
for meeting is a tent that's open to the mixing elements:

today's dry heat, an earth-scent; trodden floor  
of grass, a base for infants' feet in transit;

breaths of notes of violin and double bass, recorders  
and keyboard; songs of the teenagers in French;

the plays of the classes, learned week-in, week-out  
by heart and free grace of movement.

As always

each child is a growing wonder,  
a gift

Hawthorn and Hazel and Ash  
lean in and listen to at playtimes, and after school

the peedie Nant still rushes, brim and fresh, in the Cwm.  
And bees in the old Nissan hut that once was the hall  
will swarm - as all these youngsters will

when they have grown older,  
leaving a honeyed-beginning  
for everything to come

after fourteen - and teachers will follow  
them - with fondest of memories.

Jacqui Thewless

# Nant-Y-Cwm, Summer,2012

Since an old wall was opened  
one of the footpaths on the grass hill leads  
to a plot of grains, beans, fruit...

nearer the main schoolhouse, a little higher up,  
a building that's invisible  
shows itself. Among elements with weight,

it is as yet unborn as my kids'  
grandkids' who'll trap Ash keys  
for a day by making stick-and-stone

dams over a river.  
I visit the spiritual blueprint, twice  
passing its double-dome-shaped heart

which still rests  
on the air's arboreal lungs that never  
were rib-locked,

almost shocked to witness  
how the germ of a new school hall  
already has a pulse.

Jacqui Thewless

# Nations, Laws, Castles

Nations, laws, castles:  
short-lived, when you think of it.  
A Redwood giant.

Jacqui Thewless

# Nations, Wars, Prisons

Nations, wars, prisons:  
short-lived, when you think of it.  
A Redwood giant.

Jacqui Thewless

## Nonet: Phases (For Adam)

Inside the earth, the white clay is full.  
It is the potter who lifts it  
up to the librating wheel,  
gathering emptiness -  
The interior  
of the round jar  
turns dark as  
a new  
moon.

Jacqui Thewless

# Noon

a rose-coloured light -

morning's benediction.

over- cast by noon.

Jacqui Thewless

## Not Now, As Then

Not now, in August nights - as when  
I walked wide sands alone,  
where sea pulls shore,  
and wished for him who'd paused with me  
to hear this hush below the Perseids -  
I'd hide from this common moon

whose light floods sparks that streak black skies again...

Now no sad oceanic trails  
remind this empty hand of his-in-mine,  
nor leaving or oncoming tides  
of turning waves endow what's lost or spent.  
I could not wish for more -  
not now, as then.

Jacqui Thewless

# November

birthdays loom

from the places they keep secret among years

unanswered queries

hang from vacant limbs when the old leaves fall

Jacqui Thewless

## November 23rd

First, early frost  
strikes with dawn-sulphur  
and melts by nine.

The yeast-light of warmth then  
lifts the ropes of almost-still prayer flags  
August had bleached, September has  
curled, the Autumn wind frays.

Tomorrow is my birthday.

Today is all morning, embers flaming.

Jacqui Thewless

# October

crows stream past ice clouds  
unlikely in October  
like winter candy

Jacqui Thewless

## October (I)

this month reverses  
as clearly as water, sky,  
warm-cool-weather-march

Jacqui Thewless

# October Haiku

sighing and plodding -  
flashes of vacillation -  
how else do I live?

Jacqui Thewless

## On Taking Leave 2 (For W.P.)

It'll be hard  
to leave this  
guardian Cwm of childhood;  
each mild morning and all through the night,  
missing the river's tune  
that sang in my ears when I stood  
among haven woods  
where quiet rain-veils fell  
and drifted (filtered through  
the tallest Pines or lower Ash  
and lesser Birch) to  
wrinkled Hazel leaves over berries and buds.

But I'll not lose it.  
Though I must find  
another bee-lined lane  
opening ways beyond these  
well-known banks of Creeping Jenny's  
yellow stars, Ox-eyed open wide  
Daisies, glossy Hart's Tongue ferns  
and steeply-leaning Foxglove sentinels,  
all that is left behind will not leave me  
since youth itself (rooting when seeds fell  
in the soil where we moved stones, and weeded and dug}  
must bloom in my mind with the home I've loved.

Jacqui Thewless

# Orkney Future

One day  
another giant will come –  
almost certainly a woman  
with hindsight and a strong  
weakness for uncommon gems –

striding across the standard globe;  
one of her high-heeled feet  
lands in Hoy Sound.  
We natives must assume a metropolitan  
lodging for the other foot.

As this gorgeous colossus sweeps by us,  
cupping cosmetically-treated hands  
she lifts the archipelago  
with one deft elegant movement;  
her flunky sets the stolen jewel in a crown  
for her: Brodgar's returned to new-look Jotunheim.

Jacqui Thewless

# Orkney Islands

The light's faith-keeping with the land  
in those wee isles of Rousay and Egilsay -  
it made the sea's third wave's curve, pale green; the flower's cup,  
a whiter shade than Hakon's tower-kirk;

it frames, on one Chinese White strand, today's  
loose brushstrokes with a tide of fresh calligraphy in seaweed-inks.  
Light sinks the floundered war-ships in less bloody hue  
than sunset on a bluebell-blue sky's rim.

Yet there are stark shores, where a spate of boats left home  
and came in with the dawn, in floods of fishing folk -  
and here, we've drowned the sea's nights, brim with dark alone -  
O, come the morning...

Jacqui Thewless

# Painted Lady

poised on this foul edge  
the emblem of innocence -  
typical of love.

Jacqui Thewless

## Pembroke Haiku:

(i) September View over the Park

Today's long rainfall:  
tin ribbons trying to hide  
yesterday's gold trees...

(ii) Westgate Terrace

Medieval terraced  
homes of the privileged rich  
with less stuff than us.

(iii) Millponds

Loops in time. No ships  
but the white sailors  
with feathers and beaks.

(iv) Main Street

Eight markets each month  
and Wisebuys, Wisebuys, Wisebuys! !  
Down-hill, laden with bags.

(v) Estuary Dam

From four o'clock, kids  
from the big school in the Dock  
storm across the sluice.

(vi) Info for Tourists. (not really a proper haiku, but still)

Most people who live  
in Monkton have never been

inside the castle,

outside of Wales, or  
onto a plane that flies to foreign shores.  
Under the radar.

(vii) View from my own window, through rain (also not really haiku)

Who else puts a vase of sunflowers on a blue cloth  
on a table, outside -  
under the prayer flags, limp with rain -  
to fake her own view of cheerful flowers?

Jacqui Thewless

## Pembroke Paparazzo (As If) .

Sometimes I wish  
my little Samsung had a zoom,  
to snoop on this white-feathered  
closeting of Swanlings -  
just so  
difficult to glimpse them between  
guardian wings of royal cobs and pens...

and (if I could) I'd dig a photograph  
of the cool shaved heads of the Cormorants  
as rock-stars witnessed swimming over there -  
but then unguessably (sans that quick lens!)  
elsewhere  
under their screen  
of shining green water...

or (with the focus on wee tiny things)  
among the skimming pond celebrities  
I'd like to spy my favourites  
(as dun cotton-wool balls,  
hid in these reeds under the walls of  
our medieval Castle) - limning  
this season's un-numbered  
ducklings...  
wobbling  
by.

Jacqui Thewless

# Perhaps You, Too

Perhaps you, too, become  
reclusive, the element of choice  
seemingly invisible -

a will-o-the-wisp you think  
you followed in autumn  
mists on the moor,  
letting your compass fall from your hand.  
Where can an uncertain future find you?

Tell me, in wintering buds and  
suddenly flowering leaves,  
opening and falling  
in forests of poems

where all of the crones  
grow singly in stature  
and silence is talking at last.

Jacqui Thewless

# Plan

I'm thinking of shifting to  
Something bigger than this.

I have contained myself  
in this small place, but I've forgotten who's here.

The plan is to make my Self visible by unpacking things  
that are mine, like neighbours

who will visit Her with interest, as if  
the girl-next-door had gone

and Someone Else had come.

Jacqui Thewless

## Poem For Ben, Who Said: There Is No Money In It.

A book of poems  
isn't worth the price of petrol  
for someone's gas-guzzling battle  
into work one day by car.  
A motivated poet will hardly  
go outdoors- but to breathe the air.  
So far it's fortunate  
that s/he is always busy with  
the internal combustion  
of a single flame of light's  
assumption:  
or a kind of cud-  
chewing bovine business  
and all s/he tends to need are the fertile  
fields of the night.

And there again,  
poems are much too penny-pinching  
for the lavish modern world.  
Most people can afford to live  
very comfortably without them.  
Think of it (almost soul's heresy to link the two) :  
the 'highest art-form' yields  
the poorest purse.

I reckon only fellow-poets  
would trade almost anything  
for the no-thing  
of a poem:  
the route of our fight -  
with too many words -  
is by the most lean line,  
leading the hungriest verse.

Jacqui Thewless

# Poem For Jimmy

Gone is the Garden, O!  
and all her loveliness brought down in one wee blink of time:  
seed-harvest to the four wide widths of space blown freely;  
the great Ash uprooted and a cavernous ground.  
After the outpouring dark sky's lashing  
and this year's winds, unleashed,  
there is nothing left of flowering fields  
and the green has given up its ghost.

The earth is still  
too soft to tread upon.  
Put by your gud auld wellingtons, James Anderson  
this winter walk the tarmac road, in leather shoon.

In spring-time there'll be nae more craws at the planting,  
but, in the town, there'll be a thousand, thousand stars,  
like you, pacing the pavements with a frown or smile.  
And every face and every footfall has a place in  
The New Albion that will be built next year..

and the celestial crowd'll warmly love thee, dear.

Jacqui Thewless

## Poets' Rooms

Few folk will talk about shadows  
after a long winter  
except poets, who listen  
to what shadows say.

Perhaps the morning's warm light  
tip-toes through the day  
to afternoon.

In poets' rooms, there is quiet  
stillness – as if snow  
was falling ...

Jacqui Thewless

# Precious To Me Is My Sunny Welsh Shore

Precious to me  
is my sunny Welsh shore.

I am leaving it not  
until death parts  
everything from me.

For you, their father,  
there are new  
vast spaces where your five  
children's faces are not seen.

But here by the strand  
where racing tides break, I am  
faithful to flows and  
the time slow seasons take.

Jacqui Thewless

# Presence

My son leaves home  
and later, a thought  
of absence  
stalks the room;  
an otherwise dumb  
visitor  
from someone else's gloomy house. -  
Not this one -  
I quickly note,  
ignoring her weariness,  
her endless harping on years  
when I was not quite here at all...

Jacqui Thewless

# Questioning The Well-Known Vision Of Fish

Questioning the well-known vision  
of fish who swim as many in shoals,

or birds of a feather  
in the impersonal flock: I miss  
you,  
lots.

Jacqui Thewless

# Rain

Acquiescence is  
an opening into the world as you  
have never known her;  
quietude inside you  
leads to an encounter that is new  
with the rain, for example,  
and  
or  
any  
simple element, approaching  
you in the silence that she's brought you to –  
sit, still, and listen –  
spurn sulking –  
a more tender apprehension,  
tightly closed for a long time,  
will slowly open a view  
more lovely than you've been accustomed to.

Jacqui Thewless

# Randompoems

## 1 shoreline

The old place seemed to have mirrors  
everywhere: the same windows on a well-worn-way-side.  
I wanted foreign-ness, a landscape with a shore-  
line; no mirror except the sea.

## 2 nightgarden

this evening's journey  
spreads blue pillows from the west  
and fog wets the beds

Jacqui Thewless

# Recipe For Smiles

fish chili lime zest  
lemon grass and ginger -  
the humble beetroot

grated in a bowl  
with cloves of crushed garlic, oil  
coriander - mix

Jacqui Thewless

## Remembering Rob (For Elaine)

Dwelling on no-thingness is  
just not the same as to be empty

and open, like the Heather bells  
on the hills, when the huge sky towers over them.

Even these small things can perfume the wind.

That purple blooms and summers pass,  
is not a thing worth noticing.

Remembering Rob -  
who would care less?

Jacqui Thewless

# Rip

The quietude of this small settlement  
depends upon the brooding elements  
in unison. Since July's come,  
their calm Adagio  
for Pampas Grass and reeds  
and the leaves of the Willows hangs in the air  
as if with quick  
hawk's wings  
our Fall will thunder  
and the Last Movement  
for us won't be like this  
too easy Summer.

Jacqui Thewless

# Roadside Tree

Contemplative scribe,  
how much silence do you need? -  
See the roadside tree,

peacefully awake  
in its springtime covering,  
not hiding the sky;

unnoticed, perhaps,  
by speeding motorcyclists  
in lines of traffic,

or cops in fast cars  
whose sirens shriek their mission,  
ripping the spring air;

like human culture,  
its roots are complicated;  
its sap-flows – up to sunlight

from hidden places  
of unimaginable  
darkness – seldom praised.

Thank you, we say, for  
the cherry's blooms, forgetting  
its cycles of change,

so much like our own  
passages between dark and  
light, noise and silence.

Jacqui Thewless

# Rob's Elegy

If I have light  
Yours was the first twinkle to kindle it;  
If I have joy  
Yours was the first laugh meant for me;  
If I can bless  
And if my heart knows simple modesty  
I still remember thee, my dear,  
I still love thee.

In Winters past  
Your coming softened cruel December's freeze;  
In Summer's fires  
Your tales were like the cool burn's melodies;  
In Autumn's lonesome air  
And Spring's abandoned gardens  
Your presence there, good shepherd, made a place for me.

If I have light  
Yours was the first twinkle to kindle it;  
If I have joy  
Yours was the first laugh meant for me;  
If I can bless  
And if my heart knows simple modesty  
I still remember thee, my dear,  
I still love thee.

Jacqui Thewless

# Scapa Studios

It used to be Mrs Humphrey's  
hospital for Norway's whalers, anchored in Hamnavoe,  
stricken with scurvy, back in the day. It's the Henderson's house, now.  
The sea's souging and the skiffs are skimming the Flow  
with single fishermen; the ferry's wake  
makes its perfect Vs visible from the workshop window.  
Back-ground radio 3 voices drone on through Elaine's  
days at the wheel, her hands in clay that grows as it spins...

Mike's lens traps northern Scottish  
islands' changing light with photographs of long-horned  
cattle on Hoy: gold, big - in the narrow track,  
impassable, under the sullen mountain; mist rising and opening

purple crocuses in spring; a ruined bothy, standing in fog, still  
loved by the camera at dusk. And then, when blustery weather  
hurls on the land its might in the thin winds laced with brine,  
screaming like fiends, whipping up spumes  
of green froths, hooting through gaps under doors,  
my sister's kiln is baking peedie mugs, with sea birds  
beautifully sketched on pristine porcelain under a clear glaze.

They'll pack their fine pictures and these pots and bowls and tiles  
for you in carefully-boxed tubes and cubes  
and rush them to your own address...  
where denser airs and neon lights make skies blush at sunset.

Jacqui Thewless

## Scottish Sonnet: Grangemouth (For Betty)

Slumped at the keyboard in the afternoon,  
I live off-grid and click on a virtual box  
to open my otherwise lonesome room  
to somewhere where action happens. Now it is the Scots –  
my family included and friends who go way back when  
I was un-medicated and busy with wee causes and real effects –  
who have been screwed by one man who more or less owns them.  
So much for social media: only my sister in Stromness  
posts a remark on the tragic news, with link  
to the story of how a psychopathic monster got what he plotted,  
as per usual; knowing the ropes, holding the purse-strings.  
It's colder up there in the North. Controlling the bulk of their fuel is not  
without its power-buzz, for the addict on top.  
Business as normal for those billionaire freaks, or what?

Jacqui Thewless

# Seeding

Do not speak of love,  
lasting.

Like spring, it is not kept still; like summer, it wavers;  
by fall, it is already seeding.

Love is busy, molding the perfect architecture of your heart.

No need to notice the changes it goes through to make you who you are.

Think of the being you might have been, 'if not

for the silent arrows', 'if skies hadn't fallen', 'if earth hadn't shook',

'if you hadn't chosen to...'

Jacqui Thewless

## Selchie (For John)

I'm looking at the journey  
we might have made at sea.

When we were young, I dreamed  
we slid into the waters  
like mad lemmings  
from impossible cliffs,  
breaching the deeps  
with mouths open  
and still singing.

A pair of pneumatic Icarus-wings  
pulled us down  
far under our airy element.  
Some drowned  
but after all,  
you have grown shells.

The ocean passed through us  
as we breathed water  
with our own initiated lungs.

And me?  
I am half human soul;  
I write  
small necklaces from cultivated pearls.  
Your voice  
reminds me of the painful grain of grit:  
there are echoes in it from fathoms deep  
beds under grumbling waves.

I love you has, of course  
now been forgotten -  
like your limbs  
once used to land -

come into my arms is  
an impossible plea,  
make love with me's a mute

refusal of crustacean  
pain and nothing  
makes you mumble but  
the memories of Catholic songs.

And me, the born-again shape-shifter? -  
I was fisher-  
wife and half a human soul:  
I've thrown a frock of oysters back into the sea.  
In this boat,  
I'd sail with you in my lap;  
your shells might split  
under the sun;  
I might  
wile distances away between us  
with the stories that I'd tell  
on my own rosary of pearls?

I close my seal eyes, sick of seeing.

Ladies  
and gentlemen, roll up! Roll up!  
You are about to see  
how this girl flips  
herself with one strong leap  
onto the solid Rock of Ages;  
lets the boat go down  
with this sealskin vestment still dripping  
yet

look how she keens  
for that poor one  
milky-white pearl,  
lost in an oysterman,  
drowned  
in a moment.

Jacqui Thewless

# Snowdrops For St Bridie's Day

They might be flowers  
of mercy  
or small emblems of  
the sun's

inevitable rise;  
clusters of grey-green spears,  
miraculously piercing last year's

fallen foliage  
without disturbing  
a thing.

Earth's first birth is  
whiteness - one  
simple dependence  
from

this little  
stalk -  
where hope rises  
with modesty,  
surprise... springs!

Jacqui Thewless

# Spring

Exquisite vortices peel open like  
the fists of multiple newborn babes.

But this bud-breakage  
of unseen veins is the sweetest  
on the Maple tree -  
with colour of cherries dipped  
in mint chocolate -

who would have thought it? !

Jacqui Thewless

# Steps Into The Air

I compare my verse

almost incessantly to the stars'  
perfectly luminous structures

and sentences,  
believing:  
it is possible to climb

their heights of dizziness  
step by step.  
I fail

but continue to work -  
taking my kit of angst on my back -  
I keep climbing;  
each syllable a black mark

spilled on my name.  
In every margin there may be  
invisible commentaries,  
especially where anguish  
flexes its claws

when sorrow slips into language.  
Who cares if I like to write such things  
at two o'clock in the morning  
about your departure or about you?  
Either they stumble  
through thoughts querulous

to the sudden chasm,  
or maybe they try to clamber to the stars  
trusting in stairs  
as I do in darkness,  
believing such  
steps into the air  
are more than just possible...

Jacqui Thewless

# Stereotype

the shadow enquires:  
who can say if crocodiles  
can become lessons?

Jacqui Thewless

# Stevie

Nearly sixty years ago, a fiery-tempered little dark-haired lass married a calm and quiet gorjer man, lived in a big house near the butcher's shop and had her firstborn child they called Steven.

He was a handful and she wasn't ready. So, the young Mammy did what she could: handed him over to her own good Mammy. Nanny was a paragon of gypsy womanhood.

Stevie grew up in love with his Daddy from a distance. He and Nanny lived in the trailer, under the trees. His gorjer siblings did real well at school. Stevie didn't write or read.

Daddy liked to watch the local football team. Stevie loved boxing; trained in the gym. His Daddy travelled far to see him winning the matches, passing the belts to him across the ring-ropes after every win.

Stevie, the wonderful Welsh Never-Lost-a-Fight Boxer, got famous. Daddy, the Gorjer, used, secretly, to cry. Mammy was proud of Stevie when she saw him on telly. One day, Stevie's darling Nanny died.

Stevie stopped fighting and began to train again; became a diver then a master plasterer, instead. And a pub bouncer; drinking and staggering instead of swaggering; Pulling ladies. Oiling his shaven head,

Stevie became the Prince of alcoholic whores. But then again, he'd slip away into the woods for a few weeks of freedom:

drinking dew, eating raw bird's eggs, slugs  
and shellfish from the estuary shores.

In early middle-age,  
Stevie would strip off all of his clothes  
and race across the Cleddau bridge -  
for charities - and laughs.  
I'm physical, he'd say, with eyes half closed.

A lass gave him a snake - a growing  
Boa constrictor, kept in a tank in Mammy's tidy spare room.  
He took it out for walks, sometimes, around his fit shoulders  
in July. Mammy raged after the snake pushed the glass  
lid off its tank, with a shattering crash one afternoon..

Unstoppable,  
she got another lid  
and this time  
put  
three concrete blocks on top.

In his broad face, Stevie has got  
the biggest, cheeky, laughing, sky-blue eyes.  
He has a wide and sunny, childlike - almost toothless - smile.  
The few teeth left might make me think about the stone  
marking the place where the old bones of Nanny lie.

But Stevie's left his haunts.  
His happy soul's not here. He's gone to ground.  
The landlord lost his Dancing-Doorman when the clown -  
who once was The Big Name and then got drunk - grew up.  
Word is that Stevie's...settled down.

Jacqui Thewless

# Strange Thoughts, Tonight.

Last evening  
sharp-snipping scissors cut my hair

and white cream squeezed from a nozzled  
tube in a box turned  
my locks  
black

and tonight I have strange thoughts  
about love  
like ash  
stirred in a bronze dish with  
the stub of my pen

when I wore  
a patterned silk kimono  
smelling of  
patchouli oil  
and moved inside the slight  
ghost of my long-haired youth

after the lover's cigarette  
I slept  
on newly-warmed  
white wedding-bed-sheets  
then you were green too weighty in-  
between my tender thighs

tonight  
it must be the waxing  
moon  
the red lip-stick's  
smiling reflection and my

black cut glossy hair  
I have strange thoughts that are  
soft shadows flickering

behind the grey eyes  
gazing from the nakedness I wear.

Jacqui Thewless

# Stromness Haiku:

(i) Sbrpool Neighbours

I'm told: two horses  
once filled the horizon; huge  
neighbours in the West...

(i) Morning

Because of the rain,  
we don't go to Hoy. Gazing,  
all day, to its hills..

(iii) Copse

There are no Birch trees.  
No matter: sunlight silvers  
Whitebeams' lichened boughs.

(iv) August

So late in the year...  
Rowan-berry time. Half-way-  
home to Bridie's Day.

(v) Evening light

That violet roof  
under the far hills, blue sea –  
up-staged by gold sheep.

- -

Jacqui Thewless

# Sudden Wind

Because I am used to this slow life  
pondering the baby  
growing week by week in her womb -  
when the sudden wind blows  
at night, I have to rise with open mouth  
to watch the spinning leaves.

I wonder...

Jacqui Thewless

## Swan- Song

Trust was a tame bird in the hand,  
unlike this crow  
on my shoulders, she'd sing in my palms.  
When she flew –  
O sometimes she'd fly –  
she'd turn back soon,  
her wings folded in my fingers like  
a soft bud. Heart-shaped, when held;  
blush-feathered like a collared  
dove. I miss her  
monotonous swan-song: true love,  
true love, true love...

Jacqui Thewless

# Tender

Pembroke in autumn:  
wet soils almost too tender  
for the press of boots

Jacqui Thewless

# The Eating Club

The eating club  
meets  
regularly, now,  
on Wednesday evenings  
to eat:

that is its primary purpose,  
since,  
for various reasons,  
its members enjoy food.

Only the cook is fat, however.

Around a small mahogany table  
that has been dressed with all  
the paraphernalia of ritual eating  
four people sit opposite each other in my dining room.

Two people bring the wine.  
One brings taciturnity,  
cigarette – smoke,  
and a hopelessly swinging leg.

Each person, in turn, chooses the menu  
for the next week's banquet  
and I make all  
the necessary preparations  
as faultlessly as I can.

There is always  
An entree, usually from the sea,  
such as local crab- meat  
with a silky dressing made of virgin oil  
and vinegar and yolks of eggs,  
a spoonful of brandy and tomato-sauce.  
Prawns, perhaps,  
with wild rocket and a cucumber or else  
a bowl of green-lipped mussels  
from antipodal seas.

We all enjoy the colours of their shells while we are eating them  
and I put everything into their broth.

The main course can be anything we like  
so long as it involves meat,  
fish or game or poultry,  
vegetables or grains and fruits –  
and O, eggs, and the products of a dairy; -  
any combination of these marvellous foods.

We talk  
about  
our lives  
while we are eating.

Puddings are my speciality.

To everyone, with every choice dessert, I tender cream.  
I tell them it is fine to become fat, and to enjoy the rice with cream and  
cinnamon.  
I urge them to revel in the tarts,  
to savour sweet bananas and the home-made strawberry ice-cream.

Fancy, I find, is a seasonable thing,  
and frequently depends upon the weather.  
Red cabbage with apple and sultanas, quince jam and mashed  
potatoes goes so well with steaks of venison in spring.

Parsnips, being sweet, go well with lamb -  
provided that the leg is roasted with garlic and rosemary.

Frankly, everything depends upon the flavour  
and consistency of each accompanying sauce.

We chat.  
We drink our wine, and eat.

Meanwhile,  
one of the four suffers in silence.  
She fights with pain  
from the involuntary movement in her leg

and heart's aching.

The rest are only sitting here because of her.

I found her in a hospital for poorly souls.

We sat outdoors together,

smoking cigarettes and

quietly becoming friends.

Then, sitting next to her,

a man who works with her husband,

who knows everything-there-is-to-know

about birds and seals and cows,

because he's worked with them, too, now comes here to eat.

Next to him, my friend's husband is dipping a crust into a sauce.

I put everything into my sauces; -

Science as well as sensuality and years

of stirring pans.

When my friend has finished

with the wine, the conversation, and the pain

they all rise from their chairs.

Then comes the putting on of coats

and the agreement, once again,

on Wednesday

to meet

and eat.

Jacqui Thewless

# The Fader Of Heven, By P. Maxwell Davis. (For Betty)

Only we recall  
the hours of awful practice,  
trying to sing it:

our ears battling  
for the perfect pitch of two  
pure notes, meant to be

close seconds, but more  
like needle and magnet, or  
brooches - half-hanging,

hinged to a vest and  
scarf, 'till we got it. Just so:  
twin zones, poles apart.

Jacqui Thewless

# The Letter (I)

I came in peace  
waving a flag, a white sheet  
lined with blue,  
looped ink folded  
and delivered by hand.  
Read my lips: an enveloped  
dumb imprint:  
a kiss.

Jacqui Thewless

## The Letter (Ii)

I'm stepping out today.  
Climbing the hill  
before these clouds  
empty. The sky  
tilts  
as though June were now November  
though  
stalks are green.

I'm wearing the beret of  
most tender wool, the colour black.  
So much like fur.  
I'm walking, not talking at all.  
In deed the words

I have been trying to say  
have just become  
a letter fall-  
ing in to a  
box.  
It's possible you won't hear them  
though you read them.

Jacqui Thewless

## The Letter (Iii)

Even the leather writing  
case's hinges are shot:  
the strips  
of hide  
that bound  
the lid decayed;  
the lock –  
a small lock  
involving only a sideways  
click to open it -  
still works its  
mechanical metal slot.

Inside the case your letter's  
yellow pages of script  
slowly  
rewrite  
their gist,  
an ideal  
content –  
the content  
between me and you the long dead  
master of sub-text –  
hints at its  
continuous narrative.

Jacqui Thewless

# The Miracle Of Love, The King Of All The Elements

One day love  
opens the door.  
In comes freedom, with a light step:  
you've heard it before,  
but that is just what happens, one day.

Consider it  
a death of some kind;  
a spiritual summons  
from the highest tide of mercy;  
a surge sweeps unwillingness to play, away.  
Or else a birth:  
Wonder, instead, moves in;  
takes charge; raises a sail; before you can say  
'Why me? ' - you've left land-locks behind.

And it's ok  
to float.  
Every stony betrayal, each  
cliff-fall refusal was not love's fault.  
Look -  
here are the greatest waves in motion  
under the moon and sun.  
Wisdom can soothe, of course, but real love still knows best.

Who comes towards you  
across waters, walking? -  
the Miracle of love, the King  
of All the Elements.

Jacqui Thewless

# The Plot (For The Poet, Lloyd Merritt And Ivan, His Dad)

Two years ago, the Ferris Wheel  
offered you a view.

It's true that time runs out  
to an ordered plan  
of Swings-and-Roundabouts.

This, plainly, is  
your real property:  
a foreign garden  
bordering your neighbour's land.

Under a hat in France, Ivan  
picked ripened strawberries; like you,  
docile as a child who dreamed  
of breaking rules and making clean  
fast getaways at night.  
And though your old man's last loss  
of the plot earned him that right  
to See-Saw-down the next-door-  
fella's tree,  
the snoring sway of circumstance  
snuffed out his chance to flee England-  
while you soared, free.

Jacqui Thewless

# The Writing Class At Lampeter

Pens are lifted  
and there's the click;  
the shuffling of sheaves as we out-breathe  
and then's the intersection of an insistent bird's trill;  
voices outdoors  
and a crow's caw, and a thud.

Some one coughs.  
A boy. It is  
a Tenor Cough.  
A girl coughs in a higher key.  
The boy responds unconsciously with  
a more emphatic, melodious, baritone cough  
and now it seems  
the conversation outside's growing louder.

I'm roused by the clicking, then, of someone's shoes  
on the floor of the hall  
and the muted closure of this writing-room's door  
as the teacher leaves.  
Sweet, open, fluting of the bird-sound in the tree calls me  
and I rise,  
making my own quiet  
discordant disturbance.

Walking round the square concrete block  
outside this old Canterbury building,  
I hear a sympathetic symphony of sounds,  
conducted by the queen of mornings  
- a clear sky, golden;  
there are the tiniest of small  
breeze-motions in the single tree's umbrage;  
the swing-door bangs shut, thrice, in succession, quickly, as it must;  
a bi-plane drones;  
footfall of perpendicular people, crossing the campus, sounds;  
Hark! Now the chapel bell rings in the hour.

I return to

the class.

A man called Ken is busy with a hammer and a maniacal drill outside the door.  
From time to time, he sings a few bass phrases of a song.  
The devilish drill, though,  
and the knocking of his hammer are persistent in  
wrecking the day's choice literary music.  
In every long pause that he lets us have,  
outdoor laughter and conversation salves unsettled nerves  
restoring to the air a more  
civilised, satisfactory  
and genteel score.

Ken comes into the classroom, gently  
asking, in a whisper,  
Can I come in?  
The hand-tool is more well-behaved  
when driving into our small window frame.  
Ken leaves.  
The teacher enters  
and the pens  
- thank God -  
go down.

October,2007. Revised July 2010.

Jacqui Thewless

## Three Days

On September 1, we lay in the sun, she polishing  
her smooth milk chocolate tan;  
on September 2, sharp coolness arrives -  
the same cloudless heaven now dimples my skin.

Remembering iron, rust leaves mass  
where my feet brushed, lately, the precious few last  
young buttercups, daisies in dry grass on Monday -  
but apples are weighting the tree's branches down.

Seeds, burrs cling to my clothes.

Then, my grandson's birthday, I'm all afternoon  
cake-baking and making his favourite icing  
stick to its sides. The offering for tea's a plate  
of savoury: paella.

He's fifteen.

By September 3, all tourists have gone.  
We keep the Pembroke morning rains  
for ourselves; fine, soft, grey as herons,  
falling fast,

like summer.

Jacqui Thewless

## Tin Tabernacle 2

the clock's heard ticking..

folk rest peacefully in prayer

the warm sunlight, still

Jacqui Thewless

# Tin Tabernacle, Pembroke

All week,  
I'm waiting to go in  
to that little, homely, stable-of-a-place  
where nothing could be simpler than the grace of God.

On hot days, the large fan whirrs softly overhead,  
the narrow, high, windows are opened and,  
outdoors, you'd hear the free streaming of praise.  
On cold days, someone lights the stove

and we come just as we all already are.  
Nobody dresses up  
or down. The same familiar friends talk openly  
to God: His Spirit gathers everyone

with a small voice.  
Sometimes, a nutshell cracks:  
a man weeps, tenderly;  
an old woman finds a secret joy;

the quiet peace sinks into  
the hearts' beats and lungs  
of every body's breathing. Jesus

comes near  
in these warm-hearted meetings.  
We drink tea, later: there's a kitchen,  
mugs and kettle out the back.

Old friends, around a table,  
catching up with God:  
and all of us plain  
folk go home easy.

Jacqui Thewless

# Today

Today,  
encountering  
the edge  
of ease into nowhere-like-nearness,

I make three steps,  
pirouetting around enlightenment  
inside myself, on grounds of silence  
offering places to be with no feet

and no hands holding  
the feeling of hosanna with You  
in the lowliest of places  
and no eyes to see:

all Things are reeling  
this Way, like always,  
including  
We.

Perhaps  
deaths are trials of gratitude,  
I say to myself  
in witness,

having missed hope,  
unnameable  
and pure,  
that needs Nothing to survive

the puncture of the rubber  
ring of living  
with shock-stillness,  
but gives - after this - more than today it takes?

An instant  
reconciliation  
with October's wan sons  
some twenty-eight years dead

settles in mind like a pond where unseen lilies  
continue to float or like white wounds  
on the surface of my skin  
and today I'll cry, though later may laugh and sing  
with Them: hosanna in the highest of places..

Jacqui Thewless

# Traveller

a different address -  
from my new window, the stars  
make another arc

Jacqui Thewless

# Triptych (For Adam)

Why do we require  
conspicuous reminders  
of the singular -

objets d'art, like these -  
each more or less uniquely  
invaluable?

Is it because we -  
controversial, as they are  
peerless and solo -

have no more vocal  
key-notes with which to address  
our forgetfulness?

The triptych is not  
different in this respect  
for a hidden self

mostly neglected.  
Not once, but thrice told; over  
and over again:

no one is the same.  
We have in common this much:  
no more, and not less.

Jacqui Thewless

## Two Wee Garden Daffodils In A Pot

Here are two wee daffs  
for St David's Day, in a pot  
my sister made a few inches high -  
blue as the winter sea that laps Stromness,  
rimmed with a green so close  
to the cut stems you can see why

I placed them here. In Pembroke, the third  
month of the year, like these two Welsh  
emblems, seems to separate  
a visionary's outlook from the cynic's  
jaded view: one looks on,

with six-pointed perianth of shaded lemon  
facing the window, with a frilly skirt no less  
common than the sun - like someone who  
knows the ropes, expecting nothing to surprise;

the other's golden garment falls beneath  
the star-like Frisbee that simply  
shows - as Blake's or Burns' or even  
Wordsworth's verses do -  
the way we ordinary mortals see daylight

after far-too-long-lasting nights, or on  
the first day of spring, when garden daffodils come in.

Jacqui Thewless

# Uncommonly Long Winters

At the flowering,  
Solstice makes Poppies' frills flash in its cornfields,  
leads Rose petal silks along garden paths,  
lets folded Foxglove-fingers ruby and open for bees  
and couples moan in grass,  
and ghosts of the widows breathe on window-glass,  
drawing newly-broken hearts that bleed, seeing that  
this season still breeds lovers.

Uncommonly  
long winters shutter the springs and falls  
but never summers -  
no, not ever summers.

Jacqui Thewless

# Under The White Foam

Under the white foam,

the child I am  
is restless, until

an almost dissident knee  
emerges from washing.

The pink knee has slowly  
slid over the water's horizon,

thanks to my hidden heel,  
pressing on metal with a cunning purpose:

a soap-scented bluff,  
rising like an unconquered island hill.

I walk two of my proud red fingers on it  
as if the flesh belongs to me.

(C) Jacqui Thewless March 22nd,2013

Jacqui Thewless

# Until

Eating my breakfast,  
so full of myself. Until  
this miracle rain.

Jacqui Thewless

# Untitled

(1)

A dream enactment:  
the slow-growing feeling of  
it's ok to kiss  
under his wild hair,  
my lips on his own shoulder -  
license-filching, stopped  
for years in real life;  
something so transgressive it  
must hide, like a thief  
or like a promise  
of some skill only the next  
life may offer me -

even more wondrous,  
his returning kiss as safe  
as air on my skin,  
as certainly not  
half-heartedly there: his touch,  
placed. Even in dreams,  
I am kindlier  
to me, these days. As one door  
has been shut, at last  
an interior  
existence develops roads  
with public transport.

(2)

All morning, I brood  
on him and the dream's unlikely  
images making  
egg and mushroom break-  
fast in the hot frying pan's  
clear liquid that spits;  
while lifting the forked  
food from plate, cupped coffee from  
surfacetop - brushing  
my hair, blindly face-

ing the mirror's bright reply -

morning becomes mid-  
day; work-time, wasted; lesson  
plan still unwritten.

The question, not asked:  
how to convince my learners  
of haiku's value -  
bearing in mind their  
lives of action, practical  
minds far sharper than  
mine? - The old woman's  
bus pass seems to slip  
from her open purse.

(3)

The bus conductor  
is no longer a lover;  
the driving-seat is  
occupied by me:  
Where do you expect to go  
with nothing to lose? -  
All kindness evaporates  
at action's threshold:  
as if (like Arjuna's will  
before the battle) .  
I'm lily-livered..

ordinary life  
is terrifyingly close  
to the dream's steep edge.  
I topple over - as I  
first did when I was a kid,  
suddenly on the rocks, then  
landing on rough sand  
with brain out of sinc,  
gazing at an inner sky,  
asking my non-sexed-self:  
why am I lonely?

Jacqui Thewless

# Vessels

A wide white Cup for the teapot. The squat Teapot  
for tea. Various and pretty Plates  
for the two kinds of my home-made cakes;  
almond or else milk chocolate.  
A wooden Bowl for sugar and  
for the beautiful spoon.  
The tiny Pot you painted on a summer's afternoon  
for salt  
and a round Table out of doors for us.

An entire House for all the rest of the furniture.  
Today's transparent Sky for passing clouds.  
The plastic Seat that's green  
for my old friend to sit upon  
and, for her man, the Steps from which he leans.

My Skin, for my bulges, like any bag.  
A rotting Crevice in the neighbours' fascia board  
for the peeping birds;  
and for the Garden we are in,  
tall Hedges on one side  
and on the other one -  
a long  
and timeless,  
ivy-leaved  
dry-stone  
Welsh Wall

Jacqui Thewless

# Violence

When empathy's flown,  
war is hiding in the woods,  
exploding feathers!

Jacqui Thewless

# Visitation

in the tunnel there are blue grapes,  
orange and red nasturtiums;  
joan draws the mullein's  
pale green fruits, felt leaves,  
lemon-y flowers,

while lizabeth paints  
the canvas sunshine-yellow,

i grate beetroots  
and i finely slice  
red onions, mix quinoa,  
chop lime-pickle, pour the oil and serve;

all day, a river of light ripples  
the table's surface  
through two vine-leaved windows;

under the bay,  
the last sweet-peas' perfume  
floats; the willow  
warbler sings from this lime tree -

and a snail's  
munched progressed holes  
in the plan thumb-tacked to a wall

so even the past  
is still changing...

Jacqui Thewless

# Votive

I wish for less  
to influence  
the kindness of stars'

flickering air that passes between them and us,  
gathering the masses of sky-born form and water,  
mixing the extremes, stirring the turbulence  
of billions of voices, speaking or silent,

and our  
own  
world-  
star's  
dedicated satellite,

easing their task with time-keeping tides  
of our prayers for pauses  
for everything that matters, seen or unseen.

Jacqui Thewless

# We

the circle-makers,  
golden fish in a glass bowl;  
single small raindrops

entering the deeps;  
here are we, then, with the sun  
the moon and planets

no differently  
going about their business,  
some of them slowly,

others eccentric  
or quick as small fish aiming  
for infinities

Jacqui Thewless

# Werekidz

After `bed-time`, guys,  
my grandsons become Werekidz.  
'Specially at Christmas.

See wee angelic  
Mummy's-boy baby-faced Luke?  
- must be the moonlight:

Christmas Eve, his screams  
bring neighbours to their front doors:  
Who's killing that child?

There's Luke on the ground  
splayed like Michaelangelo's  
five-pointed star-man

in a trembling fit.  
Help! Help! Help! AH! Help! Help! Help!  
Kyle's broken my foot! Help! AAGHHH!

The neighbours go in.  
Heard it all before. Those kidz!  
It must be bed-time.

Dayne on Boxing Day -  
for chucking cakes on the floor -  
goes to bed early.

Unfortunately -  
since he has the basement flat -  
where the drum-kit lives,

the peaceful Pembroke  
evening is shattered by the  
loud bashing of drums.

Christmas Day itself  
is fine till after midnight.  
The boys stay up late.

All hell runs wild when,  
let's say, around two o'clock,  
it is time to go.

There are alarming  
sounds of breakages - maybe  
beds, doors or floor-boards -

coming from upstairs.  
Downstairs, there is more mayhem:  
Dayne thrashing about.

KYLE'S GOT MY CAM'RA! !  
Luke yells, KYLE'S GOT MY CAM'RA! ! !  
I HAVE NOT! ! yells Kyle.

Jessie turns to Jules:  
Isn't the cam'ra charging  
in the kitchen, bro?

- he's just been in there -  
fetching another sandwich -  
and he nods his head.

Dean screams: Your cam'ra's  
In the bloody kitchen, Luke!  
I WANT MY CAM'RA!

Didn't you hear me?  
His father roars from downstairs,  
IT'S IN THE KITCHEN! !

Silence. Then, footsteps  
on the stairs as Luke comes down  
looking like a saint.

He bows his gold head  
on his mother's warm shoulder:  
I love you, he says.

The whole palaver

gets an action-repeat; then,  
suddenly, they sleep.

Jacqui Thewless

## With Cockleshells, Like Mary

An occult garden grows from the house on this hill,  
where I have played with cockleshells, like Mary;  
openly visible in winter, disappearing when the trees'  
foliage spreads. From the sky, in some Julys  
you might glimpse holy bees and butterflies  
on buddleias and me, meandering, like you through a gallery  
extending through doors of privet or  
ash or a metal frame for morning glory  
or a scented rose's gorgeous exhibit  
that comes, shows and  
goes in secret season.

Jacqui Thewless

# Woodsheep's Lament

Often it seems to be  
the only way down,  
on hands and knees  
in long shadows, searching  
the heather and gorse roots,  
burned almost every year  
by busy-bodying flames;

the morning alleyways  
I found among purple bells,  
the nut-flavoured flowers,  
the aromatic thyme -  
these have all been eaten by  
the red-wind and wasted again.

The cloven beast, clothed  
with shag like my tangled animal fleece,  
was not welcome on this hill.  
The message the tongues blaze  
through the bracken trail is:  
this is not your place. Move on.  
but still

I return, ramlike, to the mountain's rim  
of birch - stooped oaks are all hewn down -  
and though without mercy  
fires have scorched this ground  
this hill -  
this primitive hill  
where I was born - hides  
in its earth the blackened horn.

Jacqui Thewless

# Xyris And O. Speciosa

For every time  
and place, the right  
encouragement.

A bog has small Xyris flowers,  
budding on thin blades in the morning hours,  
spreading yellow petals in the soggy afternoon;

the ordinary wayside's  
O. speciosa is perfumed  
and open by both day and night,

lives without water if it has to;  
closing its showy primrose only when  
the sun first rises.

Jacqui Thewless

# Yang Yin

in your embraces  
unthinkable at that time  
these lonesome years

Jacqui Thewless

# Yin Yang

when night is darkest  
the first snowflakes of winter  
arrive un-noticed

Jacqui Thewless

# Yin Yang Yin

amid the petals  
of human souls' flowering -  
everything. no thing.

Jacqui Thewless

# You

your face disperses  
your visibility is  
almost completely

gone but for the wound  
where your subtle dialect  
left a lasting mark

who can tell how long  
this interior music  
of your voice will stay?

Jacqui Thewless

# Young Wind

The ancients' longing:

O young wind, carry our prayers

to the furthest shores.

Jacqui Thewless

# Zzzz

martens swooping out and in  
through bedroom windows

the drift of sweet peas  
on the afternoon

his sonorous breathing falls  
and rises  
and falls

like an ancient lullabye  
in the lap of sleep

Jacqui Thewless