Also by John Welch:

Poetry:
A Place Like Here (Katabasis, London 1968)
Six of Five (The Many Press, London 1975)
Wanting To Be Here (The X Press, London 1976)
The Fish God Problem (The Many Press, London 1977)
Braiding the Squadron (The Many Press, London 1977)
And Ada Ann, A Book of Narratives
   (Great Works Press, Bishops Stortford 1978)
Performance (The Many Press, London 1979)
The Storms / Lip Service (The Many Press, London 1980)
Blood and Dreams (Reality Street Editions, London 1991)
Its Radiance (Poetical Histories, Cambridge 1993)
Glyph (Grille, London 1995)
Greeting Want (infernal methods, Cambridge 1997)
The Eastern Boroughs (Shearsman Books, Exeter 2004)
British Estate (AARK Arts, London & Delhi 2004)
On Orkney (infernal methods. Stromness 2005)

Prose
Dreaming Arrival (Shearsman Books, Exeter, 2008)

As editor:
Stories from South Asia (Oxford University Press, 1984)
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FOREWORD

I started writing in 1957. However virtually none of this earliest work, and there was a great deal of it, is included here. I retain a certain affection for these poems, a fair number of which appeared in magazines during the 1960s, but have decided not to include them.

The poems collected here in the section ‘Dust Settled’ date from the early 1970s. Some of them are taken from And Ada Ann, published by Great Works Press in 1978; some are previously uncollected. The work in the sections Out Walking (Anvil, 1984), Blood and Dreams (Reality Street, 1991), Greeting Want (infernal methods, 1997) and The Eastern Boroughs (Shearsman, 2004) is broadly what was contained in the four collections so titled, though with some revisions and a few poems removed altogether. The Vigil and A Place Like Here contain work dating mainly from the late 1970s through to the early 1990s and previously uncollected. The final section, The Wind Harp, is recent, uncollected work.

My acknowledgements and heartfelt thanks to Peter Philpott, Peter Jay, Ken Edwards and Nigel Wheale, publishers of these collections, and to others, publishers and editors too numerous to list here, who have shown faith in my work over the years. My special thanks go to Tony Frazer of Shearsman for undertaking this Collected Poems, as well as having been the publisher of my most recent full-length collection.
THE EASTERN BOROUGHS

1
Here I am, Leyton in summer
And the light has aged me. Spill
Anywhere out of this world

Or else, just here, an edge of London,
The small quiet backs of houses.
And I am so full of it

These dinner-hours of solo walking
And a Faustian bargain’s made in Leyton –
Verweile dich du bist so schon.

The sun comes palely in
And faces are
An innocence of expectation.

That tree being substance of itself’s
So compact in its foliage,
Its leaves the being of summer sky.

There is the work of being
And I had thought it was words
Here among the Eastern boroughs.

2
Hidden face of a lake.
I moved my name into the sun
Feeling an odd kind of happiness

As if sunlight wind and water
Had ruffled the surface of the paint
On tight-stretched canvas
I being one for whom the act
Of reading early on became
A kind of absence.

'Like this I can grow, like a
Scar over myself’, I had thought – and
'Is there enough inside me yet?’

Was this why, falling quite
Silent for a time
I fed stories in last night’s dream

To the pale hungry girl inside me.
'‘This is quite a good thing I have found’
I’d told myself, safe in my silence.

Here I’ll stay with the good things inside me
Where light embraces a threshold
And find an emptiness that is myself.

3
Is it that words build a silence
Like the fruit’s dense flavour built from light?
Each Autumn I was being called

'To what the winter sees
After the spectacle of leaf-fall
As if one by one they had gone

Back to their names and we were walking on air,
The crisp tread, a barely yielding
Springiness of surface.

I remember now, out walking
Into my waiting silences,
How the words when I first found them
Were flocking in libraries, something
Miraculous in their way
Of resting on the curve of a page.

4
The I of it is another, is both
Epiphany and absence –
The way it looks up from feeding, wiping its mouth,

It is an afterwards,
Something that goes on clearing and claiming distance
In the picture’s painted absence.

Still I was there
A winged self stretched like light,
Pinned across the door.

Today out walking with you
I have come into this noise
Of wind and water everywhere,

There is something caged that
Looks for itself out here,
Something quite huge and I want it to leave me.

Remains of a tree still flush with berries
Out on the empty hillside as if
It were standing a little apart from itself.

I am feeling around inside myself
For what might be the light.
Are you here enough in the dark to find me?

You, the speaking silence,
Are making the space familiar.
You’ll make me in your eyes –
Flesh and blood behind the curtain
Owns up to being real.
So I’ll grow in becoming to the world.

5
When the camera looked at Eurydice
And she hid in the photograph’s shade.
She was light’s image burnt into silver,

Daguerrotype mirror the light went into –
I was there too, an
Image deposit, salts drying in air

Or an ash afloat
On its small lake of light.
Image on all this shininess

Is reflection seeking its answer
Where light still writes
Its letters from the dead.

But I have flown myself out of there.
Pecking at the mirror
I dreamt my arrival,

One moment, that is, of perfect being,
Hesitant fortress
I’d said – as if sky eats its messenger.

I’ll climb into myself.
You might be there too, cloud mixed
With the sunshine, to make this food real.

The Faustian bargain: in Goethe’s ‘Faust’ the bargain Faust makes with the devil is that he will be granted one perfect moment which he would wish could last for ever.
GALLERY

This city – it is
The heartfelt pause of sunlight
Out there on a piece of shaped stone.
A shadow of writing
Darkens it like soot
And we are both the tenants
Of this. But I have taken
Myself away from you
This November afternoon
And now it’s starting to get dark.
‘Vase of Black Wine’ is a title,
The picture tilting its silence towards me
As I wait for you to arrive.
There is a kind of hopefulness waits in your arms
Like a calm end for those of us
Who, wearing our prose selves
Will one day arrive
Separate, but together
Each clothed in our final flesh.
Our first proper holiday after my operation –
‘Partial debulking’ is what they call it.
We were on the beach together. You needed to cross the estuary.
Watching the ferry approach I asked if you had the right change.
Then as I was saying goodbye it came,
That moment of indescribable strangeness
Called an ‘aura’. It’s as if a gear shifts in my brain
And I felt I was seeing you for the very first time
Where you were standing beside me on the sand.
It was the thing still lodged in my head
That appeared to be telling me this
As you climbed in the little boat and sailed away.
I stood there for some time in the hot sun.
I watched the glittering water
Not feeling altogether well
As if ‘consciousness of self’ were a sort of illness
And waiting there at the river’s edge I was trying
So hard to remember
How, taking me by the hand, it had brought me here.
SWIFT

Entered my room to a short-lived storm of wings.
How the swift got in there I do not know.
The window had been closed for hours.
Huddled there on the floor it looked up
Out of startled eyes, more animal than bird.
I opened the window and scooped the thing out
Like an insect. It sailed away,
Just a few ounces of flight this
Creature that’s riskily other.
There’s the way it consists of moments –
Wings and the benefit of air,
Being so suddenly there is one instant
In the afternoon-devouring emptiness.
What’s me is something that’s left
Hurtling around inside
As if I had swallowed self like an echo.
Now pressed against the window’s ache of glass
It watches for that momentary return.
LAKE

Bending, at day’s beginning,
Over my scraps I am Tantalus
Half-buried in my waters.
Two days before
There was that corrie lake we’d found
Its silence so abruptly come upon,
The lisp and whisper at the black stone shore,
A sunless dazzle, something held there waiting.

I go out into September sunshine.
My face is hot one side and cold the other.
I walk to where the slabs of rock
Are tilted upward from the road.
It looks deliberately gardened
As if it has been waiting for me –
Honeysuckle, purple loosestrife
But all is on the fade as if
Seen in a mirror with a faint tarnish.
I turn, and watch
Today’s inscrutable currents
And I strain to see you swimming to your island,
The one that you have chosen for today.
Your head’s a mobile punctuation mark,
The trail you make a pale
Blemish in the water.
Now I have lost it, must imagine you
Pulling your body, seal-heavy, onto rock.

Returning home I’m at the window
Watching the sheet of quiet water
It’s then I see you stretching upward –
You are unfolding in the distance like
A letter in a picture book.
Energetically you wave –
   And me? I’ve had to turn away
To put the words down on my page of silence.
**Breathe, Then**

There's more good news says Tuka  
The mirror is empty  
Tukaram, trans Dilip Chitre

‘Come, little mouth’, they’d said  
‘It is expedient to breathe’,  
Unwinking the mirror’s siege –  
An infant’s pronoun-rapture, seized with self

It grew itself a shadow full of words  
And somewhere else the world  
Being violently named.  
But now there are these patient afternoons

As if the day were hiding from itself.  
Going back to look, it is as if  
I cannot quite remember  
Just where it was I’d left it

That day the blow fell, dreaming myself awake  
To an existence in the light.  
I find it coming home to me again  
And now I may have reached a place

Where something fatal reaches me.  
I am the reader moving up behind me  
Who hovers like an afterthought.  
There is the storyteller in my head –

The one who rises with those fallen eyes,  
The me-not-me that I’m being spoken by.  
This may be as far as I  
Can take him with me now.
Creeping upstairs like a child perhaps I’ll
Find him thinking the sky
In a room where a mirror shallow with sunlight
Glosses the day. It empties. Outside

There is a single bird, its song
Intact, clouds wasting all the afternoon.
It will be almost the world
In there, as if that might be enough

To strengthen my faith in appearances.
Arriving, word-perfect now
And, hearing something breathe itself, I’ll breathe
‘Imagine living here.’
I Is

From ‘he’ to ‘I’ the pronoun –
It travelled the sky,
Being fathered: what I am heir to,
Tongue pressed against the moment

I is
A mind simply
At play with itself

And this was where
The breathing found him
Who will be up early – an old man
He waits for the sun to rise.
Years later, and I am passing my hand
Over the stone face, asking forgiveness.
Mirrored

Uncover this –
    being
it is a poor am.

We two, being
worded together

who are dusts on the mirror.

I thinks of you
Behind a window waiting
The sunlight winking back

Here being when
There is no more
Pronoun
    am
Being lifted up: one

Axe-bright moment