Its Halting Measure
Other publications by John Welch include:

*And Ada Ann, A Book of Narratives*  
  (Great Works Press, Bishops Stortford 1978)
*Blood and Dreams* (Reality Street Editions, London 1991)
*Greeting Want* (infernal methods, Cambridge 1997)
*On Orkney* (infernal methods, Stromness 2005)
*Collected Poems* (Shearsman Books, Exeter, 2008)
*Visiting Exile* (Shearsman Books, Exeter, 2009)

**Prose**

*Dreaming Arrival* (Shearsman Books, Exeter, 2008)

**As editor:**

*Stories from South Asia* (Oxford University Press, 1984)
Its Halting Measure

John Welch

Shearsman Books
Acknowledgements

Some of these poems previously appeared in the following print and online magazines:


‘Entering the Light’ was published in Plant Care: Poems for Mimi Khalvati
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one: voice in a mirror

Printing: the art of turning paper into emotions

Is printed, in ink that won’t come off on your hands
Writing that blackened the mirror searching for change,

In winter sunshine the dustless afternoon clouds,
The voice-performer’s light-filled skeleton.
John Sell Cotman: ‘Trees in the Alban Hills’

Some force, in among them, a
Driving apart
Where the wind gets in there all among those trees
Perched on a hillside, over against the city
As if the god were there,
A sort of visionary absence?
Four Walks

Floating Cargo
*Cheshunt to Broxbourne and back*

Walking steadily
Like this beside the water
Does bring a certain kind of peace.
Discarded blossom lies along the surface,
All this stuff that’s drifting down
And a powerful scent of elder
Whose musk is edged with sweetness.
People you pass are not quite sure
Whether or not to greet you
And here’s a sort of bollard,
It’s like an abandoned phallus.
Trees have that hint of greyness—
Sunlit upturned leaf drama
Against a dark threat of sky.
You carry on, through surprising groves
Putting some distance under your feet
Till, breaking into the open
Space of a silent field, there are
Unmoving clouds
And what’s this shrub with whitish flowers,
Its musty-spermy smell?
You turn back to that waterside
Whose floating cargo of blossom
Is almost as motionless as text.
Near Guiting Power

Used as title, a taking possession,
It does have this ‘watch-me-doing-this’ aspect
Like a man with that falsely knowing expression
Who, looking self-consciously relaxed,
Has briefly rediscovered the joys of reading.
But the hedgerow flail has been this way
Leaving twigs like the chopped ends of thumbs
And a bird in the mist is making a gargling sound.
Things unseen beckon, as we move on
Heads down into the wind. The Cotswolds?
It’s well-behaved children, on well-behaved horses.
It’s probably the English Tuscany,
Wealth carefully hidden behind the trees
Like that Roman villa in Spoonley Wood
Gone now to a heap of stones.
The villa is real enough, the mosaic
A Victorian fake, under an old tarpaulin.
Out in the open again,
The furtive sound of an unseen plane.
It’s the details that still have the power
To make you happy—that cotoneaster
Flaring out over a wall, red berries
And dense, bare, almost feathery twigs,
Solitary trees, stock still
As if they were the substance of our thought.
London Loop

*Bexley to Petts Wood*

thin covering of cloud
excitement of starting out

skylarks and doggerel traffic
tipping this way, it empties itself for you –

a landfill site?
continuous traffic’s a curtain now, useless angers

... 

a sort of special thing
for throwing a ball for it

five arches bridge
a ‘visual climax’

a semblance of gratitude
to free up what’s inside you

here’s a monster celtic cross
‘the founder of cable and wireless’

she tells me and
‘fourteen lead-lined coffins –

we have many important people here
from the big houses’
well, everyone’s marginal
shavings of birdsong  a central process

...  

a stagnant pond in a wood
and a viewing platform

discarded beer cans
someone has torched the ‘kissing gate’

puzzling pastoral remnant
what people come to these hidden places to do

alcohol  fire  as offerings
in the hot twinkling wood

anemones and others
each individual flower very pure
Deal to Dover

The cloud-heart melts away
Lord de Tabley

So, the surprise of nothing being found
the pupil shrinks in so much light

and our restlessness, against
an odd still sea
its peculiar deeps and blues—

Danger Of Death
No Diving
No Jumping
the sea’s
steep syllables.

When the reader gets up from the book
it is as if almost in paradise
and still there is that expanse before him.
Imagining it an audience
and it saying ‘I want every inch of you’
but he has no name to find it with.

Mid-afternoon, yes
but why should words help,
what is beyond
this beckoning?

It had
fixed itself
like a brooch
but awkwardly, at his side.
and how the night becomes us
when you’ll fit me like a glove,
you and I
meticulous graveyard of speech.
Two Landscapes / Garden Escapes

1
Cybele headless
on the Palatine
in front of her the thick, soft dust
whose footprints in it?
A bunch of mimosa someone left
has faded in her lap.

Mother of a Roman afternoon
of traffic. The city was
a slow paste, grey and ochre

The dark and dusty green of pines

scent of Cybele such an other absence
such
as music lifts one
inch above no
more

The lopped head like a monstrous absence
a blatant thing devoid of eyes
Wind wrestled nylon around you
where a gull went over
spoiled landscape of garage and gravel pit

*I too can be on the earth*

he said, I want
some of that
being alone: just
there!

Mud, water, a grey but marching sky
a tremendous rawness
miscellaneous bushes
garden escapes I shouldn’t wonder.

Imagine, that
messed-up landscape, it corresponds to me
and its single gull flies over,
the would-be transcendental
veering home in the wind
all that muscle against the air its home
The Return

No change in the town
But dumb noise in its
Saturday streets.

Its people reside
Among stone, and
Traffic as always

Drifts in exuberant
Stasis. The doom
Now or never

Takes hold
As the houses come
Down, and are scattered

By slow heavy winds.
Places become new places,
The same knot being woven and woven

And birds veering off
Being launched from ramparts
At an approach of feet,

Like exiles, the towers and
Shafts of sun, fabrications
That glint in its shining.

…
The grove at
Midday, heat
Flies in and out
Among the iron
Trunks, there is
A din of insects
From the interior.

A message of wind
Now tops the hill,
Below, ideas
For red brick havens.
Bushes lean into
The hill’s side
Where whitish bloom
Gives off its musky odour.

Here we have come
With our harsh boxed music
Among swelling chestnuts.
Arriving with cameras
We have brought wrapped food
And cups, to the
Fringe of the grove
And our games. I
Like this nearness,
Cramped festivity.
Roots seek the dark,
And hunt around –
Launch flowers from dust.
What I would miss
At all times is
These streets whose air is
Dulled with ghosts,
The one who keeps
A bar, her face
A squashed rose launched
From nowhere, now
Official birds
That rise in clouds
To name the sky.

...

Now sparrows roost among yellowing
Sycamore leaves by the market.

Where a faithless sun declines there are
Hundreds of the shrill balls of feathers.

Only one half of a person I’m here
My lips moving soundlessly to my tread.

At the front door I look for my key
Stand on the moment’s threshold and listen—
The buzzing of the codes.
So it goes to an abstract colour
But urgent at the margin.
Riding along the rim —
And looking out over the waterworks
Yellow sky breathed a word

So my mind went
With the bird up there
Always away
Then winter coming on like this,
Passing the house again and looking
Up at the lit silence
Of what was once your flat
And we were falling
Further and further back, towards
The sheet of glass that lifted
Its gleaming blackness sheer against
A night of restless unseen trees.

And a face, growing dark with the recognising
Of what it was between us—
Why is it called ‘making’ love
As if in the mirror it
Looked and saw difference, out of the
All but unreachable depths
Elbowing reflections aside?
Surely we were on our way to somewhere,
If we only knew
But I was flying with the wish
To empty ‘me’ into ‘you’
And later all it wanted was
To be indoors and quiet,
Inhabiting a morning.

The words had put me in a shallow grave,
Holding you holding me and falling
Further and further back, and now
At memory’s far edge, still falling
Towards the blackness of that silent
Window one more time.

...

**OPUS POSTHUMOUS**

Crashing around inside his wintry lusts,
The brake, the grove, the riverbank—
It overflows with fitful February.

The tombs, the tombs are overgrown.

Our pub is called The Albion
Return Return.
It sheltered us from a May storm.
If the laurel fits you wear it.

Little children trapped in school
Parrot the names.