

*John Welch*

*Also by John Welch*

**And Ada Ann**

**Out Walking**

**Blood and Dreams**

**Greeting Want**

*as editor:*

**Stories from South Asia**

# **The Eastern Boroughs**

**John Welch**

**Shearsman Books  
2004**

First published in the United Kingdom in 2004 by  
Shearsman Books,  
58 Velwell Road,  
Exeter EX4 4LD.

<http://www.shearsman.com/>

ISBN 0-907562-43-4

Copyright © John Welch, 2004.

The right of John Welch to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Front-cover illustration by Amanda Welch, copyright © Amanda Welch, 2004. All rights reserved. Photograph of the author on the back cover copyright © John Welch, 2004.

### **Acknowledgements**

Poems from this collection have appeared in the following magazines: *Agenda; Ambit; Fire; fragmente; Grosseteste Review; Navis; Oasis; Rialto; Scintilla; Shearsman; Tears in the Fence; Tenth Muse; Wallpaper; Workshop.*

'Thirst' first appeared in 'April Eye: Poems for Peter Riley';  
'Bungalow: La-Mer' first appeared in 'Poems for Roger Langley'.

## Contents

### one:

Art / Work	11
Chartres	12
Edge	13
Bungalow: 'La-Mer'	14
Out Walking, Again	16
Creature	17
Orfeo	18
It Was	20
Missing Plinth	21
Lanyon at St Ives	22
Exhibit	24
The Feelings	25
Authored	26
The Good Things	28
At the Centre	31
Deaf	34
Language Lesson	36
Dig	38
Collected	42
Family	44
Shores	45
Fathering	51

## **two: On An Island**

The Dough Bowl	61
On Arran	66
Duddon Valley	68
Isle of Purbeck	69
On Sark	71
Estuary	80
The Lure	85
That Time, In France	90
Here	95

### **three: A Poor Am**

The Sense Of It	99
Turning	113
Hunger and Thirst	114
Parented	116
Analysis	118
Lyric	119
The Moments	124
Launched	126
St Aignan	128
At Watch	129
Rose Mirror	130
The Eastern Boroughs	132
Gallery	137
Benign Tumour	138
Swift	139
Lake	140
Breathe, Then	142
I Is	144
Mirrored	145





**one**



## ART / WORK

That's right, keep it moving.  
We have seen the spring and not been impressed.

It is tedious  
Buying food under the trees. When we have  
Heaped up enough grain

We'll whisper the truth in banks  
Scatter it on the water  
His mouth is in the air –

We have taken him out of the city  
Clutching credit cards. Our funeral  
Rites are a matter of dignity,  
Gold leaf on a watery grave.



## EDGE

The god has gone back under the waves  
Uselessly uselessly trying to write his name –  
Watch each one falter just before it breaks.  
He left their irretrievable margin.  
His were the eyes that saw the tilted land  
Where a life was waiting for us.  
It grows out of a sort of mist  
And the new house built on the edge of the cliff,  
With the traffic behind, is a palace of views,  
An entire life lived inside inverted commas.  
Walking up through a rain-soaked wood,  
Its speckled light effects, you reach the viewpoint.  
You stand there waiting for the photograph,  
Focussing on the too-much of it.  
The water is an unusual sort of grey.  
Someone made it look easy then disappeared  
Who met with such a satisfying end,  
But now the sun has come out,  
And these are our defeats the sea is smiling with.

## **BUNGALOW: 'LA-MER'**

This shallow box is made of glass and wood  
To have a word in front of it.

It is as if the word  
Were prelude to some other music,

Perhaps the distant, lifting edge  
Of water that you can't quite see from here.

But the sea is not a house, and this one  
Having two birds in front of it

Which could be gulls or pigeons,  
Stone or plaster, and are painted white

Frames the distance with its word.  
Once inside and seated

All in that gleaming grave together  
Would silence be the best of us?

Out walking early I had thought of them  
In their low-windowed house,

Being born each day into the sun  
With each fresh waking, dewfall on a page

Until one day they'll slip away  
And leave this name scorched on a piece of wood –

For the time being it simply lifts  
Its puzzling hyphen.

Today we're headed for the shore, but this?  
It brings us close but still it holds us off,

Feather of air, a dying breath  
Confronting ocean fronted by a word.

## OUT WALKING, AGAIN

In the City a stench of white hyacinths,  
Monstrous-headed daffodils. A prison-shaped dream  
Was the future, like a vista closing behind me  
With a flourish. I'd resorted to vengeful watching.

Be seated now – the fat man  
Sweats slightly eating his food as a punishment.  
These diners, how squalid they look when seen from above  
Perched above the ruins of a meal.

Shelves of whole cheeses are ranged in a window –  
Their dense expectant silence,  
The sum of these vestiges a vain crust of buildings.  
There is so much inside an empty sculpted head

Where a man absents himself from himself  
Even if it does taste of the open air.  
In an empty landscape I remembered wanting,  
Chatting with the sybil

But standing as close as this  
They people the unpeopled air,  
These knowing faces, then look up –  
Sunlight's estrangement of the whole facade.



## CREATURE

The creature has learned  
To make itself music  
Plucking and sawing  
Away at the guts of itself.  
Muzzle scraping the ground  
It has learned to play with its mouth  
In a special kind of a way,  
Half-starved at evening here in a  
City will learn to grow quiet.

## ORFEO

Saying neither No nor Yes  
And always hurried on like this  
He travels toward birdsong  
Through the cool draughts of air  
Blown down here in damp gusts,

Passing the roots of trees  
That have a hold on silence  
Imagining he's roused  
The one who slept down there.  
This time he'll bring her back.

He'd gone to ground like lightning, down after  
Something imagined in the after-dark,  
That fearful thing, to make it sing.  
Should he turn round now, what will he see  
Mirroring an absence?

Nevertheless like Grandmother's Footsteps  
He senses a quick light tread of statues  
Behind him breaking into movement,  
Each foot planted in silence.  
"Was what I tried to conjure there already?

Down here I am given  
Desire to drown in, darkness to dream myself.  
I carry my body of work,  
Taking it forward. It fills  
The space that's closing up behind me."

And so, remembering days  
Of waking early to float downstairs,  
Words gathering round him like a press of quills –  
Flight is the only answer, mastered  
By the change, so he might move

Upwards and into a slow arrest of air  
To be all watching.  
Claws shrivelled with excitement  
He'll try to find the one swaying perch  
In all that blandness.

But can the bird ever  
Recover its track, before  
Scattering into an insect-flight of words?  
One's circling in that dreadful hollow  
He's coming out from now, it spirals

Upward into the moment.  
His open arms extend into the silence.  
"Being here I don't know what to say" –  
So turns, to where she goes from him  
And with that meaning marries half the sky.

## IT WAS

in a painting. The way the light had  
of falling just there  
and, seeing how it was, you felt  
it might start to make you happy.  
Here are the three figures  
who are turning towards each other,  
in the drapery flow half-  
seated and half-floating  
and if they are all anchored  
this is because of an arm  
reaching out for and grasping  
a jug. It is something quite personal,  
a particular moment  
but at the same time so  
much out-there and not-you –  
as if it is you are being reached  
out, and about to touch  
a concealed remoteness,  
an otherness which becomes  
you and so  
by this oblique route  
here I am being  
found, at home in the world.

## MISSING PLINTH

A litter of memorials –  
Helicopter-like one hangs there  
Shadowing an absence.  
He'd crossed a city grown abruptly quiet.  
The gallery was a dream-like warren of rooms.  
There was only one painting somewhere inside.  
Perhaps it was the one  
Where the half-bandaged god  
Was taken into the ground  
And if he yelled in the beginning  
It surely must have been for lack of self.  
Now, hanging in that final room,  
He wondered, is it this  
That outlasts being devoured, all  
Painted surface and its paradox of depth?  
Aching, he rose from sleep and it was like  
Being born again into the air  
Turning to look back, one final time,  
At the building, its facade  
Lifted into the day's first light  
And calm as the missing statue's brow.