The dust of just beginning
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Don Kerr

AU PRESS
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Published by AU Press, Athabasca University
1200, 10011 – 109 Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication
Kerr, Don
The dust of just beginning / Don Kerr.
(Mingling voices, ISSN 1917-9405)
Poems.
Issued also in an electronic format (978-1-897425-93-0).
ISBN 978-1-897425-92-3
I. Title.
II. Series: Mingling voices

Cover and book design by Natalie Olsen, Kisscut Design.
Cover image by Don Proch, Assissipi Valley (2006).
Author photo by Hans Dommasch.
Printed and bound in Canada by Marquis Book Printing.

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A volume in the Mingling Voices series:
ISSN 1917-9405 (Print)  ISSN 1917-9413 (Online)
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a height of prairies

a height of prairies over the river
sideways sun in the brown
stubble, twisted speech
of dead trees, the duplicitous
sun, but in decline, eyes
seeing for miles, all
at the same moment, elsewhere
the room with the blinds drawn,
the cancer advancing like traffic

or the smell in the corridor
of cooking, a fire hose for decor,
a life, long at its time, unmet
in words, a day in the
Shirley apartments, the smell
of cooking, long demolished,
home to a bowling alley,
automobile garage, passing
unmarked

a day in Connaught
in Ladbroke Road
Billy

look, Billy dead, the city empties, 
the city of London empties, 
if we don’t enter we needn’t 
remember, nor see others 
in his room, his things 
scattered, his ghost thin 
in my belly what is there to say 
without the listening man?
your death Billy, 
confounding time, burying 
your friends, burying the stories, 
plentiful as books in your room, 
your Vancouver, long buried, 
long demolished, sun the liar 
saying this is the last of all days, yet 
we bound for the next day, your music 
on the tape deck, we travel 
two ways now, playing you 
one day at a time
Billy at Notting Hill
at Ladbroke Road
at Gennaro’s, at Prost’s,
talking the eyes out of a girl,
dancing near the wide Saskatchewan
in shoes shiny enough to show
the mossy face, Billy leaving
Christmas at Finchley for the
eight-mile walk or crying
in the crowded hospital at Paddington
and saying I don’t usually cry,
the pain swallowing Billy
the lady gardener, Anne Szum

the night edges over the house
into the branches of the tree
the branches of the dark green fir
into the forest of the peony
into the dirt under the peony

in the dead centre of the day
in the mid of the mid day
the sun like a perennial
the bluebells happy in the
sweet breeze the lilies
pointing skyward the raspberries
in spiky bud all wait oh they all wait
for their first love the lady
gardener but she is unavoidably
detained the faces of the pansies
the petunias watch and wait but
she is unavoidably
detained
the voice of Anne

if your words fall into her ear
and you are in the same room
the one with the column of cds
the heater that eats logs
the walls insulated with books of poetry

in that room, your words falling
into that ear, need no other home
until she, the lady gardener,
dwells only in our rooms
cluttered as they are
with all matter of the living
absently watching cars
people and the faintest
of faint snow falling
from a heaven grey as ghosts
or your eccentric angels falling
into the pie-shaped lot
on Connaught saying in their
odd way for heaven’s sake
pick the raspberries
red as thick blood
the sparrow hopping about
looking for the ear to pour
its song into while I, bereft,
fall back into the habit of books

and she sits, makes tea,
tends the garden, reads,
in the voice of Anne,
all days in disarray
sun

if there is no sun
and the sky draws down
you walk through
a veil of mist and are not
at home

sun shone before you knew
sun and wherever you travel sun
is your home your dream
of Rome  sun rising
and falling in Claude
of Lorraine  the wide bay
or the bones leaning like flames
into only sun

when you see sun
rocking the lake, firing the woods
with a latticework that greens
the ferns, laying great hands
on the hills, scouring the bare
valleys and the small forests
of your arms and legs,
would you praise god?
or let the mind go dead,
the body drowsy  bathing
in sun heat and day light
the jesus poems

1.

jesus held me
in the grip of hell
my grade three teacher
lit the fire
and only prayer
said over and over and over
might keep me green and cool
terrified always to re-enter
the brick prison of St. Joe’s School
or to tell the terror
held me in thrall

baseball was the way
and the light of day
jesus never played baseball
maybe umpire or scorekeeper
but the soft bunt down third
the leaping catch at second
to be lead-off batter
to wait in the on-deck circle
to do the chatter
to win at tough
St. Mary’s to forget the fire
concentrating on the next pitch
was the best way out of
all that other stuff
There is nothing I believe
with mathematical precision,
no equation out of the self.
If lonely enough or vanishing enough
would Odetta effect a cure?
Patsy Cline or *Casablanca*?
Yet there is the temptation,
the nothing into everything,
true life in death, the miracle
of the cross, the Catholic
calculating machine.

easy enough to say
black on a health day
sweet church, its large emptiness, candles burning for the dead, the boy counting how many souls could fit and fly in the large auditorium of god, quits at thousands, looks at silence, the creak of a kneeler echoes, he kneeling, hands clasped holy, sinks his teeth into the varnished pew to leave his mark, under St. Joseph in the brown cloak with a staff the candles burning like souls, like hell, like purgatory and so beautiful, eyes caught, body gone quiet he crosses himself, walks down the stone steps into the wide street
this was the sermon
that a great garden
our heart’s desire
green and golden
was surrounded by a high fence
with a narrow entrance
and outside all was fury and fire
storm and stormy plains
the land of all fear

I knew I would never
discover that narrow way
to the green garden
and day after day
I picked the deadhead poppies
in my mom’s garden that they
would flower orange and yellow
like fire all the days
of summer