

# kate street



rob mclennan

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we begin to pray to our pens  
for words

that are solid  
excuses for having to let go  
– Phil Hall, *Amanuensis*

all summer long i caught myself sifting long agog  
syllables – as if i were beholden to  
their ‘topos’ if not their oftentimes libellous wit:  
    all the things i held in my hands –  
that were once ‘rotund’ in either tongue  
dissolved into oceanic silences...  
– Roy K. Kiyooka, *Pacific Windows*



**kate street**

patch a quilt of resonance  
& display harsher tones

if then  
& if so, then

an arching four by four,  
a casual glance at what will come

& what will kick the wind at  
a crooked eye or teeth

a margin of thin

she clear would land



## five short essays

the beauty of waterfalls  
turned over.

– Matthew Holmes, *Hitch*

The page is a slice of geological time.

– Jessica Smith, “Manifest”

### 1. short essay on intent

the black dog barking mute behind  
the kitchen window

I stagger statement stain  
the pounding sun

blood vessels pump & lift the line  
tween index, thumb

I was well enough to get the water  
from her blackened fridge

I have a package

I am the engineer

## 2. brief ghazal on acuity

what the darkness must resemble,  
a murder of crows

I wait for her w/ anxious dread  
at construction corner

why would all my recent lines  
be so dedicated

an otherwise occupied,  
but would release myself

today is painful marking  
in the trees

### 3. short essay on the escape artist

forgets nothing, & admits as much; pretends  
he is both larger & smaller than he is

sleep a shady country, w/ shifting maps; would  
you never ask a question, he asks?

the longest form of touch has not yet been recorded

the world is wrought w/ endings & beginnings  
that never arrive so nearly fast enough

handcuffs are far easier than feeling,  
doing taxes; it all begins with just a little key

it all begins with realizing that the key is not the only

the past is a poor muscle & the heart  
a foreign country

a hard man forgets himself

### 4. short essay on birds

*(for jessica smith)*

window s ill s lowly wing ing wing  
prevacate ; the s ound of bird wing feeder  
father fill s ound ing s parrow rob in read  
b reast is colour ed wheel s pun hard right  
re turn a tree p articu late s leep ethereal s ong  
of familiar un familiar bird s ong wind ow open  
w al k in the t all gr ass g listen s

## 5. short essay on literature

*bendable; mind over matter straws or spoons  
a texture daily lazy, self-blaming, root  
of human anything; another and control, no longer  
, comes alive; the taste of error, posing  
privilege & demands; the page goes  
longer, further; knows not*

where the spelling out; *an outcry naked, covered*

## report from the emptied city

a terrible lone barrack  
supplants out what is left

a state that doesn't hold much promise

a stitch of separate bays  
police the princely sum

embracing casualty; what  
you remember to

the street is hard enough  
to manage

\*

free from the end of love's tradition  
, a red couch main is endless

I would be unfair; apathy  
to her final day; *presume nothing*

a long provincialism entering self  
& readjusting view; a sentry record

of what already may have been  
& gone / abandoned

\*

an editorial scone  
of two-way traffic

*I beg to differ*

woman jaywalks, yells  
asshole back

to whatever approaches

what  
approaches?

a hair of bicycle breath

\*

I am at the end of the machine,  
extending whatever boundary of forgiveness

that I would know too well; knowing  
it should first come from w/in

science talks of space a non-thing,  
that even air cant comprehend

I spit heart-nails askew  
at cheese moon glowing round

, indecisive  
as a step

\*

why do you love, it said  
why do you love it

three buildings in a row on bank street  
crumble

to grow a beard & shave my head  
would make

so little difference; flyspeck  
on an otherwise empty page

the ruin of the duke of somerset  
& the lockmaster, bricks corner dust

\*

if the day itself a kind of little death,  
the heat stalks summer, slow

its hard to complain of anything  
knowing foreign cities get bombed

& I live in relative safety

ignoring the sounds of birds  
& wind through the trees

\*

a love & a love you would wipe

a poem on stone I wrote to respond  
to whom I cant speak

until the end of the world, it said

about being alone, dont talk

\*

(morning glory)

a matter of time, she is  
articulated stretch

to what you would react  
am what am is; waiting

for the moment

is comes; is just a matter of  
a day a day a day



\*

love bleeds the body to do foolish things

& all the things you cant cut down with prose

\*

, a pretty name for what we almost do

## house : an essay

cupboard painted almost shut above the bathtub claw white spread  
soapy water on the floor. the basement full of holes the steps  
outside the crack a through light. door behind the washer/drier  
thirty years or more unbroke, a hand held finally empty. what else  
makes a house? a hundred more years a red brick addition in the  
yard, the back shed crawlspace 1950s radio.

what kitchen made the wood stove, green painted chair of layers  
bruise a dozen colour down to wood, a strip mine making; made of  
wood & comfort coal, the furnace papers we would start & cords;  
dusty reservoir bore earth long the shelf of spider web & jars on  
concrete floor & shelves, a camera could his father still have film,  
souls away a stone a stone held out for finding decades spent.

a state of rotting wood & brick, where slow becomes the trellis  
& the yard, as trees grown overflow w/ bushes air conditioned  
window; soft as blouses, blow; brown paint on scarlet brushes,  
banister the hard white, where gravity down the stairs takes little  
legs & bottoms.

## poem for the newly renovated museum of nature

canvas of history & wings, a methodology  
of bone

carved out a cradle; earth, & earthen-worn

first how on polar shavings, polar plastic  
bear displays

that wouldnt hold a wind

set out or simple calm

would burst a main  
or water; dinosaur bones

a sunny morning light a brine  
, or beautiful face of calm

floating outer into space

spackle-thin, a spate

memorial of small stone  
grasses, herding cats

to stars that twinkle dim & light

the victoria memorial building

where else would you wonder when,  
the royal geological

, in what period you were bred

between old country & new

circumnavigate the wings  
, a horse-hair slowly in

follow to seed, & original wood  
, a generation, strewn

this pattern-flow of benches, molten rock  
& superheated air

in screen & glassy eye

or how I endured  
the seal hunt, hunt

what one to one another floor  
& service

marble calm & steps, a hair  
or capable string

where else would you breed,  
an einstein mark

through border, trouble; pound  
& glass

electrons through a unified whole  
a displaced stare

of buckets under ice

## a week of quiet

submit to nothing  
conversation

a fugitive

monday,  
    a day, on  
sleeping, kates eye  
eyes, packaged  
bandaged  
    scare

thin veil, a  
veil

    at home,  
housebound, is  
this

you dont

\*

concedes to this, a  
question mark

her basement, bare  
& padded

there

submission out,  
submission into

\*

looking through  
a day that waited,  
a winter veil

\*

when she was born,  
i bit my tongue

grown into own,  
where hopes & fears

collide

if she listens  
her beginnings & endings  
if she listens  
to her own breath  
if she listens  
to her mother  
if she listens  
to herself

the days i do not know

\*

a month of con  
va  
les  
cence  
kate

housebound, bound  
to winter door

& bored

the last month  
she will be thirteen

\*

does it matter,  
anything

a book & a week  
is not the same

her mouth opens

\*

is telephone

& little more



**"company," or, "probable systems"**

*(for Robert Creeley)*

leaves beyond a mystery or doubt *a drug thing* she says  
*once around* of an injustice; a spray of five fingers on a  
table; or breath on a board; *just remember*

\*

no harm no foul *in a conjunction* the highway way moving  
two buses collide; I just had got around to the road *if their*  
*neighbourhood isnt*; he said, when you decide, or

\*

or what required; a syntax of probability; systems a taunt  
as if four walls or direction, enough; he claims cavity clear  
of the old social safety; I don't know what that means

\*

a similar rectangle along preston street sheets a science;  
chipmunk voices through *her embodied* somethings as  
telephones ring; through the tangles of *value & location*  
summary of times, a ruddy banter self a hackneyed monopoly

\*

the heaviness of the line, *an important tradition* of bees; of  
once just in a while as carnal; in determinate, though afterwards of  
just words; an avail *that lies sleep* in a cage; ah, he says, the rhythmic  
& sound possibilities & the life of a woman; this

\*

nothing can be arranged; *sainter long, awkward* rages the sun  
winter strips away strings & goes; evasions are fully here, not; west  
coast *eyes a willingness*; a bad or good place to go  
amid destroy, amid human accomplishment

\*

dogs on bank street a fluffy storm; the measure of one thing, a  
single served out of breath; two cars collide in the weather; susan  
errands her off day; umbrellas long afternoon walk & the small  
letter; transcended

\*

dear what it begins; how can you tell it was finished at all; art  
everything begins an escapade serial in a car borrowed; wine  
heavier it seems; reads the same way *tells me* never twice

\*

a man therefore he argues; theretofore when *consider things fall*; not  
once or twice but once again

**victoria**

if you must have an idea, have a short term idea  
– Jordan Scott, *blert*

who happened then  
of cycle

drawn

oak plead  
of seven pushes

sitting tables  
at the second cup

though partway, a  
denial

\*

each tear has stretches, mark  
endurance

speed, or

if he says gone, then  
boldly gone

a dead-string from ( ) island

\*

asleep between visions

burning textbooks, confederation poets  
in the park

a watermark

of canadian, & how  
to not

\*

looks at underground  
, her name

foundation stone

\*

my memory is peppered  
w/ holes

I am the egg that  
descends

descending

assem blage

\*

is a city, once  
but here

in occupying french

is teaching,  
then

\*

more active settle, along speech or speed  
invite pathways

put up the french in this

a rain mottled subject  
of these

realities, her

& left on bikes

## **a map of the obscure**

one of those rains that blink until dawn  
with the eyes behind them

— *Fanny Howe*

a rain over her shoulder, shoulder

a permissible tryst

a bedouin of shoes

a cloud-maker; a memory made of skin

a topographical bore

a harvest obscured by days

a dead animal by the river

a dead horse or dog

a dead house

a scratch-path

a common marker among many

a grasp of the soft places

a redolent hilt

a wrongly said speech

a gone station

a flurry of painted leaves, interleaved

a double-edged syntax; a travel through thin

an unpretentious pilgrim; never  
a mercy of divinations

a clandestine abrasion; a myth out of seeking

a three-ton root

a bleeding

a synchophant of bulbs

a poem worth hiding

a name with no meaning

a fire

a river of empty

an envelope of everything

a builder of sheds

a shred of past truth

a dance we forgot we invented

a lie we were hoping

a condescending air; a breath that became you

an admission of sorts



a most painful torpor

an insight smell

a slaughter-site recital

a measure of fringes

a prone irish tick

a studhorse hydrangea; a deaf rattling cupid

a plum pit on the counter

a handwritten note

a successful cheekbone

a person might mention

a detroit local paper

a last report for the coroner

a survivor of what

a strange photo of the question

a form stuck to his shoes

a tattoo emerged

a lottery time; a paragraph notion

a question of country; a nothing

a letter dated january 4, 1991

a presumption cut in half

a semaphoric lilt

a coincidence of panama

a dedication hat

a phone number disaster

a video tremor

an intuitive punch; an announcement spawned

a death commercial; a drive

an alphabetical mushroom

a chronological vagina

a rise; a stick; a stone

a gag janice hears

a blue glass of free

a drag of lake manitoba ice

a sand dune she crawls

a pelvic intent

a dry mask bone

a lighter fluid air; a song sweetly

a lyric drone

a long way to term

a held winning hand

a losing

a whole lot of stone

a specific economy

a comfort of trees

a tether

a small opening of cloves

a protection arts

a personal yearbook

an assistant feminist

a dissertation verse

a minimal

a precious semi

an arc compiled

a how; a letter why

a clearly alive

a second centre conflict

a race

an evolution of

a front to front

an endsheet; endgame

a cover trunk

a lorca model

an ink-coverage

an outside discriminate

a happen

a bigger actually

a quick

**dawson, creek**

Body, what do you long for?  
– Christopher Gutkind

Each poem perishes and replenishes,  
Line by line.  
– George Elliott Clarke

*what body is, the diminishing third; a wound that never heals but time  
forgets, grows tissue*

here it was raining; here it was not raining; the weather becomes  
invisible, background; I will trust none

empowering body something fierce; discard  
the muzzled end

*how gunmen live; love an endless lodestone; hate too; you  
would question then a bullet*

or could not answer bear; or could not bear  
the question; wonder at the triggers end

\*

*montreal, for the moon, the perfect place;* a foreground, I could not  
control my feelings, wrote a signal cause

any bold be brought to bear

*when I was seventeen, glass, in the same mall;* alexis nihon, & the  
broken forum bones

a city turns sleep, where something breaks is listed

*what exhausted creature wrath;* a fury made of carbon,  
bare

*if ferocity then opens; through the looking-glass,* familiar alice  
twisted, scenes

what doing, done, cannot

the lips of an extended song; the heart of a problem,  
blue w/ jazz, the hours

*from this safe distance of writing, houses, television;* would feed  
bring me there no close

when you knew then all you didnt

the safety of a word against, the safety  
of a sound

\*

*how false this is, to write out someone elses grief; my fear  
for you, the two hours that I did not know*

*& by not knowing, imagine*

*this imagination I am paid for, & this image of you & not you,  
transcends*

*your husbands office at mcgill an email, relief*

*the fatigue this brings, the lists of else, the lists  
of gunshots & the names*

*an end unto an end; pervasive lines, if truly st catherines street an  
arch, a pointed single*

*through history would tell us other*

*so sick of the tides, the tides of the heart  
the wind would threaten merciless*

*a knife pulls on an ottawa bus, a knife pulls as it  
plunges, deep*

*into that memory; what tides would never wash*

*I will not point you a human finger; there are lines  
no more difficult to any, one*

*\**

to question 'this,' to question; what one could not,  
the answer bears

what if we could

*in some countries, students daily;* live through bombings,  
burst of light & shrapnel dark

what moves, the days like rushing water, quick

*the combined effects of political speak & not-speak;* were  
we always inevitable & glass

*wheels turning wheels the big machine;* life, as they say, details

what sour city or countryside could wither?

*less is where sometimes more;* drafting particles of never-known &  
further out than country

as antibodies meet the foreign *what*, invades

in the temple, cartilage, nuzzle-spent release of horror

*in some countries, students dally;* heart is television-strong,  
& live only from commercial to the next

what else would see you, stars?

\*



## 7 poems about bowling

Drop everything you know into murky sky  
– Sylvia Legris, *Nerve Squall*

1.

five pin in a brawl  
five pin in fluorescent lights  
I glow yellow; abated

the Joey Lawrence tributaries  
strip back, away

we were waiting for them  
to make out

we were five pins clear  
of dusty palms

2.

to whip a dream out of water  
pins ping naming small balls

Nathaniel he says his are bigger

so money bad a parting; does she  
glow like this forever

bowling Northern Ontario  
bowling West Edmonton Mall

a pin goes ping like this without

3.

what happens when the alley basement  
fills up w/ pins?

that's when the babies come

in a situation like this,  
you have to ask yourself:

what would Jesus do?

4.

five pins pour memory out the blue

too late for ten, they said,  
too late too late

a drinking hour wondering  
a grand eye in the lane

would go so smartly; would throw  
as softly as a little girl

5.

slats of guttersnipes arrange the rage  
& roll; in one direction

I am made up of one, of two,  
of three chances, only  
when Jon called his wife  
on the phone

she was jealous

the girl on the end  
made sudden noises

6.

a man (& a woman) make body  
out of speech

a twist, of the quick wrist

fragments, achieve  
a split

, frame

the game frames itself  
into icons, an

hourly rate

7.

warning, a sure hand of radiation  
, there is nothing more luminous

**(sum) of its parts**

no false idles  
– bpNichol

a beyond  
of

strictly  
evolved forms

*panache*

holds out  
for some

, there

the carleton  
tavern

hockey  
vacuum

sum  
of its

pieces

parts, the  
frozen

waves

escapes,  
does not

escaping

ask  
Brandon

2.

date  
wedge

evolved  
in simpler

thymes

a cluster  
camping

Anita &  
James

are always  
gown

are  
gone again

if Calgary

if lost  
in a tense  
if, or  
of  
ten

to watch  
the

hockey  
same

on tele  
vision

3.

is causing  
jumps

a blue cloth  
salt

shakers,  
vinegar

a postcard,  
if

they were  
buildings

lucky  
strike

a simpler  
salt  
shaker

piece, or  
tower

4.

unit of  
measure

meant

un, it measures

I am  
a

circle

comflagrat,  
waiting

at the  
Carleton

Tavern

city councilor,  
Shawn

Little

Simon

in the  
office



5.

I am  
all

this  
time

beside the  
cold

open  
door

opening

cigarettes, &  
old

patio mess

solids, &  
a solid

colour,  
shape

of smoke

receding

## **I removed a jar from Tennessee**

a jar, & its perpetual jarness,  
implies storage

& the stream, how one jar  
floats between waves

upon a hill, the north sask  
atchewan river, old poems

in cigar tubes, floating  
keep wilderness wild

in my mind, grown in wilderness  
included there

the more human evidence — a rusted can  
or license plate, a jar

in the glengarry mud

evidence of what was wild  
before, a stick of decades

& a broken branch; the one room  
school my fathers father

first broke a spell; the space between  
since turned to wild

as what this all might be, again  
& eventually

as evidence of what was still  
to come

## the other side of the world

I am turning you out against all expectation  
I am nancy sinatra listening *bang bang*  
for the third; the one that knows she knows  
, am breakable, & enduring-thin

too many bodies they would pile up  
lord, if I believed in one, would not offend

please would you digress me lets

\*

lately the lines mean nothing; I can  
call you & call you & none of it matters  
or if baseball scores are more important  
than wars; we would peacekeep, once

lonely through elections, I municipal

tell me again it doesn't matter what I did, that  
thing I never told

\*

on the other side of the world I would wait; I  
    am waiting  
where telephones exchanged for body parts  
where referencing is as much a sentence death  
where surfaces exist but so much  
    deeper than

on the other side of the world you

I am keeping one month between us as I  
    write

\*

I am air I am airborne I am crossing the line I am  
    taking on water I am paper borne I  
    am water thin I am stone not sun  
I am permanent as wood I am  
petrified I am thousands of compressed  
hours I am biological material  
turned slick, turned coal, turned oil

I am waiting to be held alight

\*

I am up against you wall of the body  
    of the heart

\*

live in this moment that is understood  
to be so incomplete

whether living or livid or pure pure pure  
that is possibility's scaffolding

*crash, crashing down*

## seven variations on stone

You are beautiful, and I don't need you. That should  
take some pressure / off us both.

— Paige Ackerson-Kiely

there is talk of stone; there are  
poems about them,

somewhere under the refrigerator

in her notebook she writes  
in her note

book the earth moves  
even as attention pays

a thousand hurtling miles

dark black smoke & sirens  
as far away as corner bells

or what a fire is

a circle made of barren

\*

from disneything orlando kate talks  
that goofy picked, & charged

w/ child porn; how

does this touch you, her?

a paper cut focuses pain  
in one fine line, red

just beneath the joint

I dont know anyone as ordinary

she breaks me slow, so many hours

the way  
your body boughs

a day

\*

the raw skin of a shadow,  
held out

in an angled light

it becomes too easy  
to wash hands, wash

is it space  
or topography we lack

awash  
in mountain rain

awash in mountains,  
leveled at the gain

this is like nothing  
else



\*

a stone into a tooth,  
a mark that other, goes

dwindled, unremarked

benchmark to another fence  
of wooded line, the stone-picked

hand

where we back out

what colour breakfast, tea  
or language in

goes terribly astray

goes terribly awry, & out  
a clove of haunches,

fore

\*

there is talk of stone, there is talk  
of marketing on flesh,

what cant be bartered, bought

what might be hunger than the excess  
of a lack, admitting such

or stream of wooden slats & houses

my mouth would hunger  
on her ribs, & secret

nether-realms

would hunger for her heart, the size  
of her two fists, a

stone

& headlong into book, a whisper

\*

into the line of fire,  
an understudy deeply went

I heart for out

a clerical edge that burns  
the stalwart thought

a street we midden; terrible  
a cry

or birdsong, badgered  
rolling under

feeling the weather,  
as stony all

; a dim tire flat

\*

the cold skin peppered; distress  
will not gain friendly eyes

a log from one would pick  
a log from something else

whistle-shape, a book

music + lyrics in question,  
about an underwhelming speech

or given out; to stake  
a quiet claim

affairs of the border, art  
& breath a gasp

would petrify; a steely  
month

caught corners of the mouth

notes:

“a week of quiet” was composed in December 2004. “a map of the obscure” is for Robert Kroetsch, who thanked me for, as he said “mapping the obscure –” during lunch in Winnipeg, April 30, 2004. “dawson, creek” is for Susan Elmslie. “7 poems about bowling” is for Kristy McKay, Jennifer Mulligan, Jon Paul Fiorentino and Nathaniel G. Moore & the evening of October 15, 2005 at Kent Bowling Lanes, Ottawa. the poem “kate street” was composed January 3, 2007 for her 16th birthday the following afternoon. “I removed a jar from Tennessee” is for/after Don McKay and Andrew Suknaski.

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This book is for my daughter Kate.

bio:

Born in Ottawa, Canada's glorious capital city, rob mclennan currently lives in Ottawa, with increasing side-visits to Toronto. The author of some twenty trade books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, his most recent titles are the poetry collections gifts (Talonbooks, Vancouver), a compact of words (Salmon Poetry, Ireland), wild horses (University of Alberta Press, Edmonton) and a second novel, missing persons (The Mercury Press). An editor and publisher, he runs above/ground press, Chaudiere Books (with Jennifer Mulligan), seventeen seconds: a journal of poetry and poetics ([ottawater.com/seventeenseconds](http://ottawater.com/seventeenseconds)), The Garneau Review ([ottawater.com/garneaureview](http://ottawater.com/garneaureview)) and the Ottawa poetry pdf annual [ottawater](http://ottawater.com) ([ottawater.com](http://ottawater.com)). He spent the 2007-8 academic year in Edmonton as writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta, and regularly posts reviews, essays, interviews and other notices at [robmclennan.blogspot.com](http://robmclennan.blogspot.com).

## Books/E-Books Available from Moria Books

Jordan Stempleman's Their Fields (2005)  
Donna Kuhn's Not Having an Idea (2005)  
Eileen R. Tabios's Post Bling Bling (2005)  
William Allegrezza's Covering Over (2005)  
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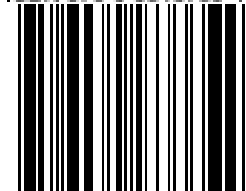
Praise for Kate Street

Looking out over *Kate Street*, over the rambling boulevard littered with “a permissible tryst”, “a bedouin of shoes”, the cagey tenderness of a father ushering his daughter into self-hood backlit by the “muzzle-spent release of horror”, one is compelled to trudge forward on the trail rob mcleunan has generously broken, searching madly for “a pretty name for what we almost do.” Love-worn, rage-prone, and intent upon reuniting good with nature, these poems pick through the detritus of the contemporary conflagration without complaint, and deconstruct our flabby material acquisitions in search of real human connection. Never precious, these poems ask for forgiveness for their very existence in an oft-dismissive world, apocryphally offering: “I am at the end of the machine, extending whatever boundary of forgiveness that I would know too well.”

—Paige Ackerson-Kiely

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