Charles L. DeFanti Reviews *What Matters* by Adele Kenny

*What Matters* by Adele Kenny  
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With High Victorian bluster, Thomas Carlyle once demanded: “What, on earth, then, are you afraid of? Wherefore, like a coward, dost thou forever pip and whimper, and go cowering and trembling? What is this that, ever since earliest years, thou hast been fretting and fuming, and lamenting and self-tormenting, on account of?”

Adele Kenny, having overcome more hardships than a dozen less courageous people, offers forty-seven luminous poems in a cycle coded to reveal “What Really Matters” in life. Joy, wit and affirmation spring from even the most bittersweet among them.

Shifts in mood are quick, but never alarming: Kenny is always in control, evident from the first poem, “The Living”:

> It’s not destination, but more what silence is when  
you enter it deeply—like walking in snow (the hush  
and spell)…

The sequences seem more linked through sound and epigram, until you see where the poet is heading. (Sound-play and paradox are as essential to Kenny as they are to Emily Dickinson); in “Like I Said,” set on a Sunday morning, she goofs on both grammar and pop culture:

> The washing machine refuses to spin,  
There’s no clean underwear left, so
I’m not wearing any. Like I said, I was tired; I didn’t feel like getting dressed, so I didn’t go to church and abdicated rights to all that grace. I put on a pair of dirty jeans, a dirty shirt, and sat outdoors all morning.

I did nothing but talk to my dogs, watch squirrels, and wonder what it might be like to nibble Prozac from Johnny Depp’s lower lip.

So much for living in the present—always a good idea, especially in life’s more haunted moments. “Where Lightning Strikes” relives a horror we hope comes only to other people:

There’s no translation for the terror when the surgeon says I have bad news, on the phone no less, and me alone, a glass baton that someone else is twirling. …

Equipoise is restored not in lightning strikes, however, but through deft hints that all’s right with the world, as in “That Much Closer”:  

No big epiphanies but smaller things I’m more aware of:

moths that call the porch light a party, my dogs asleep on pillows beside me, their sleepy breath warm on my hand;

and this morning a neighbor’s child balanced on her knees where the crook of the apple tree flattens. …

Plain speech is reserved for everyday sadness, as in “Selling the Family House”:

The house—empty or nearly empty—crumbles into itself. I leave a few books on their shelf. Some shimmer, the other are rags.

What voice do I hear (or want to hear)? The catbird cries; the earth turns on wing-boned fingers.

while lush figures enrich a poem evoking Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s painting, Beata Beatrix, the dust jacket illustration:
… a sundial casts its metal wing
on the thin, blown hour when leaving begins.
Red dove, white poppy: the woman, transfixed,
slips—diffused like light through darkened glass—
her hands open and soft.

Kenny’s rich palette will be obvious to all her readers over the years, though it is more intense than ever in this tightly knit volume. The final poem, “We Don’t Forget,” bears the full weight of her message, and deserves being quoted in full:

Tonight you heard my footsteps in the room
above and called to me.
I didn’t answer. There was only the movement of
air my body made when I turned to your voice.

Later, in what might have been a dream, a little boy played stickball in the street,
the moon shuffled home.
Grace is acceptance—
all of it, whatever is—as in we live for this: love and gratitude enough.

We don’t forget how it feels to rejoice.

We’re all survivors of one thing or another, and these meticulously crafted poems by Adele Kenny tell us that we’re not alone.

Amazon is offering a discount on all pre-publication orders, Click to Order "What Matters"

Charles L. DeFanti is Professor Emeritus of English at Kean University.
Adele Kenny is the author of 23 books (poetry & nonfiction). Her poems, reviews, and articles have been published in journals here and abroad. She is the recipient of various awards, including poetry fellowships from the NJ State Arts Council. Adele is founding director of the Carriage House Poetry Series (which she founded in 1998), and she serves as poetry editor of *Tiferet*. For poetry info and weekly prompts, visit her blog: [http://adelekenny.blogspot.com/](http://adelekenny.blogspot.com/).

### Coming Home by Marguerite Bouvard

Under the spring rain, everything is liquid: the bird calls, the branches’ languid sweep. Under this sky with its conjugating grays, the greens are more intense, the larks are jubilant. The earth inhales me, the earth that will finally embrace me. When I unbuckle my skin,

I want to be by the lake where I walked with my love year after year as we wrote our own story. I want the blessing of *earth to earth*, not the baleful intoning of *dust to dust.*

We were so much more than that. We shone like the orange lichen starring the woods. My children and my grandchildren do not need to wander among stones. I will be there waiting for them when they come home.
Marguerite Bouvard has received fellowships at the Radcliffe Institute, the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women and from the Puffin Foundation. She has been a writer in residence at the University of Maryland and has had residencies at the MacDowell Colony, the Yaddo Foundation, the Djerassi Foundation, the Leighton Artists’ colony at the Banff Centre and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. (Excerpted from Marguerite Bouvard’s online profile please click here: to learn more.)

Dandelion Green by Irene Heimberg ©

Irene Heimberg received a BA in English Literature from Pace University, with a minor in Art. She started writing poetry at age 12, and has been writing ever since. She has also drawn most of her life, but didn't begin painting in a serious way until she was in her thirties. She works primarily in watercolor, and occasionally in oil. Her work is representational, and her intent is to reflect God's glory in her work.
How did I learn to hear and trust my inner voice? It began, ironically, with a journal. As comfortable as I am with pen and paper—I've worked as a freelance writer or editor since graduating from college and kept a variety of journals with varying degrees of success—I never thought about keeping a practice journal until four years after that first yoga class. It was then that another teacher, Rita, gave each of us in her class a spiral-bound journal on the last day of our session together. “Give it a try,” she said, and handing it to me. “See where it will lead.”

When I began keeping a journal to reflect on my yoga practice, the first thing that I needed to learn was how to listen to and trust the voice inside me, the voice that I'd first heard years ago when I'd kept a journal for my English professor in college, and which I'd rediscovered in the journals that I'd kept while my mother was dying of cancer. It was a voice that scared me because it made me feel so vulnerable and exposed, and yet that voice helped me feel more connected to myself—and to something larger than myself—than any other voice. If I was to fully understand myself and my relationship to the world and to others, I needed to find that voice again, to let go of my fear of being vulnerable and open. Rather, I needed to learn how to achieve the courage to be vulnerable and reveal more of myself to the world without fear of ridicule or criticism or disdain. It took writing pages and pages before I could let go of these fears and begin to hear my true voice and let it come through on the page. I could only detect that voice after I'd learned how to cast aside the voices of impersonators. I had to learn how to relax on the page, let down my defenses, and allow my heart to show in ways that I'd learned in my yoga classes over the past four years but hadn't yet incorporated into my daily life. I had to learn how to accept and let go of myself in order to be myself.

It wasn't easy. When you sit down to write something new, you face an empty page. You confront the fear that you may not have anything to say or, worse, that what you have to say may be unoriginal or foolish or downright stupid. I had to learn how to step into the silence of the page and trust that I wouldn't drown in silence, that the blank page wouldn't overwhelm me. For that to happen, I had to drop my defenses and reveal myself—not a caricature of myself, or an inflated image. I had to let myself show, warts and all. Anything less than complete honesty would have frightened my true voice and sent it skittering away in an instant.

In time, the combination of keeping a journal and practicing yoga helped me learn to view life in a nonjudgmental fashion, a neutral way that was altogether different than the way that I'd viewed the world in my youth, when I started keeping a personal journal. That earlier view was self-absorbed and turned inward. This view was focused on the relationship between the inner and outer worlds, viewing both simultaneously as places that can nurture growth if we can assume the proper attitude and perspective.

Keeping a journal has given me a way to find this perspective and to reflect on life. My journal is a safe place where I can ask questions, examine the sometimes confusing pieces that make up my life, and hear what I’m thinking and feeling when I can’t always admit such thoughts or feelings aloud. On the page, I can explore in private whatever might...
trouble or excite or surprise me without fear of making mistakes or saying the wrong thing or appearing stupid or feeling invisible. (When I was younger, I felt as if every word written on the page in private were somehow being shouted to the world. Now, it feels like I'm whispering, and I'm the only one who can hear.)

In the pages of my journal, I don’t have to try as hard as when I was younger. I don’t need to change the world, merely accept it as it is. The page, just like the mat and the world itself, is neutral. It’s like an empty vessel waiting to be filled, a blank slate yearning for words. The page offers no judgment or criticism. It’s just paper, silently waiting for my pen, eager to reveal and let me hear my voice. It was this process of writing in the journal each day, before and after yoga practice, that helped me learn to lower my defenses, let go of the imposters and the fake voices, open up and write from my heart.

Bruce Black holds a BA in English literature from Columbia University and an MFA in writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. His stories have appeared in Cricket and Cobblestone magazines. He is the founder and editorial director of three blogs, including Writing Yoga with Bruce Black. He lives in Sarasota, Florida. Available from Rodmell Press http://www.rodmellpress.com/ http://www.amazon.com/Writing-Yoga-Keeping-Practice-Journal/dp/193048528X. Bruce’s blog is http://journalpractice.wordpress.com. Photo courtesy of
Frances Pelzman Liscio has had her work showcased in numerous group and solo shows. Her work has been published in fine art and design magazines including Traditional Home and Martha Stewart Living and is included in many private collections and galleries. This bio is excerpted from her web site, please click here to learn more about Frances and her work.
Two Senryu by Robert H. Deluty

Senryu (like their better-known cousins, haiku) are 3-lined poems that seek to convey the essence of a keenly recalled or observed moment. Traditional haiku and senryu consist of 17 Japanese "onji/sound-symbols" in phrases of 5/7/5. Since Japanese onji are not equivalent to English syllables, haiku and senryu written in English are typically presented in three lines totaling fewer than 17 syllables. Whereas haiku are objective and deal with natural/seasonal events, senryu focus on human subjective situations and are often satiric or ironic.

Sunday School . . .

a nine year-old demanding

hard evidence

at a wishing well

pondering the downside

of eternal life

Robert H. Deluty is the Associate Dean of the UMBC Graduate School. His 32nd book of poetry, "Too Old To Know Everything," was published this month by Otter Bay Books.