

Cultural Daily

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Poets on Craft: Adele Kenny and Emily Vogel

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, June 2nd, 2021

For this forty-first post in the *Poets on Craft* series, we have Adele Kenny and Emily Vogel.

Poets on Craft is a cyberspace for contemporary poets to share their thoughts and ideas on the process of poetry and for students to discover new ways of approaching the writing of poetry. In the face of a pandemic that is both viral and political, it is a resource for strength and creativity, friendship and beauty, love and rejuvenation. It is thus a celebration of the beautiful and eclectic minds of contemporary poets. This series is intended for educational purposes only.

The format is as follows. I emailed poets these questions: “Generally speaking, how do you build a poem? How do you start a poem? How do you move from one line to the next? How do you know when to end a poem?”

With the exception of length requirement, poets are free to respond in whatever manner they find appropriate to their styles and concerns.

Access to *Poets on Craft* is democratic. Generally speaking, anyone can have free access to these posts. With that said, please consider supporting our poets by clicking on the links in their bios and purchasing their work.



Adele Kenny is the author of 25 books, most recently *Wind Over Stones* (available via Amazon). Widely published, she is founding director of the *Carriage House Poetry Series* and poetry editor of *Tiferet*. Among other awards, she has received first prize in the 2021 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards, NJ State Arts Council poetry fellowships, and Kean University’s Distinguished Alumni Award.

For me, nearly every poem begins with a single image. Each poem, informed by the initial image, moves forward into its own “being” through subject and meaning. The process has an organic sensibility—I rarely begin with a clear idea of what a poem will be about. That’s not to say the poems write themselves, but each is strongly powered and buttressed by the image that inspired it.

Only after writing several drafts, do I begin to look at a poem in terms of what it reveals about being human and whether or not it offers a message larger than the words it contains. In all of my poems, my intention is to *show* (not *tell*) through striking imagery and a strong emotional center. Most often, I write in the active voice (to do that it’s helpful to drop “ing” endings), and,

sometimes, I switch from the past to the present tense to create a greater sense of immediacy. Among my editing goals is to attend to the things I encourage when I conduct workshops: stay on the lookout for prepositional phrases, articles, conjunctions, and unnecessary adjectives that can be removed; sidestep the pitfalls of sentimentality and clichés; take out rather than add; and leave some things unwritten so readers will be able to enter the poem. Often, a poem ends before I think it does, so I look for the hidden last line by reading and re-reading the poem aloud to find the line that brings it to closure most effectively. A “so what” ending can ruin an otherwise good poem, and there’s no need to explain or “sum up” a poem in its last lines. A great “dismount” leaves readers something to wonder about, a sense of awe, a lit spark that doesn’t go out when the poem is over.

For the past several years, I’ve written prose poems almost exclusively. Prose poetry is a unique form that is not defined by the line breaks (lineation) typically associated with verse. Prose poems approximate the visual aspect of paragraph form, but they move away from customary prose techniques in favor of poetry-like imagery and/or emotional effect. They show a distinct allegiance to poetry in sonic impression (rhythms, internal rhyme, assonance, and alliteration). Importantly, they may look like paragraphs, but they lack the narrative structure of prose. Prose poems are much more than stories told in a generic way; there is always a strong element of surprise in the language, always something unpredictable. Characterized by complete sentences *and* deliberate fragments, they are largely driven by metaphor and imagery and sometimes speak the dialect of dreams. Prose poems include unexpected juxtapositions, startling twists of language, and often give a nod to the surreal. Whatever poetry genre you prefer, my advice is to always stay true to your own voice and style—don’t worry about what others think of your poems, dare to be different, and write for the pure love of it.



Emily Vogel’s poetry, reviews, translations, and essays have appeared in numerous journals, most recently *The Paterson Literary Review*, *PEN*, and *Omniverse*. Her work has also appeared in several notable anthologies. She is the author of five chapbooks and three full-length collections, the most recent being *Dante’s Unintended Flight* (NYQ Books). She has a collection due to be released soon entitled *The House That Wailed* (NYQ Books). She teaches writing at SUNY Oneonta.

A poem can arise in relation to a single image from which the first line emerges. It may arise from several images, or from something someone said, or something you were thinking while completing a task. The emergence of the line(s) in the poem typically come from a great deal of “play” with language in the mind. The lines may seem to be “out of order” at first, but will structure themselves by way of the momentum of the poem.

Of course, a topic is necessary, but doesn’t necessarily need to be linear. Technically, the poem should make some semblance of sense to the reader, but not in all cases. Poems may be fragmented, and may shift from image to image, (or scenically), and also may circle back to the origin of where the poem began. A poem should move freely as what I call “the narrative of the consciousness.” We know that our consciousness can tend to wander and play, so the poet should allow that to happen. As such, poetry is a sort of “word association—” which may oftentimes emerge as disconsonant. But it is different for each poet.

How does one know when a poem ends? It’s an intuition. Never feel like the poem should keep

going if you get a “gut” feeling that it’s over. It may end on an element of suspense (such as most of Emily Dickinson’s poems—of course, and several others)—don’t ever feel like you need a pat conclusion or resolution in a poem. You just get a feeling.

(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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