

**Chapter 1 : Ellen Bryant Voigt | Martyn Crucefix**

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Why did you have to go back to that awful time, upstream, scavenging the human wreckage, what happened or what we did or failed to do? Why drag us back to the ditch? Have you no regard for oblivion? One hears the water rushing through the vegetation. From her earliest collection – fittingly entitled *Claiming Kin* – Voigt has been intent on reaffirming her connection to the land and her rightful ancestors: I have come from a great distance to find my father asleep in his large brown chair. I want to wake him with kisses, I want to reach out and stroke his hand. The story will be familiar to anyone who has experienced the sudden caretaking demands of an aging parent, accompanied by the shock of human diminishment. The personal histories relayed in *Headwaters* – as has long been the case with Voigt – engage the past with alternating coolness and sentimentality, espousing the necessity of both distancing oneself and remembering. Voigt seems caught between these poles. At other moments, though, nostalgia is exposed as an unproductive trap. Thankfully, there is enough of the aforementioned resentment and, more generally, perhaps enough of the modernist in Voigt to return to a vantage of distance. As the above suggests, Voigt is perhaps most at home in the natural world. When the swans passed before the sun they were distant – two black threads, two live stitches. But they kept coming, smoothly, and the sky deepened to blue behind them and they took on light. They gathered dimension as they neared, and I could see their ardent, straining eyes. Then I could hear the brittle blur of their wings, the blur which faded as they circled on, and the sky brightened to yellow behind them and the swans flattened and darkened and diminished as they flew. Once I lost them behind the mountain ridge; when they emerged they were flying suddenly very high, and it was like music changing key. With Voigt as with Dillard, there is undeniable beauty to the natural world, but there is also an austerity that precludes solace. Like Dillard, Voigt understands the continuity of nature and human nature, but her work is also informed by a legacy of farming and animal husbandry that acknowledges the notion of dominion. Some of the best poems in *Headwaters* take advantage of this tension between worlds as a way of exploring complex human relationships from a critical distance. Indeed, Voigt fearlessly extends the description for so long that it nearly outpaces its metaphorical power. The owl is only one figure in the extensive menagerie that constitutes *Headwaters*: Some, however, are fully observational and resist being employed as metaphor. There is, of course, the argument that the observational stance of the speaker as a sort of witness represents an invitation to political or ecological commentary – on land use, for instance – but this seems a considerable stretch. And Voigt, for all of her prodigious powers and range, does not seem inclined to this degree of subtlety. But the innovation of *Headwaters*, the dimension in which it truly shines, may in fact be stylistic. Casting off the conventions of capitalization and punctuation, Voigt has assembled a collection that feels stripped-down and definitive, even oracular. The title poem is perhaps the clearest example of what she gains by this approach: In the example above, Voigt further – and masterfully – complicates our reading through her use of enjambment. Does it refer to the unstable chasm of blank space into which the line runs? The lack of punctuation – and the double-reading it necessitates – emphasizes the cumulative effect of successive revelation. Equally impressive are her lines, which are much longer – and engender much more vulnerability – than in her previous collections. The poem is in tercets. *Headwaters* is a slim collection – I count 43 pages of poetry – but in a very limited space it achieves both breadth and depth. Most importantly, like all memorable works of art, it leaves one wanting more.

**Chapter 2 : Kyrie: Poems by Ellen Bryant Voigt**

*Ellen Bryant Voigt (born ) is an American poet. She has published six collections of poetry and a collection of craft essays. Her poetry collection Shadow of Heaven ( ) was a finalist for the National Book Award and Kyrie ( ) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award.*

About Ellen Bryant Voigt: Born in , she grew up on a farm in south-central Virginia, in a culture she describes as now completely vanished. Her Southern Baptist family was large, extended, and close-knit; all of her cousins lived near enough to come to Sunday dinner, and summertime meant no fewer than three family reunions. Despite her evident participation in that world, Voigt says she found being so surrounded by family "extremely claustrophobic. It was there she fell under the spell of literature, gradually taking more poetry and fewer music classes. Her professors, disciples of New Criticism, presented poetry as an art form transcending context, released from the "merely" personal. At the time, that suited Voigt. That urge towards the purity of music, language for its own sake, is audible in all of her poetic work. Voigt, even in this epoch of the meditative narrative, unashamedly owns herself as a lyric poet, and any of her readers knows the value she places on tautness and compression. Her particular specialty is the phrase which indelibly combines austerity of mind and sonic richness. But as Yeats said, out of the quarrels with ourselves, we make poetry. And that dialectic, between the sheer spirituality available in music and the more circumstantially bound facts of life, between the beautiful phrase and the bloody body, runs throughout her work. Eventually, she says, "I needed a poetry that could accommodate the soul in the messy world of PTA meetings and sick children. And in one of her many poems about music, "At the Piano," Voigt describes a girl practicing, "driving triplets against the duple meter": The journey away from the world of her family took her far afield, and also provided her a ringside seat at several singular chapters of American culture. She recalls being one of only three women in a class of sixty, the whole group meeting in a Quonset hut on the University of Iowa campus. She remembers having just one poem workshopped that year, though her classmate Stephen Dobyns claims she may have had as many as three. After a teaching stint at Iowa Wesleyan College, her next stop was the revolutionary Goddard College, then in the full fever of the Aquarian Age. The opening day festivities at that campus included sliding, nude, down a mud slope created by the college fire truck. It is hard to imagine, as she tells these stories with fondness and bemusement, that Voigt has ever not had an unusually clear sense of who she is, and both feet solidly planted on the ground. In her home base of Cabot, Vermont, a town which she says remarkably resembles the town of her Virginia childhood, she has raised a family, stayed married, and, in a moment which has had great significance for American poetry, founded the Goddard M. That program, of course, became the model for other "low-residence" writing programs at Bennington and Vermont College, and was eventually reincarnated, in , at Warren Wilson College in North Carolina. The point, as Voigt explains it, was not "community," a term she is still suspicious of, but access for talented writers, particularly women, who had little opportunity to attend conventional graduate schools or were not served well by them. The list of early Goddard M. And both faculty and students speak of the program with nothing less than reverence and a sense of their own good fortune. Of Voigt herself, the two adjectives most commonly employed by others are apparent contradictions: And in workshops, her rigorous standards for poetry are a daunting, incisive reminder of how much craft and knowledge are required before the word "art" can be uttered. At Warren Wilson residencies, publication is not a dirty word, exactly -- just an irrelevant one, belonging to the "outside" world. Art and life, community and privacy, immense practicality and the growth of the soul -- to meet Voigt is to recognize that you are meeting a person of remarkable integration, and to be heartened by the possibility. As this issue of Ploughshares was going to press, she was en route to a house in southern France for several weeks a gift from Warren Wilson alumni , to do nothing but read, write, and walk around. It seemed only fair that she should have her turn at the experience she has fostered for so many -- that moment when the writer turns his or her back on the world and begins to play, like the girl in the poem "At the Piano": His second collection of poems, *Donkey Gospel*, will be published by Graywolf Press in

**Chapter 3 : Poet: Ellen Bryant Voigt - 40 poems of Ellen Bryant Voigt**

*Ellen Bryant Voigt grew up on her family's farm in rural Virginia. She earned her BA from Converse College and MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her most recent collections include *Headwaters* (), *Messenger: New and Selected Poems* , and *Shadow of Heaven* (). Bryant Voigt studied piano when she was a child, not turning to poetry until a friend in college introduced her to poems.*

By Maria Hummel November 26th, Lines are to poems what laws are to governments—they create a tangible form of control—and since the advent of free verse they have been extended, subverted, overturned, and eliminated entirely by poets. Flip through any recent anthology and you can see the parliamentary negotiations. Yet all the while, another powerful but more shadowy operation has been taking place. Prose writers use it, too. They write a long, languorous sentence that rolls and tumbles down the page, drifting and eddying away from its initial clause, circling back, and rising like a great green wave before crashing to its end. Or they write a short hard sentence, like a clap. No contemporary poet speaks more eloquently about this covert craft than Ellen Bryant Voigt, author of eight volumes of poetry, a former Vermont Poet Laureate, and a two-time finalist for the National Book Award. In her book, *The Art of Syntax: Rhythm of Thought, Rhythm of Song* , Voigt delivered a brilliant examination of syntax in poems, and how the sentence and the line operate together. As a poet and teacher, Voigt is known for her clarity and rhetorical authority, and *The Art of Syntax* is no exception, detailing exactly how a Frost or Kunitz poem works with and against English sentence structure to create its effect. At first glance, it appears as if Voigt uses no sentences at all. Certainly there are no periods, no commas, no colons, no dashes. The long lines twist down the page, one thought spilling into the next. The voice is wry, uncertain, as in the start of the title poem: Voigt answered questions about her new collection, and the poetic process behind it, from her home in Vermont. This is your first poetry book after your collected poems, surely a moment of self-reckoning. What surprised you most when you started writing them? I think their tolerance of a certain kind of excess, particularly their double-stitching, that amount of direct repetition. Why recognize it now? Seems to me it has always been absolutely in evidence, although one prefers to ignore it, that impermanence, or labor against it. That gets harder to do as one ages. In *The Art of Syntax*, you use the image of the right-branching tree to talk about how an English sentence works. The syntactical tension in the *Headwaters* poems feels more Andy Goldsworthy—your clauses like twigs balanced against each other to create different patterns and shapes. Can you talk about your relationship to the sentence in these poems? I agree with you about that imbalanced tree! What I have always loved about poetry is its two rhythmic systems—the rhythm of the sentence, which is the given, how we think, how we make meaning; and the rhythm of the poetic line, which is wholly artifice, made by the poet every time, in every poem, in every line—and the relationship between them. And yet, my preoccupation and my allegiance had been with and to line, not sentence. No rest except at the end of the line or a longer pause the stanza. This was a way to enforce my own attention to the syntax, since I certainly still wanted clarity. It seemed possible to approach something similar with a long, irregular-length line. And I recommend that a reader do the same. Did your writing process change for this book? All of these poems required a totally different approach to composition and revision, and I had to generate many drafts of about two-dozen of them before I had any clear sense of how to go about it. Some of those struggles were against the impulse toward brute economy, some of them were to avoid falling into a surface or linguistic mannerism, some were to create structural variety in a collection so highly repetitive, and idiosyncratic, in its formal protocol. In general, my war is with my temperament: I want to know things. Do you have periods of self-doubt as a writer? What do you do to get through them? It must be some sort of survival instinct that kicks in—the Habit of Mind, as Flannery called it, a soul-necessity. These things are cyclical. Prose rhythms and prose values—a recognizable speaker in a recognizable place with an accessible, perhaps autobiographical central event, in short declarative sentences and fairly regular lines—were a reaction against another sort of poem, and led to its own conventions. Aristotle laid this out for us in the *Poetics*. A string quartet can play certain songs better than a brass band, but the reverse is also true.

## Chapter 4 : Practice by Ellen Bryant Voigt - Poems | Academy of American Poets

*Ellen Bryant Voigt was born and raised on a farm in Virginia. As a child, she showed an aptitude for music and began playing the piano. Initially a music major, Voigt attended Converse College for its music conservatory, but eventually she shifted her studies to literature and poetry.*

## Chapter 5 : Practice | Introduction & Overview

*Debra Albery, an American friend who works at Warren Wilson, recommended this book of new poems by Ellen Bryant Voigt, full of the natural scenery of Vermont and fascinatingly eschewing all punctuation (like WS Merwin) to track the little manoeuvring negotiations of mind with world.*

## Chapter 6 : LitMed: Literature Arts Medicine Database

*Ellen Bryant Voigt is a poet whose eight published collections meditate on will and fate and the life cycles of the natural world while exploring the expressive potential of both lyric and narrative elements.*

## Chapter 7 : Reinvention in the Work of Ellen Bryant Voigt - Los Angeles Review of Books

*Hear Ellen Bryant Voigt read her poem, originally published in the May issue of 'The Atlantic.*

## Chapter 8 : The Art of Syntax by Ellen Bryant Voigt | pagesofjulia

*Kaveh Akbar joins Kevin Young to read and discuss Ellen Bryant Voigt's poem "Groundhog" and his own poem "What Use is Knowing Anything If No One Is Around." Akbar is the author of the.*

## Chapter 9 : Introduction to Literature, An, 13th Edition

*With singular force and precision, Ellen Bryant Voigt explores relationships between human character and human destiny in meticulously crafted, quietly potent poems that move through autobiography, pastoral, and history. She is known for an exacting and luminous intelligence, and for poems infused.*