



## The Maverick Room: Poems

*Thomas Sayers Ellis*

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**With its defiance for any one tradition or voice, Thomas Sayers Ellis's debut becomes a powerful argument against monotony**

*A dream. A democracy. A savage liberty.  
And yet another anthem and yet another heaven  
and yet another party wants you.  
Wants you wants you wants you.  
—from "Groovallegiance"*

In one poem, Thomas Sayers Ellis prognosticates, "Pretty soon, the Age of the Talk Show / Will slip on a peel left in the avant- gutter." The result is *The Maverick Room*, the testing ground of determination and serendipity, where call-and-response becomes Steinian echo becomes Post-Soul percussive pleasure becomes a bootlegged recording hustled out of a D.C. go-go club.

## The Maverick Room: Poems Details

Date : Published January 1st 2005 by Graywolf Press

ISBN : 9781555974145

Author : Thomas Sayers Ellis

Format : Paperback 120 pages

Genre : Poetry, Music

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## From Reader Review The Maverick Room: Poems for online ebook

### Craig Werner says

Really good first book. I'd definitely like to hear it read aloud, but it comes from an African American musical tradition I'm familiar enough with to take it at least part way to the stage. Ellis structures the book around the quadrants of his hometown Washington D.C. with a central section, same title as the book, on the clubs that bring the tribes together. I love the P-Funk references--Psychoalphadiscobetabioaquadooloops (take that, spell check) to the Thumpasaurus People.

Ellis is to funk what Langston Hughes was to the blues.

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### Allison says

I think I need to hear these read aloud. I had trouble hearing them in my brain by only reading them. Loved the content of the poems & politics behind them, but had trouble connecting with the form itself. Educate me, plz! How should I read these?

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### Roberto Garcia says

Groovy, musical and journeylicious. The poems about Go-Go musicians and Go-Go history are mesmerizing. A great read.

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### S. Donovan says

Sayers Ellis grew up in Washington, DC in the era of Watergate, Vietnam, and Home Rule. He notes that "if poets are made up of the voices they hear, [his:] would be Richard Nixon's." Sayers Ellis studied here in the Northeast. One of his noted accomplishments was to found the Dark Room Collective, a group of African-American writers living communally in a house on Inman Street in Cambridge.

Sayers Ellis is a poet who turns musical scores into words and phrases with his pen. His work lives on rhythm. He relates a story of being on the road with Grandmaster of Funk George Clinton. Clinton confided that he'd "arrived at funk by 'speeding up the blues.'" Sayers Ellis decided to do the same with his "Atomic Bride"--a modern riff on a classic form, the villanelle.

Much of The Maverick Room contains what Sayers Ellis calls "identity repair" poems such as "No Easy Task" and "The Dollar Signs of Autumn." He's spent decades figuring out how to be "black" in a poem: "First, you'll need a talk, then a kind of walk."

Although his work is racially conscious, to suggest that Sayers Ellis limits the political content of his poems to the issue of race is to fall into the trap of skin-deep analysis—something his writing works hard to defy. "All Their Stanzas Look Alike" digs at all the formal institutions of literature: from poet laureates to rejection letters, writing contests to tenure tracks, the Caucasian queen of literary criticism, Helen Vendler, to the self-made African-American Empress of the book club, Oprah Winfrey.

## Chase Berggrun says

Just finished a workshop with this man: awesome!

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## Patrick Duggan says

Jazz had its army of poems and poets. Hip-hop has its army of poems and poets. In Thomas Sayers Ellis' *Maverick Room*, funk finally gets its due. He brings the scene and memory of growing up impoverished in Washington D.C. in the shadow of the White House in the richest country on Earth, and pairs that youth with a rhythm and verse of political and neighborhood lyric with a bass line meter and soaring guitar breaks.

The beauty and fire of *The Maverick Room* doesn't stop there, however. Ellis moves from form to form, keeping lines quick and unornamental, or letting them weigh down with density. He lets the form sit in tradition, or frees it to give and take from all the space on the page it needs.

Ellis lets his language create fast flowing idea, and those ideas become image and emotion. Culture and cultures float in and out in half reference -- everything from movies to music, art to clothing fads -- in half reference. Without a heavy hand, *The Maverick Room* combines that culture with sometimes subtle, sometimes not, shout-outs to Amiri Baraka, Robert Hayden, Bob Kaufman, and other forebears. And bringing together Baraka and Hayden is like overcoming physics -- something Thomas Sayers Ellis does time and time again in this book.

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## Cedric says

I learned a lot about DC, the members of P-Funk and random black intelligensia/literati from googling the people the poems were dedicated to. It took me longer to do that (being a nerd) than it did to read the book. I think this book might get a higher rating from a fan of the music TSE's a fan of, or a DC native; I'd certainly recommend the book. I happen to love this dude personally- he is the coolest MF I have probably ever met and I give HIM 5 stars. Can't wait for the next book.

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## E. T. Brother says

So so

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## Christina Marie says

Too impersonal. Too thought out. Give us some heart Thomas, even if you don't use the word, use the organ a bit.

