

Clayton Eshleman

*THE  
GULL  
WALL*

*Los Angeles  
Black Sparrow Press  
1975*

---

## THE 9 POEMS OF METRO VAVIN

---

[A few days after I arrived in Paris this August, Peter Finch wrote me that "a good man to look up is jochen gerz, 41 rue buffon. 75, paris 5 and metro vavin, rue chaplain for low down bars." I looked in the Paris Street Directory for a Vavin on rue Chaplain, but there was no one there with that name, so when I wrote Peter again I asked him for Vavin's complete address. After writing this letter I decided to do a little more looking on my own, and I found an M. Vavin in the Alphabetic Directory. I called this person and M. Vavin answered, but he claimed his name was not "Metro" but Metranil and that he had never heard of Peter Finch. When I told him that I was a poet he became a little more friendly and finally invited me to meet him at his café. I went to "Cayla" on rue Commerce the following evening. Mr. Vavin, it turns out, is a 64 year old Russian dwarf who does odd-jobs around the café and sells birds occasionally near Notre Dame on Sundays. After we got talking, he told me that he had never been called "Metro" by anyone else but his mother and father when he was a little boy in Vladivostok, and that the reason he had invited me to meet him was that he was so curious about an American poet who would call him up on the phone and address him as "Metro." A few days later I heard again from Peter Finch who in regard to locating Vavin wrote: "my ref to vavin, was the metro stop not a man; its just an area i got to like quite a lot and lost my shirt playing some strange kind of dice game. also enjoyed the peanuts there!"

When I went to visit Vavin the second time he presented me with 9 poems written in rather crude colloquial French which he said he had translated from the Russian that the poems had originally been written in. He said he had intended to give me 8 poems, but then decided to write a new poem about our meeting. It turned out that he knew a smattering of English, so with his help I got the jist of what he was writing and made the American versions here presented.

Vavin insists that he has not read any French, English or American poetry—only Russian, and mostly Mayakovsky and Essenin. He also claims that the poems he gave me are the only ones he has written, and that he does not plan to write any more. When I asked him if he hadn't done some other kind of writing in the past thirty years, he said that he did have "a notebook on Toulouse-Lautrec" but that he would not show it to me. When I asked him why he had never published any of his poems before, he answered: "because no one has written me about my size."

The American versions are dedicated to Denis Kelly.]

### 1) IN PARIS

The café dims and I walk my home  
with my little dog. It is 1955 in Paris,  
it is when Mayakovsky killed himself in Russia.  
I still have not understood his hand,  
his huge head like my own turning beacon.  
I looked at him from my little level,  
looked at him the one time we met  
and he crushed my shoulder  
grasping all of me fondly.

### 2) A WOMAN IN THE SUBWAY

A woman whose hands are praying.  
She is low like me, low in light, low  
in memory. What do her hands hold?  
Dirt, dirt of God, dirt of radish,  
red radishes,  
black apples,  
there is a fruit  
she prays for,  
I give her something.  
I give her mouth  
and I give her my crying.  
Always a woman whose hands  
brown and cracked  
hold my mother's furnace,  
my father's pewter.  
Metro, it is time for enema!  
Metro . . . my mother who is blind  
is looking for her little boy.

### 3) A CHANGE OF HEART

Tonight there was a beautiful woman in my café.  
I watched her eat as I drank my coffee.  
I loved her ears especially, her ears with very soft lobes.  
I wanted to love her, I wanted to, oh terrible shame,  
show her my body, which is not the body of the man she ate with,

but a short body like a pencil stub filled with lead.  
While I was thinking my thoughts I saw her drop her billfold,  
and so hot on her was this man she drank her wine without thinking.  
I watched both of them leave, and like a tarantula  
I hurried over to under their table.  
I raised her billfold to my black lips,  
I thanked my mother for her furnace,  
*I wanted to tear this billfold to bits!*  
But I am Vavin, I care about folks even in spite of my lust.  
I went to the police with this lady's thing  
and I said: I have had a change of heart,  
and the policeman said, *You Vavin? You horny son-of-a-bitch!*

#### 4) MEETING AN AMERICAN POET

Somebody called me and said he had a friend.  
I said Who. He said someone I don't know.  
I said alright, come visit me if you want so much to know me,  
and this fellow walked in not speaking good French.  
I said to him do you know how the locust sounds?  
He said No and smiled at me, not trying to answer.  
Then he told me he lived in Japan.  
I have never been there, I never will.  
I am old now and my pencil is almost eraser.  
He said the Japanese children play with beetles in the trees,  
he said they catch cicadas; I said those are not locusts,  
what sings in a little cage is not what flies at my nature,  
I mean, my native Vladivostok. Then I told him about locusts,  
and he looked at me like I am eaten.  
What do you think, I said. He said I was kind to invite him.  
Have another wine I told him, you are American,  
I am a hollow plague of night.  
Very poetical.  
Very awful.  
I can no longer see.

(1973)

#### 5) MY NEIGHBORHOOD 1964

Too many people dropping heavy fruit in my sack!  
Too many people taking my thin coin!

It is they say a paradox I am Vavin :  
when I stand I am less than the priest on his knees.  
The priest is never on his knees. I walk in Notre Dame  
far from my neighborhood. People will think I am tourist here.  
And I, I think they are like the people in my neighborhood—  
they stand in a ceiling without angel.  
They stand like the fruit merchants over me.  
Why has no one written me about my size?  
You are paranoid Vavin they say.  
They say this in my café when I cry.

#### 6) WHAT I BELIEVE

I believe the stone is more alive than what I can find of angel.  
I believe my mother with her furnace did not want to make me pencil.  
I believe I am not pencil, but have a pimple like other persons,  
I have to admit it, when I squeeze my pimple lead comes out.  
Is lead some magical meaning? Once I read a book where a man called metals.  
He called metals like I cry, he called them a way to not be here.  
I did not understand. He said, I mean he wrote (excuse me) FOUNTAIN!  
I thought, this is what I also believe.

Even in mattress I am power.

#### 7) 1943

This happened during war.  
A horse appeared in my hallway by the toilet.  
I swear it is true. Do you want to use my toilet, horse? I said.  
The horse said I have been tortured by the Germans.  
You can use my toilet anyway I said.  
But he went off and I looked at my dog's legs.  
I looked at my dog's legs when they bowed and he shit the bad stuff.  
I am sorry I said to my dog. How could my dog answer me.  
But I had fed him food I had to share.  
I had fed him my white scarf.  
What does this poem have to do with what I believe.  
My hunger was so big I wanted to kill and eat my little dog!

## 8) THINKING ABOUT LOVE

Someone you want does not want anyone.  
But I only had a woman once. I will not spell her name.  
Some people took me to a whorehouse,  
and for one of them the hand was enough.  
For me, I could not get far enough into peace.  
She was kind when I showed her my body.  
Ho, black radish, I think she thought, but she was kind  
and did not push back my penis. I have these thoughts all the time.  
I want to return to something I cannot name.  
Maybe she would like to see me again.  
But this is all phoney. She just made me go inside her.  
I do not like to think about love.  
Love. What are you doing, Vavin,  
that is not love. You are hate.

## 9) A POEM ABOUT MY DESTINY

I want to talk about the stone that is bigger than all my clothes.  
It is greener than what I eat. That is not my neighbor's mistake.  
The stone was here. I was not here.  
My mother wore leather shoes even though we were poor.  
It is alright, my father gave her a wedding-gift.  
He gave her and gave her, my father, he gave her a sperm-gift,  
he gave her muscles, he gave her the horse I dreamed about.  
I will leave this place called Paris. My mother will not be waiting.  
But something will be. I mean, something is eating and eating.  
I think the stone is bigger than all my clothes.  
Listen to me if you are smaller or bigger than me. •  
I think about my missing size, about my sister with both of my eyes.  
It is dim now and I must leave my café.  
I go home to stone, to my walking up and turning around.  
I go home to something hard.  
I want to write about what will happen,  
but I do not think it will be here.  
What happens when you turn the doorknob.  
What happens when you pass a woman crying.  
I was born the fourth child in a family of eight.  
I say this and do not believe. I say this and see leather.  
Her leather shoes, split and open with soap.

And still I want to talk about stone.  
And still the floor is wet  
and my own mouth is wet for food.  
Don't come to my house. There is only some heavy blankets.



Clayton Eshleman was born June 1, 1935, as Ira Clayton Eshleman Jr., in Indianapolis, Indiana. He began to write while attending Indiana University (1953-1961), and has traveled widely since, living in Japan, Mexico, Peru, and most recently France (1973-1974) where many of these poems were written. From 1967 to 1973 he published and edited the magazine *Caterpillar*. He is presently living with his wife Caryl in Los Angeles, California. In 1976 he plans to return to the Dordogne region of France to continue research for a poem on the painted Paleolithic caves and if possible to recover Metro Vavin's notebook on Toulouse-Lautrec which he suspects is buried there.



# Clayton Eshleman/

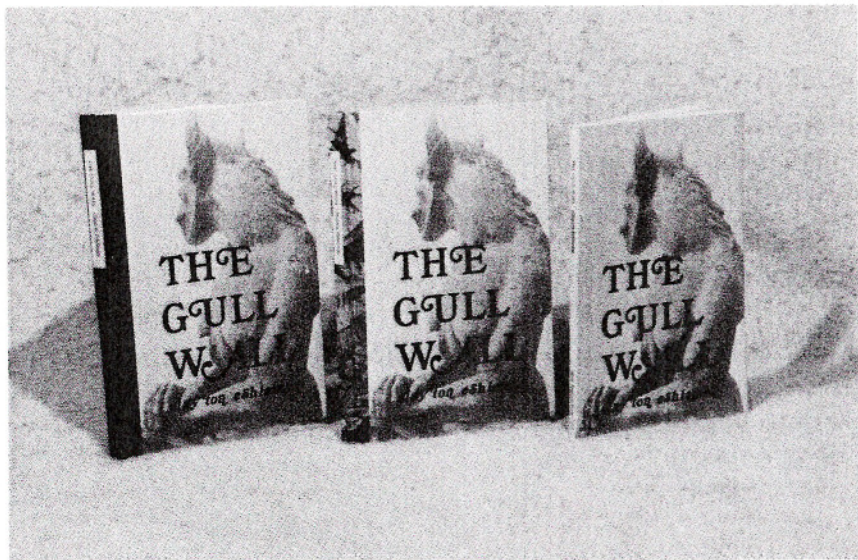
*A Descriptive Bibliography*

by  
Martha J. Sattler

*American Poetry* Contemporary Bibliography Series, No. 4



McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers  
*Jefferson, North Carolina, and London*



A32. The Gull Wall

## A32      The Gull Wall

1975

[In black:] Clayton Eshleman / [in red:] THE / GULL / WALL / [in black:]  
Los Angeles / Black Sparrow Press / 1975

23.6 × 16cm.; 58 leaves; 1<sup>2</sup>, 2–3<sup>16</sup>, 4<sup>8</sup>, 5<sup>16</sup>; pp. [i–xii] 13–111 [112–116]: p. [i] blank; p. [ii] advertisement; p. [iii] title page as above; p. [iv] copyright and acknowledgements; p. [v] dedication; p. [vi] blank; p. [vii] table of contents; p. [viii] blank; p. [ix] quotations; p. [x] blank; p. [xi] I.; p. [xii] blank; pp. 13–111 text; p. [112] blank; p. [113] colophon; p. [114] blank; p. [115] portrait of the author from a photograph taken by Caryl Eshleman, below this is a brief biography of the poet; p. [116] blank. Gold endpapers.

Three bindings, no priority as follows:

a. [Red, gold, tan and blue leaf patterned cloth spine over yellow paper covered boards; on spine, a yellow paper label reading top to bottom, in red:] THE GULL WALL [in black:] Clayton Eshleman [Front cover, in red:] THE / GULL / WALL / [in black:] clayton eshleman [superimposed over an image, in gold of a chimere from the Second Gallery of Notre Dame in Paris, (selected by Clayton Eshleman)]. Paper: wove; all edges trim. False headband. Unprinted acetate dust jacket. Lettered and signed; an extra leaf is bound in between pp. [iv–v] with an original holograph poem by the author. Handbound in boards by Earle Gray. 37 copies, of which 26 copies

lettered A-Z) were for sale, priced at \$30.00 a copy. 11 copies (one each marked "Author's Copy," "Publisher's Copy," "Printer's Copy," "Binder's Copy," and a "File Copy," and 6 marked "Author's Presentation Copy") not for sale.

b. Red cloth spine, lacks extra leaf. 201 signed copies of which 200 copies (numbered 1-200 were for sale, priced at \$15.00 a copy, one "File Copy" not for sale.

c. Same as above except 22.7 × 14.7cm.; glued in paper wrappers: [on spine reading from top to bottom in red:] THE GULL WALL [in black:] Clayton Eshleman [in red:] Black Sparrow Press [Gold, front and back, free endpaper]. 1502 copies, priced at \$4.00 a copy.

*Publication:* Published by John Martin of the Black Sparrow Press in Los Angeles, California, September 3, 1975. Printed by Noel Young in Santa Barbara, California and Edwards Brothers in Ann Arbor, Michigan, July 1975. Colophon: [Publisher's device] / Printed July 1975 in Santa Barbara & Ann Arbor for the Black Sparrow / Press by Noel Young & Edwards Brothers Inc. Typography by Graham / Mackintosh. Design by Barbara Martin. This edition is published in / paper wrappers; there are 200 hardcover copies number & signed by / the author; & 26 lettered copies handbound in boards by Earle Gray each / with an original holograph poem by Clayton Eshleman. [Hand lettered or hand numbered].

*Contains:* "To the Creative Spirit," "Reduction," "Entry," "Gargoyles," "Aconite," "Sugar," "Puberty," "Bud Powell," "50 Men for a 41 Kill Per Hour," "Study for a Self-Portrait at 12 Years Old," "4705," "Realignment," "Rotunda," "Creation," "The Gull Wall," "Baby Rhubarb," "Adhesive Love," "Portrait of Vincent Van Gogh," "Portrait of Charlie Parker," "Portrait of Chaim Soutine," "Portrait of Paul Celan," The 9 Poems of Metro Vavin, [the poems included with this essay are: "In Paris," "A Woman in the Subway," "A Change of Heart," "Meeting An American Poet," "My Neighborhood 1964," "What I Believe," "1943," "Thinking About Love," "A Poem About My Destiny"]; "Portrait of Antonin Artaud," "Portrait of T.R.," "Portrait of Hart Crane," [after Arthur Rimbaud:] "Le Bateau Ivre," "At the Tomb of Vallejo," "My Gargoyle," "A Visit from Paul Blackburn," "Collage to the Body Electric," "My Jackal Henchman," untitled: "Leon Golub working on a painting. . .," "Portrait of Francis Bacon," "Germanic Halo," "The Ronin Cock."

[Notes: "The 9 Poems of Metro Vavin" were written by Clayton Eshleman. The persona of Metro Vavin was conceived by Eshleman, (see appendix A). The Black Sparrow Press promotional catalogue: "Forthcoming Titles" January-August 1975 (21.5 × 14cm., in black and purple) announces the publication of *The Gull Wall* and 8 books by other authors. It prints (on page 8 of 12 pages) the first 6 lines of "Paul Celan" from *The Gull Wall*].

## A40 Grottesca

1977

[On tan in black:] NEW LONDON PRIDE PRESENTS / GROTESCA / BY CLAYTON ESHLEMAN / EXCLUSIVE MIMEOGRAPH MASTERPIECES 977

27.6 × 20.7cm; 29 leaves; pp. [1-4] 5-38 [39-43]: p. [1] blank leaf of tan card stock p. [2] blank on recto, printed on verso: advertisements; p. [3] title page as above, blank on verso; p. [4] copyright and acknowledgements, blank on verso; p. 5 dedication, blank on verso; p. [6] blank leaf; p. 7 contents, blank on verso; p. [8] blank leaf; pp. 9-38 text; [leaf 6 and leaf 8 are blank and unnumbered but seem to have been counted in the pagination. All other pages in the text [9-38] are numbered on the versos and counted in the pagination only if they are also printed with the continuation of a poem from the recto]. p. [39] blank; p. [40] colophon; p. [41] blank; p. [42-43] blank leaf of tan card stock.

[Glued in glossy white art board wrappers, reading top to bottom, in black:] NEW LONDON PRIDE EDITIONS GROTESCA CLAYTON ESHLEMAN [Front cover, printed in black gothic type letters:] GROTESCA / [photograph of a collage by Caryl Eshleman of the poet's torso with a pillow in the shape of two lips covering the lower portion, across which is printed in white:] CLAYTON ESHLEMAN [On back cover in black:] [publisher's device] / NEW LONDON PRIDE EDITIONS [Paper: Mimeographic; lithographic for title page. All edges trim with cover].

*Publication:* Published by Allen Fisher of New London Pride in London, England in 1977. Printed by Allen Fisher at Spanner Studio in London in 1977, in an edition of 255 wrapped copies, 25 of which were lettered A-Y and signed by the author, original price not known. Designed by Allen Fisher with the front cover designed by Caryl Eshleman. Colophon: This Exclusive Mimeograph Masterpiece published in / July 1977 in an edition of 280 copies by NEW / LONDON PRIDE 97 Kingsley Flats Old Kent Road SE1 5NL. / 25 copies have been signed by the Author and lettered / A-Y. / NEW LONDON PRIDE are distributed in North America by / Truck Distribution Service 1141 James Avenue / Saint Paul Minnesota 55105 USA. / This is part of New London Pride's second series.

*Contains:* "Study for a Portrait of Robert Duncan," "Study for a Portrait of Norman Glass," "Study of a Shadow," "Portrait of Diane Wakoski," "A Climactic," "Ira," "The Dragon Rat Tail," "Dummies," "Still-Life, with Manson," "Still-Life, with Fraternity," "Study for a Portrait of Hans Bellmer," "The Red Snow," (ascribed to "Metro Vavin"), "1945," "The Wood of Isis."

[*Note:* *Grottesca* was part of a series of books known as "Exclusive Mimeograph Masterpieces" edited by Allen Fisher in London, England].

## Appendix 1: Pseudonyms of Clayton Eshleman

Metro Vavin. Appeared in *The Gull Wall*. Black Sparrow Press, 1975. (A32): "The 9 Poems of Metro Vavin," pages 68-73, were written by Clayton Eshleman in the persona of Metro Vavin, a 64 year old Russian dwarf who does odd-jobs around a Paris cafe. "The Red Snow in *Grotesca* (A40) was also ascribed to Metro Vavin.

Celine Arnould. Appeared in *The Gospel Of Celine Arnould*. Tuumba Press, 1977. (A43). These poems were written in the spirit of Celine Arnould, a French poet who lived in Paris and who published a dozen or so books in the 1920's and 30's. The publisher, John Martin, had given Eshleman Arnould material to look at for a possible translation project, but Eshleman did not feel it was strong enough to warrant translating. Instead he imagines Arnould's gradual release from the bourgeois Catholic mind of her era, through her encounters with other imagined personalities, and writes a serial poem in the spirit of Celine Arnould.

Horrah Pornoff. Appeared in: *Fag Rag* 20, Summer 1977, (see C254); in *Momentum* #9-10, Fall 1977, pp. 3-29, (see C256). "Her" work was also featured in *Origin* (fourth series) #7, April 1979, 24 poems, pp. 1-24, (see C284). These poems were written by Clayton Eshleman in the persona of Horrah Pornoff, a disfigured reclusive woman poet whose only known address was a West Los Angeles post office box.

## Appendix 2: Library Holdings of the Work of C.E.

### Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

The Eshleman mss., 1953-1973. Writings of Clayton Eshleman given by him to Black Sparrow Press publisher John Martin during the early 1970's with two letters to Martin from Eshleman. (15 items, includes: "On the Horrors of Getting Up in the Morning," [typed at bottom: "written by Clayton for advanced composition senior year 1953"]. "Through a Window," [Inscribed on bottom verso: "for John Martin — my first piece of 'creative' writing—1953 Bloomington Clayton Eshleman. (Oct. 10, 1972)"]; *Composition For Caryl Christmas 1971*, (see F12); *A Bringing Of Rilke Into My Own Road And Thought*, (see A21); *Eshleman Literary Materials*, (the author's description of his