

A Review of *On The Flyleaf* by Herbert Woodward Martin Bottom Dog Press 97pgs

Reviewed by Grace Cavalieri in **The Washington Independent Review of Books**
November 2013.

Herbert Woodward Martin is the biographer of Paul Laurence Dunbar, researching and publishing his uncollected works—as you can imagine—a triumph. Martin is also a poet and musician. In this new book, he explains that his poetry comments on existing poems and works of art—but there is much more. The book is Martin’s philosophical statement on what has shaped him and what he has shaped. Each poem begins with ‘*On The Flyleaf...*’

In *On The Flyleaf of Cold Comfort* Martin writes about the days of drinking segregated water, and a white woman who asks why she can’t drink from the colored fountain. . . . The answer was ‘those fountains contain rainbow water. It is reserved for Negroes only.’ The poetic environment in the 1940’s and in this book is about race and compassion, revelation and forgiveness, traditions and rejuvenations. Martin is diligent; but this quality deepens only because of impulse, idea and implementation. One quality alone does not ride a poem into the future. Every poem here is a version of Martin’s experience or understanding. He interprets our views with his own. I won’t say that this book is a culmination of a poet’s life, but the visionary power here is not a bad verification of a life well lived—composing images through beautiful construction. *On The Flyleaf of 59 Contemporary Poets*: “Beginning with a line from an older poet:/ each generation tells the next how excellent/its time was and that the next generation will/have it better. . . .” *On The Flyleaf of 90 Miles* (for: Dennis Brutus) Martin begins: “I see your spirit in between the roots of a Banyan tree/ searching for a route that will allow you to defeat your nearest/ competitor. . . .”

Sometimes Martin’s commentary is about the past, sometimes about the contemporary. *On The Flyleaf of The Last Uncle* (by Linda Pastan) his remarks are as fine about her work as as been written .

And here is a tiny three-liner poem, *On The Flyleaf of Urania*:

Titanic language

Clouds forget; they drift away

Sweet delirium