

2016

Four Poems by Herbert Woodward Martin

Herbert Woodward Martin

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Recommended Citation

Martin, H. W. (2016). Four Poems by Herbert Woodward Martin, *Mad River Review*, 1 (1).

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“This Is the Bowery of 1938”

This is a collection of triplets, three men are sitting in the doorway of a closed department store. In the windows there are three ceiling lamps hung with light from various centuries.

We shall assume, that they are brothers and not friends, otherwise why are they triplets and dressed alike with three caps, matching shirts and trousers and three sets of shoes, which are not terribly worn, and still must retain a modicum of warmth.

Their trousers are unable to brace them from the troubling wind.

They keep their white heads bowed in the presence of circumstance.

“Bahamian Migrant Worker”

*He looks to be a braggart
in a time when such a
small attribute was
offensive and punishable
by some terrible death
depending on how deep
in the south you happened
to be buried, which would
have first resulted in your
disappearance and second
your death. Such a handsome
face might have been intriguing
to some white women, but for
the most part you were a minor
scream or maybe a mighty whimper
resulting in your untimely end no
matter how hard you were
willing to work.*

Fallen Birds

I fed you doughnuts dry as dust

you cough, you munch drily.

I scramble eggs

I boil water

you eat unnatural problems;

you pucker your lips

with confection sugar

they remained dry

they confirm the taste of truth

as sweet and stoic

resting on a pink tongue.

Fallen Birds II

bodies

unconventionally

floating through

a blue mist.

a biting stench

gnaws at the nostrils.

Icarus is falling,

a whim of the sun.

his face juts forward

his eyes are black fists

his hair whips the air

his thin lips are drawn

a heavy tongue screams

against the passing clouds

In The Early Forties,

the allure of the allies

Was to be up in arms

against the holocaust

Germans, and the death

March Japanese and

the Italians who always sang,

themselves towards death

in an intriguing way.

The women of my family

taught me to scavenge the

neighborhood soil for

stray nails, abandoned hinges,

metal rods and any suspect

piece of dormant iron that

could sustain its weight in silver.

Pennies and nickels could be

earned for by the industrious;

I hustled to gather enough pieces

in an old tin bucket that I would

soon sell so I could be richer

than all the other black children

in the neighborhood who sort

to collect nickels of cinematic

escape and dimes to feed our rare
desires. I was the rich child who
and counted my affordable movies
that spurred our American heroes
on to victory after conquest and
never once did I see a black faced
soldier set to liberate a downtrodden
citizen incarcerated for his or her
victorious beliefs. Commotion was
all the rage when the war was over:
white men kissing white women.