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## On Andrew Grossbardt

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*The Traveler*

Andrew Grossbardt

Confluence Press

Lewiston, Idaho 1976

\$2.50, paperback

In the two dozen poems of *The Traveler*, there is the strong feeling we are being told something, and that it is important to listen. The poems are like news items from worlds we thought we knew about, told to us in parable fashion by the traveling poet whose job it is to observe and pass on.

It is easy to see where this "traveler" has been. Most of the poems have some real place names in them that tie them to certain areas such as Mexico, or the West, East, and Midwest of the United States. Most of these places . . . Kansas, Montana, Idaho . . . have built-in images and memories for us that Grossbardt recognizes and uses in odd ways. He jars you from your general idea to a specific image that becomes almost the reason for what you thought.

*Listening to Missouri in March*

Tonight, after all these quiet months  
there is a new sound  
threading the silence. From the still

brown pasture  
back of where the garden ends for good  
insects are hatching.

I can hear them now like a rush  
of delicate metals  
touching for the first time.

This relationship to the places named in the poems, while attractive because we recognize them, and therefore feel comfortable, is probably the most superficial. What comes out strongly, and what *should* come out strongly, is information, news, of the poet himself. The way the poems are begun in story fashion with first lines like "East of here," "Somewhere to the east," "In late summer, the water low," "Somewhere," "Everywhere," places a certain warning to the reader/listener to pay attention. This obscures for us the poet's relationship to the places and events he is describing. When you start

to see this relationship, you see not only a traveler, but a wanderer, a staggerer, a discoverer, a blunderer . . . everything we all are. In the beautiful poem "The crossing" the day is spent traveling and then

. . . .

near dusk I stop and watch  
the western border of sky  
fade to a dull copper flush

today I was annoyed by the light  
tonight I am angry with the darkness

Most of us see travel in terms of getting somewhere, but Grossbardt is equally concerned about leaving. He refers constantly to what is left behind besides time and landscape. It becomes apparent you can't take things away without leaving as much or more than you are taking.

. . . the roads are in mourning  
they have languished so long  
they no longer understand  
what it means to be a road  
I pass like the air  
like a wind walking among clouds  
and what I leave is the shape of air  
already burning in the morning's first fires

where no man has gone  
today is the same  
and different . . .

These poems are what come from arriving and leaving. They are like decals on the car window . . . proof of having been there. How much they cost is another story. The poet understands what is traded for what, and knows that poems must live by themselves. The final lines from the first poem in the book, "In its own cold," give testimony:

. . . Inside, I feed whatever  
burns into the fire. What I leave behind  
will learn to stay out there in its own cold.

*Quinton Duval*