



## **A Green Journey**

*Jon Hassler*

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"Hassler's characters have old-fashioned values and typical human failings; they make this a novel to restore your faith in humanity."

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Agatha McGee is following a dream, though it might be late in the game. She's just retired from a career of teaching and travels to Ireland in search of the romance she never had time for. And along the way, she not only discovers people she would never have let herself know before, but learns through experience, at long last, that love is unpredictable, unstoppable, and never appears as we dream it will.

*From the Paperback edition.*

## **A Green Journey Details**

Date : Published August 27th 1996 by Ballantine Books (first published 1984)

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Author : Jon Hassler

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## **From Reader Review A Green Journey for online ebook**

### **Geri Degruy says**

This was a delightful read! The book is well written. The characters were well drawn, human and ultimately lovable. One of the main themes was figuring out how to negotiate and be with people/groups with whom one has differences. Can we let go of our personal rigidities and staunch beliefs in order to make peace with another?

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### **Terry Ruppel says**

Reading this series is interesting. This book centered on one of my favorite characters from Staggerford - the first book in this series.

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### **Tim says**

In his fourth novel Hassler returns to Staggerford, Minn., for the first time since "Staggerford;" not that his incisive looks at small-town Midwestness in places not named Staggerford are big departures. Here, in fact, much of the plot ends up taking place abroad.

The strong-willed yet occasionally kind-hearted sixty-something Agatha McGee takes center stage here, visiting a pen-pal in Ireland and finding he's more (and less) than what he seems. Nice characterizations and writing, as always, and the jaunts around Ireland are generally interesting, with snapshots of the Ireland/Northern Ireland political situation inserted for color. Still, I found the parading around Ireland by various members of the travel group a little monotonous and unfocused, and overall of the first four Hassler novels for adults (I'm reading them in chronological order) this is my least favorite. Even so, I enjoyed it, and a proper rating probably would be 3.5 stars.

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### **Joan says**

A journey to Ireland is the basis of this story as told from the prospective of several friends who went for various reasons. Agatha...to see a man she had been writing to for 4 years but had never met, her friend Evelyn... who wanted to tour everything there was to see, Janet... who was supposed to go there for her delayed honeymoon but went anyway when her husband backed out, and Father Dick Baker... who went to try to rustle up some new priests from the Irish seminary to come to the states to work. Each has a story to tell and each story is carefully woven into the others.

The writing was good. Jon Hassler really knows how to tell a story. We see weak characters who grow stronger, we see strong characters who get even stronger, we see annoying characters who will always be annoying but lovable. We see temptation that is averted, we see changes through the generations that are welcomed by some and not by others as far as the Catholic church is concerned. It was a good read although I thought the ending a was little weak.

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## Leila says

Many years ago I watched the film of this book set in a small American town and have unsuccessfully tried to obtain a copy of it but with no luck. I recently decided to buy the actual book and am glad I did so. As is often the case there is so much more depth to this gentle and a little old-fashioned tale, The main wonderful character is Miss Agatha McGee who is a 'dyed in the wool' traditional member of the Roman Catholic Church and has dedicated her life to serve as a schoolteacher in the local Catholic School in the fictional town of Staggerford. Strong and determined in her ways and following the rules of the Church, nevertheless she loves her pupils past and present and under her stern and upright outer character there lives a heart of gold too. She is at the point of retirement as the tale begins and this allows her to travel to Ireland in search of the romance she has never had the chance or the time to find in her personal life. All the main characters are extremely well drawn in their contrasting places in life at that time. Agatha has strongly opposing views to the Bishop who has much more modern ideas but has met his match in Agatha. Without revealing the core of the story with its mixture of humour, sadness, tenderness and insights into so many different characters and their points of view I do recommend this book. I found myself with a lump in my throat on more than one occasion. My attention flagged a little when the main story veered off into the life of Randy, one of Miss McGee's past pupil's husband and I did find myself skipping a few pages here, but overall I enjoyed immensely in a quiet and gentle way. I really felt for Agatha and the quandary she finds herself in. Values were different back in the fifties. It is interesting to wonder how different things might have turned out today?

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## Mary Zurn says

An enjoyable book with some wonderful characters. Just a feel-good read.

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## moviebunny says

From my blog: ([\\\_\\\_](#)/nymfaux

Agatha McGee is a brash and unapologetic no-nonsense spinster. She's spent her entire life devoted to her Catholic faith and 46 years teaching her sixth grade students. To the small town of Staggerford, MN, Miss McGee is as much an institution as St. Isadore's, where she teaches, and even the Church, itself. Everyone seems to have put Agatha in a neat little box, expecting her to retire and take up knitting and bingo.

A new bishop is threatening to close St. Isadore's school, bringing unsettling Church reforms into her world, just as Agatha is on the brink of retirement. All her life, Agatha has had her faith in the Catholic Church to keep her company, had its rituals and traditions to guide her. Can her life be coming apart at the seams, just as it seems to have passed her by?

But Agatha has never been one to fade into the background, and while she may be retiring, she's not planning to go quietly. Agatha McGee has a secret. One that no one would ever suspect.

Agatha McGee is in love.

For five years Agatha McGee has had a pen-pal. James O'Hannon is a fellow teacher living in Ireland, a bachelor and a kindred spirit, a man as devout in his own faith as Agatha is in hers. It was their mutual dislike of the new Church reforms that drew them together into correspondence. But it was a shared longing, a shared void of companionship that they began to fill in each other. And when Agatha's retirement gift turns out to be a trip to Ireland, Agatha is ready to abandon a lonely empty future in Minnesota for a future of hope and love in Ireland. When they finally meet, James and Agatha have the both the shyness and intimacy of an old married couple on their first date.

But James has a secret, too. Where the Church and Bishop "Dick" Baker and old age could not break Agatha, James O'Hannon leaves her devastated.

Oddly enough, it is Agatha's nemesis, the bishop, who comes to her rescue—in more ways than one (NO—NOT THAT WAY)—The bishop mends fences between Agatha and James, becoming a dear friend to them both.

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I couldn't put the book down. Jon Hassler's writing is witty, thoughtful, insightful, and beyond it all, captivating. A Green Journey is a story as much about people's faith as it was about romance, but it never comes off preachy. Instead, the deeper I delved into the story, the more I found myself reflecting on my own beliefs, choices I've made, and the turns my own life has taken. But I have to admit, I was absolutely swept away by the romance of it. \*sigh\* James O'Hannon \*sigh\*

It's a story that more than stands on its own. But that doesn't mean I haven't been ecstatic to discover that Hassler's characters and the world of Staggerford, Minnesota carry over into a dozen more books.

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### **Em Parac says**

This was my first Jon Hassler book and since then got me hooked. With books, I care more about the writing rather than a grand plot. Hassler's style and his "laid-back" plots are exactly what I want.

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### **Marne Wilson says**

The first part of this book is set in rural Minnesota in the early 1980's, and it certainly did remind me of my childhood across the river in North Dakota. Hassler is able to represent all the exasperating foibles of small-town folk while still letting you care about them. I actually didn't like Miss McGee very much in Staggerford, where she serves as a foil to the main character, but in this book she takes center stage and is a much more sympathetic figure. Just as we're getting settled in to Minnesota small town life, many of the characters pack up and travel to Ireland for the rest of the novel. Ireland at that time seems like a very distressing place to be, but I still wanted to go there and see the beautiful countryside. While this is not the masterpiece that Staggerford was, it is still a very good book, sensitively written, and I'm glad I read it.

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## **Debbie says**

This novel is for those readers who like Catholic/Christian stories with a focus on a Catholic teacher. Agatha, is nearing retirement, and she is struggling with her decisions -- was it worthwhile to be a religious teacher for nearly forty years? Should she travel to Ireland and meet her pen pal of four years? Should she confide in her best friend of her secrets? I really enjoyed the character of Agatha -- she is very real and likable. The pace is quick and filled with lots of dialogue and many witty comments.

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## **Rachel M says**

I just love Agatha McGee. She is not the type of character I would expect to love, though - she is full of harsh edges and what some might call "religious spirits." But there is something so endearing in the chaos of her story among her inner certainty of how life should be. She wants to orient the world to her inner rightness, and yet it will not be righted: in the meantime she learns the gift of acceptance - acceptance of the people life throws her way.

I was not sure how to think of James O'Hannon - as I see it now, he seems like a good complement to Agatha: while she walks into life sure of how it ought to be, he is a seeker, responding to life by questions where she reacts with rules. And then there is the bishop, who infuriates Agatha with the number of changes he wants to make to the rich Catholic traditions she has known.

The larger lesson I gleaned from this book is that we don't really get to choose the people in our lives, especially if we live in small towns. They can make uncomfortable companions through life. Sometimes, like Agatha, we meet a "James," who is a true kindred spirit and to whom we are able to respond warmly. Sometimes, however, we meet a "bishop," who evokes our anger or passionate dislike. And sometimes we meet with a neighbor like Lillian, who is kind and a friend on some level, but with whom we will never be able to reach a friendship of any depth. Yet, as Hassler so deftly portrayed, each person in our lives serves a purpose and serves to catalyze our growth in some way.

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## **Heather says**

I was hoping to get more out of this book, and I'm not sure how it made it to my to read list. I thought I was looking for funny, comical books and this one came up. It was available on bookmooch.com so I mooched and read it.

There are comments on the back about wanting to read aloud passages, and laughing at parts...I did neither.

I guess I was just expecting something more. It was a good book about a retired catholic school teacher, Agatha McGee, who feels the catholic faith is going down hill quickly. There in her opinion not enough emphasis on the traditional practices of the catholic faith. (I'm not catholic so I don't know the proper terms.) Along with a group from her church she travels to Ireland and meets a man whom she has corresponded by mail for 4 years. This relationship did not evolve how I or Miss McGee hoped it would.

It just didn't do it for me. I was looking for humor and didn't find it.

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### **Hope says**

If it had not been for Gladys Hunt's mention of Green Journey in Honey for a Woman's Heart, I would never have heard of it. Although the blurbs called it "charming," "heartwarming," and "lovely," I approached the book with my usual skepticism toward anything written in the 20th Century. The beginning was awkward – a stilted conversation between an unwed mother, her father and a stodgy old maid. But as the character of Agatha McGee takes shape, you really begin to care about her and words like "stodgy" and "old maid" don't fit anymore.

Agatha is in a crisis. She's looking for meaning in her life after decades of teaching in a parochial school. Her staunch catholic faith seems threatened by the many modern changes occurring in her local church. Her correspondence with another disgruntled Catholic is her only comfort. The book is about her journey to Ireland to meet him and about all the people she touches with her sweet, faithful life. A few off-color moments were not enough to distract me from this compelling story. As one reviewer noted, these characters don't always do what you want them to do, but they always act according to their beliefs, which is satisfying in its own way.

I loved this book. Hassler has a gift for writing a tender narrative that never crosses over into sentimentality.

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### **John Casserly says**

Nearly 8 years since I read this last. Such a great writer. Of the protagonist, Agatha McGee he wrote:

"Along with Preston Warner she rejected a house, a barn, I heard of guernseys and 100 acres of fertile soil. 'I was born to teach not to churn' she said, not realizing that he was her last chance. though it's doubtful that realizing it would have changed her mind. She loved classrooms. Barns made her sneeze."

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### **Ron says**

Except for North of Hope, Hassler has set all of his books (at least those I have read) in the town of Staggerford, MN. The Character of Agatha, McGee reoccurs in all of the books. She is the main character in this one. A mid to lat 60ish spinster, teacher and Staunch old-fashioned Catholic who, as she comes to the end of her career looks back on her life, finds love, she thinks, and comes to terms with modernity, in her fashion. There is a trip to Ireland that wonderfully evokes the people and place and there is a thoroughly modern young couple trying to find/make the stability in their lives that Agatha has always had and imposed on others. What I really like about Hassler's writing is that he makes the everyday boring, troubled-but-not-dramatic lives of his characters interesting. He makes characters and situations that we find ourselves caring about even when, in theory, we have nothing in common with these people. What a marvel!

