



**Nodin Press**

**5114 Cedar Lake Road, Minneapolis, MN, 55416**

**Contact Norton Stillman (952) 546-6300 / Fax (952) 546-6303**

**nstill4402@aol.com**

## Jon Hassler – Voice of the Heartland

*a critical appraisal of his work*

Ed Block

Jon Hassler was one of the most beloved writers to come out of Minnesota in the twentieth century. Here author Ed Block gives us the first book-length study of his life and work. Block begins with a biographical sketch recounting Hassler's Catholic education, and goes on to describe his career as a teacher in a succession of towns in central Minnesota. The remaining chapters focus on the novels and short stories Hassler crafted from these experiences and from the various personal relationships he nurtured, sustained, and sometimes lost over time.

Hassler's small-town roots and the sensitivity he developed to the aspirations and frustrations of youth during his teaching career contribute to his gently satiric but deeply humane renderings of middle American life. Backbiting and gossip, family break-ups, depression, addiction, the problems of aging, and other social issues figure prominently in his work. But as Block amply demonstrates, these elements of malaise are counter-balanced by Hassler's lyrical celebration of nature and the everyday and his far from sentimental insights into the role played by friendship, love, loyalty, and self-respect in bringing meaning to people's lives.

Novelist Larry Watson observes that Block's study "should go a long way toward bringing Hassler's fiction the attention and respect it deserves." And Sally Childs, who devised theatrical versions of several of Jon's novels, observes that "few can dish up small town life the way [Jon] can, with scoops of comedic moments, quirky characters, satiric scenes, and boundaries defined by morality exposing his irrepressible optimism and love for humankind."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Born in Wisconsin, Ed Block grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. He skied in northern Minnesota and fished Arrowhead Country streams in high school and college. He graduated from St. Thomas College in St. Paul and then attended Stanford University, where he earned his PhD in English and comparative literature. He taught for thirty-five years at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin before retiring as emeritus professor in 2012. He invited Jon Hassler to Marquette for a reading in 1996, and the two corresponded for years. He has published a number of articles and essays on Hassler. He and his wife live in Greendale, Wisconsin, where he continues to write, tend a garden, and visit old friends in Minnesota.

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