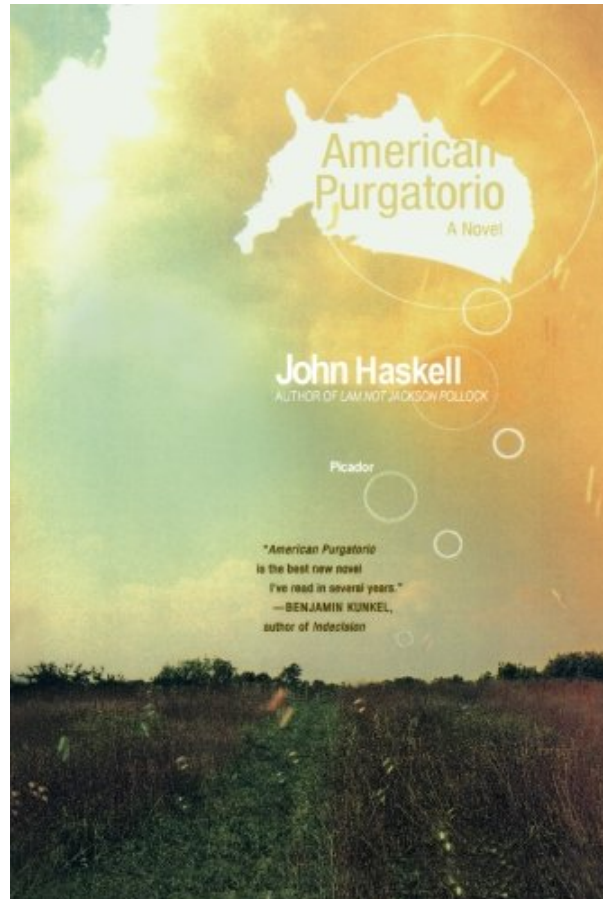
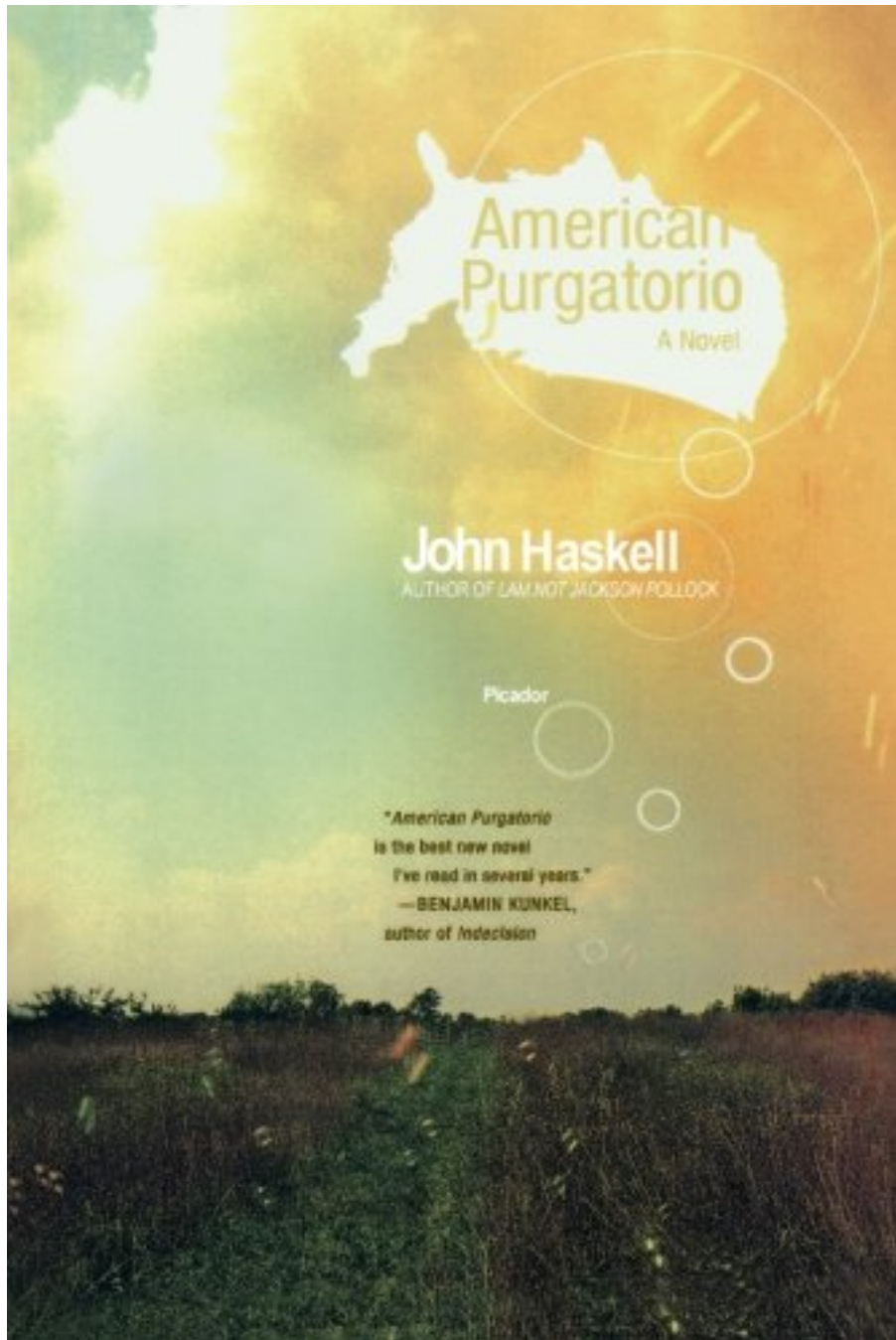


# AMERICAN PURGATORIO: A NOVEL BY JOHN HASKELL



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From Publishers Weekly

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Review

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American Purgatorio is the story of a happily married man who discovers, as he walks out of a convenience store, that his wife has suddenly vanished. In cool, precise prose, written as both a detective story and a meditation on the seven deadly sins, Haskell tells a story that ranges from the brownstones of New York City to the sandy beaches of Southern California. The novel follows the journey of a man whose object of desire is both heartbreaking and ephemeral, and confirms John Haskell's reputation as "one of those rare authors who makes language seem limitless in its possibilities" (Los Angeles Times).

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

(3.5) "As long as I had my need I was able to move forward."

By Luan Gaines

This strange novel requires a certain mindset, a willingness to follow the protagonist through a series of actions that make no sense in an ordinary context. But that is the point. This man is engaged in an effort to control his environment and limit his reactions to the world around him. When he walks outside after buying snacks in a gas station-convenience store, his wife, Anne, is missing, along with their car. His reaction to this event is to wait at the gas station for her to return. When she doesn't, he walks from New Jersey back to Brooklyn, abandoning their trip to Anne's mother in Nyack, New York without even calling his mother-in-law to tell her what has happened. He doesn't call the police or act as if anything is amiss, simply returns home and goes to bed. He continues in this disjointed manner with occasional fits of rage, generally carefully monitoring himself. Within a couple of days, he buys a used car and begins a journey to recover his lost wife, using a map she has circled in strategic places. Although he has difficulty connecting to those around him, he travels across the country, the author beautifully describing people and places with a sense of immediacy and a fine talent for detail.

The narrative abstract becomes meditation in *American Purgatorio*, and an exploration of the seven deadly sins, difficult territory to traverse, requiring the reader to trust where the writer is taking him. Fantasy must be tempered with fact, enough to pin the character to earth while his mind drifts elsewhere in pursuit of a loved one. Clinging to the details of each place he inhabits, the protagonist is barely anchored, yet he manages to tap into reality often enough to maintain a sense of direction, his goal inexorably closer with each place he visits. Not quite a mystery in this mystery, the novel is as well a remarkable travelogue of terrain and the human spirit, wherein one man's deception is another man's heart break, a memorable journey toward self-realization and the nature of the world as we perceive it. Luan Gaines/ 2006.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

I enjoyed this book, but its not for everyone....

By MLRapp

From page one I was hooked on this fast-paced, interesting debut novel about a happily married man who

goes into a gas station to get a snack and comes out to find his wife and car missing. The book is written in rather simple prose, which makes for an extremely fast read, however, there is a lot of depth and meaning underlying the simplicity of the words and sentences. So despite reading quickly, you're left pondering how John Haskell was able to so precisely capture raw human emotion, while using such deadpan prose. He has a unique writing style, but one which is extremely admirable, as he so wonderfully taps into how the protagonist must have felt at each stage of his "search" for his wife, while experiencing each of the seven deadly sins (named in Latin for each part of the book).

I really enjoyed this novel, but don't think its for everyone, so I have a hard time recommending so highly in this review. If you're looking for something different, very well-written, and which captures the complexity of human emotion during a difficult time, this book will likely interest you. If you're on-the-fence, I recommend reading the first chapter before purchasing it, to get an idea about the style in which it is written. I would likely read another novel by this author, as I believe he is very gifted, and provides interesting insight into the human condition.

9 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Haunted and Haunting

By Joshua Broder

I stayed up too late finishing American Purgatorio, then woke up too early -- before the alarm -- rethinking what I had read. At daylight I was back in the book, checking key passages. An ending that at midnight made me groan aloud in sadness, was found at dawn to deliver an odd redemption.

Jack -- a name the protagonist wears loosely -- is, for good reason, a man apart. He lives in his head. Like a transcontinental drive in the slow lane in a dying car, Jack's narrative of his crossing doesn't whip past. That's the book's challenge, but also its pleasure. At that pace you don't miss the sights, both real and mirage.

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