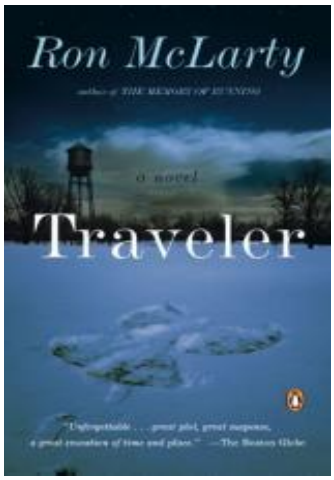
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Traveler

by Ron McLarty



About the Book

The eagerly anticipated follow-up to Ron McLarty?s poignant and deep-souled debut, *The Memory of Running*

When Ron McLarty?s debut novel, **The Memory of Running**, appeared, the publishing world sat up and took notice. Now, McLarty is back with another reason to cheer the arrival of his distinctive new voice. Jono Riley is an aging part-time actor and bartender trying to make ends meet in Manhattan when he receives a letter from a childhood friend telling him that Marie, the first girl Jono ever loved, had just died in her sleep. As Jono makes the trip back home to the working-class neighborhood of East Providence, Rhode Island, McLarty deftly travels between Jono?s adolescence in the early 1960s and the present story of his return. Woven throughout are Jono?s endearing and funny memories of his coming of age with his three best friends?including a series of mysterious shootings that occurred back then, one of which lodged a bullet in Marie?s back when she was twelve. When Jono?s girlfriend, a gritty New York City firefighter named Renee, joins him in East Providence, they find themselves drawn into an attempt to find the person responsible for the shootings so long ago. As the surprising truth unravels, Jono is forced to come to terms with a past that is not quite what he remembers, even as he makes new resolutions in the present. **Traveler** is a fine-tuned and riveting novel that will further affirm McLarty?s place in American fiction.

Discussion Guide

1. The title of the book refers to the bullet in Marie?s back, which moved over time and killed her over thirty years after she was shot. What else do you think this title might refer to? What is its larger significance in terms of the characters and events in the book?

2. Ethnicity is an important aspect of this book: Jono is Irish, Bobby is Portuguese, and Cubby and Billy are Italian. Discuss how each character?s heritage influences who he is, and who he grows up to be. How are these ethnic divisions similar or dissimilar to those that you?ve experienced in your own life?

3. At one point Jono reminisces, ?I think the American retrospective of small-town lives is a cleaned-up version of how we wished we could have been? (p. 133). He thinks about how many other young people at that time were thinking about the war in Vietnam and politics, but that he and his friends were mainly interested in ?the Beatles, large breasts, baseball, and hockey.? How true do you think these statements are in terms of what happens in the book? How true do they ring to you in terms of your own childhood reminiscences?

4. Why do you think Jono continues to act despite the fact that many of the plays he appears in are so unsuccessful? Can you identify aspects of his personality, both when he was young and in the present day, that help him stick with it?

5. Discuss the character of Bobby Fontes, Jono?s quiet but strong Portuguese friend. Although all of the characters in **Traveler** experience pain and tragedy at some point in their lives, Bobby?s situation seems to be unique. Why do you think that is, and how much of it is due to the environment in which he grew up?

6. Though Jono is relatively happy with his life in the present day, he is particularly indecisive about the prospect of moving in with Renee. On page 50, he explains why: ?Marie D?Agostino and my mother aside, Renée Levesque is the only woman I have ever loved. Ever would, my instincts told me. . . . It?s not the moving in that scares me. It?s the moving out.? What do you think of Jono and Renee?s relationship? How does it compare with the past relationships in Jono?s life?

7. Traveler opens with Cubby?s letter to Jono, and Jono?s description of Marie, and how he fell in love with her as a twelve-year-old boy. Marie continues to be a presence throughout the book, though she and Jono never actually dated. Why do you think Ron McLarty made Marie such a central part of the book, though she is not really one of the main characters? How important is the character of Marie to the overall message of the book?

8. The rift between Jono and his friends and the boys from the Terrace, like Howie Crosby, Allie Ponserelli, and Connie Dwyer, is a continuing concern for Jono as he is growing up, and when he returns to Providence he encounters the same group, still behaving in a similar way even though they are grown men. Why do you think the boys had such issues with one another when they were young? Would you have handled some of their confrontations differently? Do you know anyone like the Ponserellis, who still act the same way they did when they were kids?

9. Discuss Jono?s relationship with Big Tony D?Agostino. When Jono?s father passes away, Big Tony assumes the role of his father and cares for him until his own death. Yet Big Tony is known to have a temper as well?he slaps Jono at one point, and it is also understood that he beat up Bobby?s father. What kind of a role model was Big Tony? How has his influence affected Jono?s adulthood?

10. East Providence has changed quite a bit since the last time Jono was there. Many of the landmarks that Jono remembers from childhood have been torn down or changed into something else. As great as Jono?s memories are of this place, he tells Bobby, ?I wouldn?t want to really go back. . . . I?m here now. I?m where I am? (p. 241). How does this statement reflect on Jono, his relationship with Renée, and his trip back to his childhood home? If you live in a different place from where you grew up, talk about what it?s like when you visit your hometown as an adult and how

your experiences are similar to or different from Jono?s.

11. What did you think of Jono?s brief affair with Roxanne Boneria during the summer between his junior and senior years of high school? He lied to Roxanne at first and managed to hide his dates with Roxanne from his girlfriend Sandy Minucci. How do these actions fit in with what you know of Jono?s character?

12. Were you surprised by the ending of the book? Who else did you think could have been responsible for the shootings and why?

Author Bio

Ron McLarty is an award-winning actor and playwright best known for his appearances on television series, including *Law & Order*, *Sex and the City*, *The Practice*, and *Judging Amy*. He has appeared in films and on the stage, where he has directed many of his own plays.

Critical Praise

?Unforgettable . . . This novel has a great voice, a great plot, great suspense, a great evocation of time and place.?

?*The Boston Globe*

?McLarty excels at creating a sense of place, but he is positively brilliant at creating characters. We care about these people.?

?*The Providence Journal*

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