



# Peter Taylor: A Writer's Life (Southern Literary Studies)

*Hubert Horton McAlexander*

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Some years before Peter Taylor's death in 1994, the tacit agreement was made that Hubert McAlexander would be the author's biographer. Peter Taylor, McAlexander's accomplished portrait, achieves for readers a remarkable intimacy with this central figure in the history of the American short story and one of the greatest southern writers of his time.

Taylor's life spanned most of the twentieth century, a fact borne out in the themes of social and psychic rifts in a modernizing South that dominate his stories, plays, and novels. McAlexander knits together the facts and fiction of Taylor's life in a compelling seamless account: his family roots in Tennessee, and the ancestral basis for some of his best work; boyhood upheavals to Nashville, St. Louis, and Memphis, and his establishment of the dysfunctional family as a major subject in American literature; his tutelage under poets John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren, and the development of complex, subtle, carefully crafted stories as his metier.

We see Taylor emerge as a major writer under the aegis of the New Yorker, persevere over the decades, and finally win public recognition with the Pulitzer Prize at age seventy for his novel *A Summons to Memphis*. A genteel, sociable personality, Taylor sustained deep lifelong friendships with Robert Lowell, Jean Stafford, and Randall Jarrell; formed close bonds with three literary generations; and enjoyed fifty-one years of marriage to poet Eleanor Ross Taylor.

Exhaustively researched and engagingly written, Peter Taylor presents a vivid picture of the man, the artist, and his culture and literary milieu. Anyone drawn to Taylor's work will savor this superb biography.

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