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Michener: A Writer’s Journey

Stephen J. May

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James A. Michener was one of the most beloved storytellers of our time, captivating readers with sweeping historical plots that educated and entertained. In this first full-length biography of the private as well as the public Michener, Stephen J. May reveals how an aspiring writer became a best-selling novelist. It is the only book to draw on Michener’s complete papers as well as interviews with his friends and associates. The result conveys much about Michener never before revealed in print.

May follows the young Michener from an impoverished Pennsylvania childhood to the wartime Pacific, where he found inspiration for *Tales of the South Pacific,* a book that led to a string of best sellers, including *The Source, Centennial, Chesapeake,* and *The Covenant.* May provides insights into Michener’s personal life: his three marriages, his unique working methods, and his social and political views. He also reveals the author’s hypersensitivity to criticism, his egotism, and his failure on some occasions to acknowledge the contributions of his assistants.

Examining Michener’s body of writing in its biographical and cultural contexts, May describes the creation of each novel and assesses the book’s strengths and shortcomings. His close readings underscore Michener’s innovativeness in presenting mountains of historical and cultural research in an engaging literary form.

This probing biography establishes Michener’s place in twentieth-century letters as it offers an unprecedented view of the man behind the typewriter.

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