



1992 Inductee
to the
South Carolina
Academy of Authors

Henry Maxwell Steele, known commonly as Max Steele, was born in March 1922, in Greenville, SC, as the youngest of eight children. He attended Furman University from 1939-1942 and Vanderbilt University from 1943-1944. His first story, "Grandfather and the Chow Dog," was published in 1944 in *Harper's Magazine*. Because of his service in the U.S. Army Air Force as a meteorologist during World War II, his studies were interrupted and the completion of his B.A. was delayed. Once the war was over, Steele graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1946. He returned to France after his graduation and continued his education by attending both the Sorbonne and the Academie Julian in Paris where he studied French literature and painting. He also became a founding editor of the literary magazine *The Paris Review* and remained one of its editorial associates for about fifty years.

Steele taught at the University of North Carolina in 1956 and then at the University of California in San Francisco from 1962-1964. He returned to UNC to teach in its creative writing program and then became the director in 1967 over a period of twenty years. He was also largely responsible for transforming his alma mater's program into a nationally recognized undergraduate writing curriculum. As professor emeritus, Steele inspired and instructed several future authors until his retirement in 1988. From then until 2000, he worked as an editor at *Story* magazine.

His own writing includes the large fiction works: *Debby* (which was later retitled *The Goblins Must Go Barefoot*) and *The Cat and the Coffee Drinkers* (1969). Examples of his short-story collections are *Where She Brushed Her Hair* (1968), *The Hat of My Mother* (1988), and *The House of Their Childhood* (1996). His various short stories were published in numerous magazines, such as the *Atlantic*, the *New Yorker*, and *Esquire*. His novel *Debby*, sponsored by the Eugene Saxton Memorial Trust, won both the 1950 Harper Prize and the Mayflower Award. This book describes life in the South during both the Great Depression and WWII through the eyes of a recently released inmate of the Home for Delinquent Women. Steele also won the O. Henry Award twice, once in 1955 with the story "The Wanton Trooper" and again in 1969 for "Color the Daydream Yellow."

The University of North Carolina created the Max Steele Award in Fiction in his honor. Steele died on August 1, 2005.

-Sarah Marie Williamson



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Max Steele