

MARIJANE MEAKER

b. May 27, 1927

d. November 21, 2022

PULP FICTION PIONEER

“We are what we are. We don’t have to define or label it.”

She helped launch the lesbian pulp fiction genre.

Marijane Meaker was a prolific author who helped launch the lesbian pulp fiction genre with her 1952 novel, “Spring Fire.”

Meaker grew up in Auburn, New York, surrounded by books. Enamored of pen names from an early age, she carried the affinity into adulthood, publishing under a variety of pseudonyms.

In 1943 Meaker attended Stuart Hall School, a Virginia boarding school, but was expelled for unruly behavior. She enrolled in Vermont Junior College in 1945, then in the University of Missouri the following year, where she joined the Alpha Delta Pi sorority. Throughout college, Meaker sought the company of other aspiring writers and began submitting her own work for publication. She sold her first story to Ladies’ Home Journal while she was a student.

After graduation, Meaker worked as a clerk for Dutton Publishing before becoming a proofreader for Gold Medal Books. She began publishing mysteries under the name Vin Packer. As Packer, she penned the novel “Spring Fire” about a love affair between two sorority sisters. The novel sold an astounding 1.5 million copies at a time when gays and lesbians were largely closeted and considered mentally ill. The unexpected financial success of the book uncovered a huge untapped market for lesbian-themed fiction, and Meaker continued writing in this newfound genre.

Throughout the 1950s, Meaker pursued relationships with other women, most notably the American writer Patricia Highsmith. Highsmith is best known for thrillers such as “Strangers on a Train” and “The Talented Mr. Ripley.” The couple met at a lesbian bar in New York and lived together for a time.

In the late ’50s, Meaker began writing nonfiction paperbacks about lesbians under the pen name Ann Aldrich. In the ensuing years, she wrote children’s books under the name Mary James. As M.E. Kerr (a play on Meaker), she earned acclaim for her young-adult novels, which told captivating stories while authentically depicting a range of issues affecting teens, from mental illness to sexism and homophobia.

Later in life, Meaker published several books under her own name, most notably “Highsmith: A Romance of the Fifties” (2003), about her two-year relationship with the author.

Among other recognition, Meaker received the Margaret A. Edwards Award from the American Library Association in 1993 for her achievements in young-adult literature. She received the Trailblazing Award from the Golden Crown Literary Society in 2013 for her contributions to the lesbian literary cannon.

Meaker died in Springs, New York, at age 95. The New York Times, The Washington Post, and other major media published her obituary.



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