

Julian Rutherford Meade 1909-1940

Julian Rutherford Meade was born in Danville, Virginia on February 4, 1909, the son of Edmund Baylies and Helen Douthat Meade. His father, at one time, served as Mayor of Danville.

As he grew up, Julian became a tall, angular young man, one of rare sensitivity and superior intellect. He attended Danville Public Schools, where he had the reputation of being an excellent student. Following what has been referred to as “a miserable year spent at Virginia Military Institute,” he went to the University of Virginia where he was awarded both the bachelor and master’s degree. At first, Julian seemed to have a deep yearning for a career on stage, and for a few weeks in the mid-twenties he tried his theatrical “wings” in New York but came away disillusioned and gave up the idea. After a summer in France in 1929, he returned to Danville to begin teaching French at George Washington High School.

During that same year there was a textile strike at Dan River Mills, at which time Julian Meade’s potential as a writer first became evident. He reported the incidents of the strike for *The New York Herald Tribune* and for *The United Press International*. The stories he penned had a color and style that marked him as a writer of no small talent and as a thinker to be reckoned with in the socio-industrial world. In 1935, at the age of 26, he published his first book titled *I Live in Virginia*. Much of the material for this book he had kept for years in the form of a notebook, autobiographical in style, and enlivened with family glimpses that turned out to be more interesting and more revealing than some family members approved of. It is no surprise that Julian Meade was not the most popular person in Danville following the publication of the book. The work was seriously compared with Thomas Wolfe’s novels *Look Homeward Angel* and *You Can’t Go Home Again*, which had caused such a scandal in North Carolina. Wolfe, in turn, took a deep interest in Julian Meade and encouraged him in his literary career.

As he lived his brief 31 years, Julian Meade became increasingly interested in gardens and gardening. He had traveled fairly extensively, and was in constant demand as a lecturer, especially on gardening. In fact, at his death, his entire calendar was booked up with lectures for the coming year. In *Adam’s Profession and Its Conquest by Eve* he satirized garden clubs. He later published *Bouquets and Bitters* and *Back Door*. In each work, Danvillians claimed to recognize someone in the composite characters he drew. The author’s insistence that no one was intended simply added fuel to the flames.

Out of Julian Meade’s deep love and understanding of children grew several books written specifically for them. In his work, *Teeny and the Tall Man*, the “tall man” represents the author and was Julian Meade’s biggest selling volume. It is still a favorite whenever children choose their own books in libraries. His other children’s books are *Miss Couch and the Scamps* and *Peter By the Sea*.

Perhaps a “prophet without honor in his own country,” Julian Meade was not fully appreciated in his day, but reflection places him among the permanent literary artists of the period. He possessed sensitivity to his environment, a keen perception of character, and a deep sense of justice. Like Shelley, he died an uncompromising artist.