



# Books & Writers



## Who is your favorite Hall of Fame writer?



**Olive Ann Burns, author of *Cold Sassy Tree* (1984)**



**Natasha Trethewey, former U.S. Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner.**



**Pat Conroy another of the great writers featured in the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame. Photos from [georgiawriter-shalloffame.org](http://georgiawriter-shalloffame.org)**

**By David R. Altman**  
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What do Hershel Walker, the Allman Brothers Band and Flannery O'Connor all have in common?

Besides being from Georgia, they are all Hall of Famers. That's right, Walker is in the College Football of Fame, the Allman Brothers Band is in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and, Flannery O'Connor is in the Georgia Writer's Hall of Fame.

Yes, there is a Hall of Fame for writers, not just for athletes and entertainers.

What makes someone a hall of famer? Is it talent? Fame? Longevity? All of those?

Of course, Georgia is now home to the College Football Hall of Fame and we can all name a few of those football greats ("...run Hershel run....run Hershel run!").

But there's another Hall of Fame close-by that you might not have heard of.

It's the Georgia Writer's Hall of Fame, housed in Athens, which has been around for about 15 years. But the Hall's timeless honorees read like a literary Who's Who of historic proportion.

The Georgia Writers "Hall", managed by the University of Georgia, "...recognizes Georgia writers, past and present, whose work reflects the character of the state—its land and people."

Here are a few of the most well-known of those 48 writers who have been honored by the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame (believe me, Frank Tarkenton and Pat Swilling have nothing on these literary giants):

Conrad Aiken, a Pulitzer Prize winner and former Poet Laure-

ate, author and editor of more than 50 books, he also wrote one of the country's most famous short stories, "Silent Snow, Secret Snow". Aiken grew up in Savannah, and his grave in Bonaventure Cemetery was made famous by the John Berendt book *Midnight in the Garden of Good & Evil*.

Erskine Caldwell, author of *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*, was from White Oak, a small community in Coweta County.

Olive Anne Burns, born in Banks County and long-time writer for the *Atlanta Journal*, wrote the best-selling book *Cold Sassy Tree*, which was published in 1984. It took Burns 15 years to write the book, about a boy coming of age at the turn of the last century, and she began it in earnest after being diagnosed with cancer.

James Dickey, perhaps most well-known for his novel *Deliverance*, is also viewed as one of the South's greatest poets. Dickey, who grew up in Atlanta's Buckhead neighborhood, was the nation's Poet Laureate in 1966. He taught at the University of South Carolina, where he died in 1997, just three days after teaching his last class.

Dickey was eulogized by, among others, another Georgia Hall of Fame writer and our state's former Poet Laureate, David Bottoms, a native of Canton. Bottoms, himself a brilliant poet who has published nine books, read Dickey's great poem "Buckdancer's Choice" at his friend's funeral.

Judson Mitcham is Georgia's current Poet Laureate, and was inducted into the Hall two years ago. He has twice been named Georgia Author of the Year.

Other famous past and present

writers in the Georgia Hall include Martin Luther King, Jr., Jimmy Carter, Pat Conroy, W.E.B. DuBois, Henry W. Grady, Terry Kay and Ferrol Sams (who wrote, among other books, *The Horse Whisperer*). This extraordinary list of honorees includes recent U.S. Poet Laureate, Natasha Trethewey, who now teaches at Emory, and of course, short-story whiz Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, of Milledgeville (*The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*) and Eatonton's Alice Walker (whose work, *The Color Purple*, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1982).

Perhaps best known among the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 48 honorees was a young, free-spirited woman who grew up in Atlanta in the early 20th century. She wrote a book that would not only win her a Pulitzer Prize but would change forever the way many Americans viewed the South and the Civil War. Her book would sell more than a million copies in its first six months. She died on August 11, 1949, after being hit by a car while crossing the intersection of Peachtree and 13th streets in Atlanta, a place close to the location of the museum which now bears her name: Margaret Mitchell.

Greatness is defined in many ways—and Georgia has a legacy of extraordinary writers that may be unmatched anywhere in the United States.

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