



2017 Inductee
to the
South Carolina
Academy of Authors

“Hardship, cruelty, heartbreak, bleak sorrow—these sad themes are plentiful in the pages of **Cathy Smith Bowers**,” writes Fred Chappell of her poetry. “But in its smoldering heart, her poetry holds, like the piñata in “The Party,” a “sweet, dark center.”

“Every moment of intensity, joyous or painful, I have ever experienced—and have attempted to shine a light on through my poems—is the flaming out, I believe, of an energy, a source of power greater than myself.” So says the poet regarding the abiding image that inspired *Like Shining from Shook Foil* (2010) a line from “God’s Grandeur,” the 1877 sonnet by Gerard Manly Hopkins.

“This quote epitomizes my whole philosophy of the abiding image from which I write and from which I encourage my students to write,” explains the former North Carolina Poet Laureate.

Born in 1949 in Lancaster, SC, Bowers received her BA and MAT in English at Winthrop University in Rock Hill. She also studied Modern British Poetry at Oxford University in England.

As a high-school English teacher, she discovered her urge to write, speaking about how she “stayed one lesson ahead of my students.” Later, she began her career in Queens College in Charlotte where she garnered teaching awards.

From those early years her poems have appeared in publications such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Georgia Review*, *Poetry*, *The Southern Review* and *The Kenyon Review*. She received a South Carolina Arts Commission Poetry Fellowship, which led to completion of her first book, the award-winning, *The Love That Ended Yesterday in Texas* (1992).

Other collections are: *Traveling in Time of Danger* (1999), *A Book of Minutes* (2004), *The Candle I Hold Up to See You* (2009), and her newest book, *The Collected Poems of Cathy Smith Bowers* (2014), which won the 2014 Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance Award.

Bowers’ early work centered on growing up in a mill town one of six children. The family struggled with poverty and tragedies, such as the death of two brothers, themes found throughout her work. Much later, she wrote of her husband’s suicide. William Matthews notes about her poetry that she “*thinks* in metaphor; her poems combine a measured, adult sadness with the erotic pleasure, first learned in childhood, of tracing connections and resemblances....”

Bowers lives in Mill Spring, NC with her partner, Christopher Juett, and currently teaches in the MFA program at Queens College. —Libby Bernardin



Cathy Smith Bowers