



Carolyn Kizer

December 10, 1925 - October 9, 2014

Sonoma, California

Carolyn Kizer, a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet whose work brought wit, fury and classical learning to the lives of women, died in Sonoma, California, on October 9, 2014. She was eighty-eight and had suffered for several years from dementia.

Carolyn Ashley Kizer was born in Spokane, Washington, on December 10, 1925, the only child of a prominent lawyer and a biologist mother who encouraged her to write. She graduated from Sarah Lawrence College in 1945 and did graduate work in Chinese literature at Columbia and the University of Washington, where she studied with the poet Theodore Roethke. Chinese and Japanese poetry remained lifelong influences, and she would translate and adapt it throughout her career.

In 1959 she helped found the journal *Poetry Northwest* in Seattle and edited it for most of the 1960s, publishing many of the leading poets of the day. In 1966 she became the first director of literary programs at the newly created National Endowment for the Arts, where she helped build the grants that have supported American writers ever since. She also spent a year in Pakistan as a State Department specialist, translating Urdu poetry.

Her own books included *The Ungrateful Garden*, *Knock Upon Silence* and *Midnight Was My Cry*. Her long sequence *Pro Femina*, begun in the 1960s, was a sardonic, clear-eyed meditation on the hard choices facing women who wrote, and it became a touchstone for later generations. Her collection *Yin* won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1985.

She taught at many universities, served as a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and resigned that post

in 1998 in protest over the lack of women and people of color among the chancellors. She lived her last decades in Sonoma with her husband, the architect John Marshall Woodbridge.

Services

Died in Sonoma, California, October 9, 2014, aged 88, after a long decline with dementia. Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1985 (Yin). First director of literary programs at the National Endowment for the Arts; founding editor of Poetry Northwest. Portrait: 1970 photograph (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

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