



In Memory of Professor Gönül Uçele (1942-2025)

Gönül Uçele was among the first research assistants at Hacettepe University's English Language and Literature Department, established by Prof. Emel Doğramacı in 1966. She received her PhD with a dissertation entitled *The Conflict Between Illusion and Reality in O'Neill's Latest Plays* in 1969. Her associate professorship thesis was on Jerome Lawrence's and Robert E. Lee's work, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*. In 1982, she was a founding member of Hacettepe University's American Literature Department. From 1984 to 2000, she was the chair of the department, which was later renamed the Department of American Culture and Literature. Under her leadership, the faculty and the student body flourished. In addition to offering classes and guiding MA and PhD students, she wrote numerous articles, attended national and international conferences, and supported ASAT's endeavors to create networks beyond Turkey. Gönül Uçele continued to teach after she retired from Hacettepe in 2000. Her last post was at İstanbul Aydın University, where she taught until the Fall of 2024, only a semester before she passed away.

I would like to celebrate Gönül Hoca's life by referring to both her personality and her academic achievements. Her classes inspired numerous students because she was always interested in the avant-garde and new literature of the time, introducing us to the most recent noteworthy publications. She would methodically follow contemporary writers in American theater and fiction and include them on her syllabi. Her effort to educate students was particularly admirable given the reality that new publications were difficult to access. I learned about Joyce Carol Oates in her classes before deciding to study her novels for my PhD dissertation. When I joined Hacettepe University's Department of American Culture and Literature as a research assistant, she was the

chair, and like many of my colleagues, she supported my application. I worked with her as the vice chair before she moved to İstanbul.

Gönül Hoca's laughter was unique and unforgettable. She laughed so heartily and in such a fashion that when she did not, all of us were concerned. When she was not in her usual cheerful mode, we would wait to approach her until she regained her sunny disposition. A person who smiled so sincerely and profoundly obviously loved life and socializing. Her home was always open to friends, colleagues, and students. As anybody who crossed paths with her can testify, she was also a great cook. The food she served at her house parties was legendary. The rice dishes were cooked with saffron, pine nuts, and currants; the grape leaves were delicately stuffed; and the desserts were exquisitely mulled with unusual spices. She was well-versed in Ottoman cuisine, and her knowledge of lesser-known Turkish recipes was admirable. She would host visiting Fulbright professors and invite her colleagues and other guests, guaranteeing good conversation and lively evenings. Her home, located on Güniz Sokak, Ankara, was a well-known spot to all of us.

Her circle of friends and colleagues was also extensive. Numerous academics, writers, and poets from the United States visited our department during her time as chair. Robert Creeley, Ed Foster, Simon Pettet, Raymond Federman, Bob Bertholf, Paul Levine, David Landrey, William Jones, and David Espey all came to give lectures, participate in conferences, and offer classes. Due to her networking skills, her junior colleagues and research assistants were able to forge their networks and receive support from other academics. For example, Bob Bertholf sponsored the annual department periodical between 1993 and 2002. Gönül Hoca not only introduced American writers and academics to the department, but also prominent Turkish actors. She invited Zuhâl Olcay, Haluk Bilginer, and Ahmet Levendoğlu to our department. They accepted her invitation to discuss their play, Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, which was staged in Ankara in 1996. Following the discussion, we were invited to watch the play from a far more informed perspective.

Gönül Hoca's generous attitude towards her colleagues was exemplary. In 1994, she spent her sabbatical year at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, with a second Fulbright grant, and invited Ayça Germen and me—two research assistants at the time—to stay with her during the semester break. She was temporarily living in a small one-bedroom apartment in their graduate housing complex. She kindly gave us her bedroom while she and her son, Alp, slept on the two couches in the living room. She cooked for us, invited American academics to guide our research activities, and accompanied us while sightseeing. I cannot forget the long walks we took on the streets of New York, during those very snowy and cold winter days, to catch events in different parts of the city. On one occasion, we decided to watch *Schindler's List*, a recent release at the time. We picked a theater without knowing that it was in a Jewish neighborhood and that the audience consisted of families affected by the Holocaust. The matinee was interrupted by sobs from the audience and a prayer session at the end; an unforgettable cultural experience we shared with her.

Gönül Hoca was more than a chair and colleague for the members of the Department of American Culture and Literature. She guided us in academic as well as personal and social matters. Even

after she moved to İstanbul, she kept in touch. In 2012, she delivered the welcoming speech at our international conference, “From Cover to Cover: Reading Readers.” In 2013, she invited some of us to present our research at İstanbul Bahçeşehir University. At the end of that day, she treated us, once again, to her lovely cuisine at her İstanbul apartment, accompanied by friendly conversation, as always.

Raymond Federman refers to Samuel Beckett’s death as changing tenses. Gönül Hoca’s presence in another dimension does not diminish the love and respect we have for her, and it is not easy to use the past tense when talking about her life and achievements. I am honored to have met her, to have worked with her, to have become part of her academic family, and to carry the torch she has passed on to us. With my utmost respect, may she rest in peace.

Assoc. Prof. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş

