



In Memory of Prof. Dr. Necla Aytür
(1932–2017)

The “First Lady” of American Studies in Turkey

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Prof. Dr. Necla Aytür, the pioneer of American Studies in Turkey, died on October 7, 2017. Her loss has been heavily felt by her colleagues and students, as well as by the general reading public.

After graduating from Ankara Kız Lisesi, one of the Turkish capital’s most prominent high schools, she became a student of English language and literature at Ankara University’s Faculty of Languages, History and Geography (Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi). There she had the chance to attend the courses of “legendary” professors such as Orhan Burian and İrfan Şahinbaş, as well as Prof. Hamit Dereli, Arthur Sewell, Edward V. Gatenby, and Violet Gordon, who spent years teaching English at Ankara University. Right after her graduation, Necla

Aytür was appointed as a research assistant in the English Department.

She spent two years at the University of Minnesota as a Fulbright grantee, where she worked on her Ph.D. dissertation, “The Concept of Nature in the Works of Alexander Pope,” and took graduate courses in American Studies. Her growing interest in American culture and literature led her to change her field of academic study.

At the time, the main focus of Ankara University’s English Department was English language and literature. However, beginning in the 1952–1953 academic year, courses in American literature were also included in the curriculum. These courses were taught by Sidney Burks and later on by Fulbright professor Robert. H. Ball. Thanks to the efforts of Professor Ball, the Division of American Studies was established in 1954.

After receiving her Ph.D. in English literature, Necla Aytür began to work in the field of American literature. Her focus of study was William Faulkner’s fiction. She went to the U.S. a second time on a Rockefeller grant to conduct research at Yale University. During her stay at Yale, she attended numerous courses and seminars in the American Studies Department, including those offered by Norman Holmes Pearson, one of the pioneers in the field, and by Cleanth Brooks, a specialist in Faulkner’s work as well as one of the champions of New Criticism.

In 1964, Necla Aytür, a fresh Associate Professor of American literature, was appointed as the first Turkish staff member in the newly-established Division of American Studies at Ankara University. During the 1965–1966 academic year, she returned to the U.S., this time as a guest lecturer of American literature at Louisiana State University in New Orleans.

It goes without saying that Necla Aytür was the “First Lady” of American Studies in Turkey. She was the first to develop a B.A. curriculum in the field, which was later fully realized at Hacettepe University with the opening of its Department of American Culture and Literature in 1982. This paved the way for other departments in the field, all over Turkey. Professor Aytür was also among the scholars who established the first American literature conference in the country with the collaboration of the Turkish-American Cultural Association in Ankara. In 1988, she co-founded, and was the first president of, the American Studies Association of Turkey (ASAT). The papers

delivered at ASAT's conferences led to the publication of the Journal of American Studies of Turkey (JAST) in 1995, which has been published continuously for the past 22 years.

Necla Aytür continued working in the field of American Culture and Literature until her retirement in 1999. She believed that Turkish higher education should be of the highest quality, and spent a great deal of effort to raise American Studies to an academic level. Having educated hundreds of students in the field, she is considered the “professor of professors,” for many of her former students are now faculty members in American Culture and Literature departments across the country. Hundreds of students learned how to evaluate poems from her detailed analyses in class and through her writing. Moreover, Prof. Aytür was a most skillful practitioner of New Criticism. Her book *Amerikan Romanında Gerçekçilik* (Realism in American Fiction) (1977) is one of the earliest studies of American literature. *Kitaplar Arasında* (Among Books) (2010) is a study that focuses on literature, language, and culture, as well as the works of Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Yaşar Kemal.

Thanks to Professor Aytür's translations, Turkish readers have had the chance to enjoy many famous works by American authors. Henry James' *Daisy Miller* (1966), *The Turn of the Screw* (1988, *Yürek Burgusu*), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1995, *Bir Kadının Portresi*, with her husband Prof. Ünal Aytür), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1990, *Uyanış*), Herman Melville's *Pierre* (2006, with Ünal Aytür), William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (2004, *Kurtar Halkını, Musa*), *Sanctuary*, (*Tapınak*, 2007), *The Wild Palms* (2011, *Çılgın Palmiyeler*, with Ünal Aytür), and *The Unvanquished* (2012, *Yenilmeyenler*, with Ünal Aytür) are some of the fruits of her diligent labor. *Bir Başka Amerika/Kadınca Öyküler* (1999, *Another America/Stories by Women*) is a collection of American short stories, and *Kısa Romanlar Uzun Öyküler* (2007, *Short Novels, Long Stories*) is another collection in which she combines her efforts with those of Prof. Ünal Aytür. Her translation of the stage adaptation of Melville's *Billy Budd* (“Yasalar ve İnsanlar”) was produced by Ankara State Theatre in 1978.

Necla Aytür was a person of sound principles who carefully avoided displays of self-flattery. She hardly raised her voice, even when she found herself in conflict with others. She maintained her elegant attitude while coping with difficulties and was ladylike at all costs. She

was a true daughter of the modern Turkish Republic, who fulfilled all her private, social and academic responsibilities. She was a perfect housewife and a good cook, with a profound sense of hospitality. She was an ardent admirer of all kinds of artistic work, a great lover of nature, and a skillful gardener. She was a woman who dressed beautifully. She was a model wife, a loving mother, an affectionate grandmother and an academic who watched over the progress of her colleagues with a great deal of interest. She will be remembered for these fine qualities, which are becoming increasingly rare in our world.