



Honoring Gülden Özcan

Writing with Gülden

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ABSTRACT

SNAC+ (University of Lethbridge) Excellence in Equity Award Ceremony

KEYWORDS

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WRITING WITH GULDEN

It is a great honor for me to have the opportunity to participate in this award ceremony and to say a couple of words. Thank you very much for having me.

Gulden touches the lives of many people on various occasions. I am one of them and feel very lucky to witness her productivity, creativity, and strong willpower. But, for me what distinguish her are her compassion, integrity, and warm friendship. I am really privileged to have her as a friend, a colleague, and a feminist story-teller.

There is so much to say about her touches in my life. Now, specifically, I would like to talk to you about her creativity in our collective story writing group which we call the Sewing Machine. We first sat around the table in November 2018. Since then, we have been meeting and writing fictional feminist stories together: Gulden, Simten, and I. We have our own way of writing. One of us starts to write the story and the other continues without having any plan or plot. The story finds its own way and ends. Through this way, we not only multiply our words but also empower our friendship. We try to benefit from the healing power of women's literature. Hopefully, we will publicize the stories soon. For now, only in Turkish.

I am not a person who is not that good at being a part of any kind of group. Most probably this is to do with my problematic relation to politics. I am not proud of this. However, when I look at myself in the Sewing Machine, I can say that I totally feel like I belong to this group. Gulden is one of the important reasons why I feel myself in the right place. Her approach and way of thinking not only enrich the stories but also us as a group of feminist friends writing together. She

creates powerful characters who tell the diversity of our existence as women under the same sky. By her characters she shows the hidden barriers in society, challenges stereotypes and dichotomies. Her way of storytelling inspires and binds us together.

To be honest, this collaborative feminist storytelling desk made me realize many things about myself that I repress and/or of which importance I have so far bypassed.

- I realized how much I internalized heteronormativity even though I thought I was aware of it.
- I realized how valuable it is to be inclusive.
- I realized that it is possible to be compassionate and frank at the same time.
- I realized that collaborative writing is a fertile means of solidarity.

Following Gulden, I quote from a poem by Birhan Keskin, that she put at the end of one of our collective stories, The Remains:

Bu mum medeniyetinde
bu metal öznede
bu cam sözde
ne yurt sana dil
ne şölen yeterince.

Leyla Bektaş Ata

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Feminist Asylum
Sewing Machine*