

# Glamorizing Naturecultures: Traditional Village Plays and Pastoral Tradition

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## Abstract

Anatolian village plays and pastoral tradition commonly celebrate the harmonious interactions between people and the physical environments and display how such material interactions are warranted upon an anthropocentric desire for power and control over the natural world. Both relying on early rituals as their sources, these early ritualistic performances indicate the dependence of the social life on agricultural, material and meteorological events. This indication coordinates these works with popular celebrations of the co-evolution of the human and the nonhuman. By this way, these ritualistic plays also uncover a materialist undercurrent about the acknowledgement of Naturecultures in that cultural changes are based on natural formations, or vice versa, hence producing a reciprocal relational network. However, this acknowledgement celebrates natural events only for the benefit of the human realm, hinting at weak anthropocentrism. As we will see in these works, union with the environmental forces is important for the survival of the human species. This union is further necessary to avoid punishment from venomous natural beings. In this respect, these cultural performances help us see very different sets of relations with more-than-human habitats. Elaborating on this complicated representation within different sets of relations, this article will analyse traditional folk performances and pastoral tradition in terms of their representing Naturalcultural formations.

**Keywords:** traditional village plays, Anatolian folk performance, pastoral, pastoral tradition, Naturecultures

## DOĞAKÜLTÜRLERİ BÜYÜLEMEK: KÖY SEYİRLİK OYUNLARI VE PASTORAL GELENEK

### Öz

Anadolu köy seyirlik oyunları ve pastoral gelenek ortak olarak hem insanlar ve fiziksel çevreler arasındaki birlikteliği kutlamakta hem de bu tarz maddesel ilişkilerin nasıl doğa üzerinde insan merkezli bir kontrol ve güç kurma isteğine bağlı olduğunu göstermektedir. Kaynak olarak daha önceki kırsal geleneklere dayanan her iki gelenek de sosyal hayatın tarımsal, maddesel ve meteorolojik olaylara bağlı olduğunu gösterir. Bu bağlılık, bu tip eserleri insan ve insan olmayanın birlikte evriminin popüler kutlamalarına dönüştürür. Bu şekilde, kültürel değişimler doğal oluşumlara, ya da tam tersi, bağlı olduğundan, dolayısıyla karşılıklı bir ilişki ağı oluşturduklarından, bu kırsal oyunlar aynı zamanda Doğakültürler için maddesel bir algı altyapısı da oluşturur. Ama yine de Doğakültürün birlikteliğinin bu şekilde kabul edilmiş olması yalnızca

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insan çıkarı içindir, bu sebeple de zayıf insan merkeziliğine bir gönderme yapar. Bu tip eserlerde göreceğimiz üzere, çevresel faktörlerle uyumlu bir birliktelik içinde olmak insan türünün devamı için önemlidir. Bu birliktelik aynı zamanda kötü doğal varlıkların cezalandırmasından da uzak durmak için gereklidir. Bu açıdan, bu kültürel performanslar insan olmayan yaşam alanlarıyla çok farklı ilişkiler görmemizi sağlar. Bu makale, farklı ilişkiler içerisindeki karışık temsil üzerinden, köy seyirlik oyunlarını ve pastoral geleneğini Doğakültürel oluşumları göstermesi bakımından analiz edecektir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** geleneksel köy seyirlik oyunları, Anadolu köy performansları, pastoral, pastoral gelenek, Doğakültür

**R**ooted in the beginnings of humanity, traditional village plays are folk performances with crude drama including songs, dances, imitations, and mimicry. According to the theatre scholar Metin And, they may have “originated in the shamanistic rituals of the Ural-Altai region, which was the birthplace of the Turkish people, or perhaps it was part of the folklore of the Phrygian or Hittite civilizations of Anatolia” and “from festivals honouring such gods as Dionysios, Attis and Osiris, or from the Egyptian mysteries celebrated in Eleusis and other places” (1975, p. 9). These crude plays show a conflicting representation, though, since they “invited humanity to [a celebration of the cultural cooperation with] nature” (Şenocak, 2016, p. 249)<sup>1</sup> on the one hand. On the other hand, the inducement of such performative rituals results from the desire to affect the natural spirits for the betterment of human sphere through performative and ritualistic satisfaction. This illustrates how people do things that they believed “have positive influences on the ecological cycle” and how they interfere with “the ecological phenomena” (Çetin, 2006, p. 190). The interference indeed stemmed from a selfish expectation of more crops and softer climates. The main target of these performances is, thus, “to increase the fertility of the soil and to ensure that the animals reproduce in a healthy environment and in many numbers” (Özhan, 1999, p. 109), which actually suits human desires. This results in a crucial point that needs attention in relation to these performances: do they put harmonious union with nature with their emphasis on Naturecultures<sup>2</sup> on market by taking all elemental bodies into consideration? Or, do they support the necessity of an anthropocentric intrusion prerequisite for this harmonious union?

On the surface, these plays point to Anatolian environmental consciousness in their celebration of the embeddedness of elemental cycles into daily lives. Indeed, human beings pretend to celebrate this embeddedness only for the betterment of their cultural prosperity; therefore, these plays turn into a cheat treat. In this sense, the fact that most village plays either portray nonhuman animals as central figures or employ animal disguises—including those of

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, all the Turkish sources are translated by the author.

<sup>2</sup> NatureCulture, as a term, underline the co-existence of discursive and material formations, hence pointing to the co-evolution of nature and culture. Inspired by Haraway’s note “We’ve never been human,” NatureCulture hints at these two inseparable two dynamics. That is to say, this term, developed with the principles of new materialisms and posthumanisms (see Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles, Karen Barad etc.) basically challenges the grand dichotomy between Nature and Culture, and gives equal importance to the material agency and the social one.

camels, horses (sometimes as hobby-horses), bears, [...] hedgehogs, [...] gazelles etc. (And, 1999, p. 23)—reveals a shallow respect for nature. These plays also mark important cultural dates in relation with natural cycles. Similarly, the names of months—Offspring pouring (*Döl dökümü*), Flower month (*Çiçek ayı*), Rain month (*Yağmur ayı*), Harvest month (*Orağ ayı*), Wine month (*Şarap ayı*), Ram pairing (*Koç katımı*) (And, 1970, p. 20)—also seem to underline the intrinsic value of elemental and environmental cycles, yet revealing a pseudo-respect for the nonhuman world. In other words, while taking cognizance of the importance of natural forces in the survival of our species, these plays intrinsically categorize those forces as volatile, threatening, and unreliable. Such negative connotations ironically beckon a fear and respect of nature at the same time, which is quite problematic.

These dramatic village plays also disclose a yearning for control over the physical environments. Mevlüt Özhan delineates the purpose of these ritualistic rustic plays, stating that they picture the endeavours of humanity trying to control natural/environmental forces with the aim of rendering themselves strong against Nature (1999, p. 95). This is closely related to ecophobia, developed by Simon C. Estok and theorizing humans' attempts to control the environment as they feel an inherent loathing and fear for the uncontrolled spheres. Granting Brian Deyo's queries, "does anthropocentrism not reveal itself to be driven by an irrational desire for mastery and control that is itself driven in some way by ecophobia? The fear and hatred of that which is beyond our full mastery and control ...?" (Deyo, 2018, p. 202). Attending to these queries, while offering potentially biophilic relations with "such drives as union with nature and natural life" (Sokullu, 1979, p. 82), these plays also gesture toward an ecophobic relationship by representing uncontrollable forces as evil formations, hence creating a complicated set of relations.

One dramatic example of such a relationship is in *The Play of Hindering the Course of Water* from Çankırı, a small city in the north of Turkey. Mevlüt Özhan explains that this Anatolian village play takes place "on the day of Hidrellez (the 40th day after the spring equinox, May 6th, popularly considered as the beginning of summer)" (1999, p. 101). The play dramatizes the village life with children playing in a stream. However, this harmonious cycle is interrupted by an Arab<sup>3</sup> whose face is black with paint. The Arab prevents children from playing by sprinkling water onto them with a ladle. A white-bearded old man (the traditional Turkish figure *Akdede*) appears and sits on a rock. The Arab tries to prevent the water from running with stones and disregards the children's efforts to stop him. Meanwhile *Akdede* stands up and warns him against famine that will result from his actions. The Arab, then, says that he will only stop if he can marry a woman from the village. However, the last single woman has just gotten married and happens to pass into the stream with the groom right at that moment. Out of wrath, the Arab removes the stones, as a result of which running waters kill the bride and the groom (Özhan, 1999, p. 101). But in the end, they are resurrected, and their union becomes a symbol for the restoration of the stream purified from the evil Arab, which is then celebrated with halay (a traditional Turkish folk dance). The Arab's

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<sup>3</sup> As Metin And succinctly underscores, "Anatolian peasant dramas often include Arab, a black-faced individual, dressed in a black goat or sheepskin, who represents night or winter. His opponent, in emphatic contrast, is usually white-bearded and wears a white goat or sheepskin" (And 1975, 10).

close connection with the mysteries of nature-magic bonds a correlation here: The Arab provides an adversary for the Turkish culture as much as a distorted environment becomes an enemy of a harmonious culture, thereby forming “a dramatic contest representing two opposing principles” (And, 1999, p. 16), which are death and resurrection. To put it another way, any cultural intervention into the ecological balance implies a social collapse. Yet, the play also projects that resurrection is warranted only on control. Order is restored only after controlling both the Arab and the distorted environment. The intervention of a cultural figure (the Arab) into the course of a natural cycle co-locates anti-Arabism with a potentially ecophobic yearning for control over the land. Therefore, the play problematizes human engagements with the physical environments.

The pastoral tradition of the Western literature also implies the same problematic relationship.<sup>4</sup> Economy, during the Classical Period and the Renaissance in which the pastoral tradition was dominant, was based mainly on agricultural sustainability. Unlike Anatolian traditional village plays, though, pastoral works are not ritualistic performances, rather written works. Nevertheless, Paul Alpers, in his monumental work *What is Pastoral?* (1996), claims that “[a]part from the happy confusion of definitions, it is clear to no one, experts or novices, what works count as pastoral, or – perhaps a form of the same question – whether pastoral is a historically delimited or permanent literary type” (p. 8). The main reason is the abundance of the thematic representations of idyllic and pure nature against the social evils and wrongdoings of human beings in every genre. Accordingly, “[m]ost epics of the period [...] are studded with pastoral landscapes” (Loughrey, 1984, p. 12). Charles Martindale, for instance, indicates the use of pastoral elements in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, exemplifying “the shield of Achilles which includes a vignette of music at a grape harvest, Calypso’s island, the gardens of Alcinous, rustic scenes and characters in Ithaca [...] [along with] the enchanted landscape setting at the opening of Plato’s *Phaedrus* that has nothing to teach Socrates, lover of the city” (1997, p. 107). Nonetheless, the distinction of the pastoral tradition exercises itself in that

as opposed to epic and tragedy, with their ideas of heroic autonomy and isolation, it takes human life to be inherently a matter of common plights and common pleasures. Pastoral poetry represents these plights and these pleasures as shared and accepted, but it avoids naiveté and sentimentality because its usages retain an awareness of their conditions – the limitations that are seen to define, in the literal sense, any life, and their intensification in situations of separation and loss that can and must be dealt with, but are not to be denied or overcome. (Alpers, 1996, p. 93)

Similar to traditional folk performances, pastoral works also put the elemental and natural bodies and formations into the focal priority. The crucial role of the sheep in all pastoral works contribute to this argument. Nevertheless, the sheep in these works are at the service of the human abuse, thus revealing how these works are warranted on problematic relational networks between the human and the nonhuman. Julian Yates in “*Oves et Singulatim: A Multispecies Impression*” refers to the sheep as the “[c]ontested beings that live of the margins of these genres” (2016, p. 178). Yates further exemplifies the instrumental value of the nonhuman with the example of the pastoral

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<sup>4</sup> A similar argument was introduced by the author in her PhD Dissertation entitled “The Discord Between the Elements and Human Nature: Ecophobia and Renaissance English Drama” (2018).

sheep by means of Leonard Mascall's "A Praise of Sheepe" from his husbandry text entitled *The First Booke of Cattel* (1591):

These Cattel (Sheepe) among the rest,  
 Is counted for man one of the best.  
 No harmfull beast nor hurt at all,  
 His fleece of wooll doth cloath vs all:  
 Which keeps vs from the extreame colde:  
 His flesh doth feed both yonge and olde.  
 His tallow makes the candles white,  
 To burne and serue vs day and night.  
 His skinne doth pleasure diuers wayes,  
 To write, to weare at all assayes.  
 His guts, therof we make wheele strings,  
 They vse his bones to other things.  
 His hornes some shepeheardes will not loose,  
 Because therewith they patch their shoes.  
 His dung is chiefe I vnderstand,  
 To helpe and dung the plowmans land.  
 Therefore the sheep among the rest,  
 He is for man a worthy beast. (2016, p. 178)

Principally, pastoral derived from the Greek poet Theocritus's bucolic poetry and his pastoral poems which he wrote in the *Idylls*. The term bucolic, coined by Theocritus, itself comes from a rural background, *boukolos*, which means cowherd (Alpers, 1996, p. 147). Theocritus's *Idylls* is accepted as the first literary example of the pastoral tradition "in three forms [...] [that] have persisted down to the present time: the monologue, in which the despairing lover is pictured singing his song of complaint; the dialogue, in which two or more shepherds sing without having any fixed subjects; and the dialogue with a singing-match" (Shackford, 1904, p. 587). However, it was Virgil, rather than Theocritus, who more explicitly established the rules of the pastoral tradition in his *Eclogues*. As regards, Paul Alpers sets the distinction between these two poets underscoring that

[h]istorically it was the work of both poet, with Virgil coordinating and making more explicit what was implicit in Theocritus's bucolic representations. For example, the various senses in which a pastoral singer sings *for* someone are all present in the *Idylls*, but it is Virgil who made them thematically explicit and connected them with each other. His transformation of Theocritean bucolic is as much a matter of form as of theme and symbol: where Theocritus's pastorals are part of a larger collection of poems, from which they are not easily differentiated, the *Eclogues* are a coherent book. The older view of the relation between the two poets was that, in Schiller's terms, Theocritus played 'naïve' to Virgil's 'sentimental.'. (1996, p. 138)

What is common to both poets is how pastoral works underscore a well-being state in consequence of a harmonious unity with Nature through "lying in a green spot; seeing a far off (*procul*) sight which both bounds one's world and gives play to the imagination; and, finally, the details and pleasures of innocent feeding" (Alpers, 1996, p. 169). From this perspective, like traditional village



performances, the pastoral tradition implies an “instinctive harmony that the shepherd has achieved with the non-human world he inhabits” (Gifford, 1999, p. 8). This view that “the country as cooperation with nature, the city and industry as overriding and transforming it” (Williams, 1973, p. 352), however, imagines nature as a simple, passive and peaceful entity where humans can escape from the unsteadiness of city life. This escape also points to another thing: Longing for pristine nature that humans enjoyed before the Fall from the Garden of Eden. This longing indeed resulted from the rapid spread of cities and capitalist practices. Attending to Terry Gifford’s statement that the pastoral tradition “is essentially a discourse of retreat which may [...] either simply *escape* from the complexities of the city, the court, the present, ‘our manners’, or *explore* them” (1999, p. 46), it seems apt to present the pastoral tradition as an escape from the polluted nature towards the pure fictional portrayals of the uncorrupted physical environments.

Marked by the re-discovery of ancient classics and a consequent humanism, the Renaissance witnessed an enormous interest in the pastoral tradition at large in terms of raising complaints of the corruption of the city. Most of the influential poets of the time wrote sets of pastoral poetry, including the Italian poet Mantuan’s *Eclogues* in 1498 which “directly inspired the first clumsy attempt at formal pastoral in English, Alexanders Barclay’s five *Eclogues*” (Loughrey, 1984, p. 11) as well as Barnabe Googe’s eclogues which were printed in 1563 (Little, 2013, p. 49). In spite of the eminent Victorian critic William Hazlitt’s pessimistic attitude obvious in his statement that “[w]e have few good pastorals in the language. Our manners are not Arcadian; our climate is not an eternal spring; our age is not the age of gold” (qtd in Gifford, 1999, p. 45), there was a great deal of interest in the pastoral tradition in Renaissance England, too, especially after “the rediscovery of Virgil’s *Eclogues*, which were first printed in England by Wynkyn de Worde in 1512” (Little, 2013, p. 2). Therefore, the pastoral tradition in England initiated with the adoption of the Virgilian style which can be traced in such important works as Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* (1570), Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), and Christopher Marlowe’s poem “The passionate Shepheard to his love.”

One can further trace the pastoral tradition not only on page but also on stage with various examples of pastoral dramas. The Italian writer Torquato Tasso’s play entitled *Aminta* (1573), representing “the creation of a princely court, in which the shepherd is an idealized mask, a courtly disguise: a traditionally innocent figure through whom, paradoxically, intrigue can be elaborated” (Williams, 1973, p. 32), is among the first examples of European pastoral drama. Apart from Tasso, “George Peele’s court entertainment *The Araygnement of Paris* (subtitled “A Pastorall” when published in 1584)” is also another pastoral drama “[as] a succession of eclogue-like scenes, some of them deriving from *The Shepheardes Calender*, which had recently given English literature its first Virgilian eclogue book” (Alpers, 1996, p. 70). Apart from pastoral dramas, pastoral elements used in various plays also demand consideration as an important impediment to comprehend the Naturalcultural perception of the time. As an expert at sprinkling the pastoral contrast between the chaotic city and the idyllic country into his plays such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1597) and *As You Like it* (1599), William Shakespeare underlines how humans are enmeshed with material practices and planetary processes. Shakespeare also shows how archaic

environmental landscape gradually dissolves into the dominance of the forest imagery and the garden estates. This shift in the environmental portrayals for a pastoral landscape coincides with the spreading of the garden and forest culture at the time, which again emphasises the reciprocal influence of natural and cultural formations over the literature of the time.

Such thematic changes make inroads into an evaluation of the period as a whole. Forest and garden imageries in the early modern literature are significant in tracking how humans strived to tame nature according to their aesthetics, hence separating Nature and Culture and denying their reciprocal influence over one another. That is to say, the physical environment is fashioned in accordance with human discourses, which points to anthropocentric and ecophobic desire to control and tame a so-called wild Nature. In the early modern period, as John Stow in *A Survey of London Written in the Year 1598* illustrates, “[e]verywhere outside the houses of those living in the suburbs are joined to them, planted with trees, the spacious and beautiful gardens of the citizens” (2009, p. 16). This gardening practice venally depends on ecophobic practices though it seems to be celebrating how earth and human domain are intermingled. To put it somewhat differently, the existence of earth is reduced to human agency. Consequently, such thinking coordinates Nature with a passive entity. Similar to gardening practices of the time, Martyn Whittock describes early modern forests as “not necessarily areas of extensive woodland. Nor were they necessarily areas of poor agricultural land” (2009, p. 37) as the purpose for producing forests was to protect game and hunting animals (p. 38) for royalty. On similar grounds, N. D. G. James highlights in *A History of English Forestry* (1981) that “[i]n early times a forest was an area or district reserved to the king for hunting and the fact that trees may have been growing in some parts of it was largely incidental” (p. 1-2). Like Renaissance gardens, the early modern forest<sup>5</sup>, therefore, has a thwarted agency to serve the human need for pleasure. As a matter of fact, practices of gardening and forest, and the like, are isomorphic with an ecophobic desire for control enmeshed with an anthropocentric fear of losing the privileged agency as the Maker and the Interpreter of the world.

Furthermore, the burst of the pastoral tradition in the Renaissance coincided with a period of agricultural crisis especially as a result of the enclosure of the common lands for pasturing sheep. Raymond Williams aptly notes that “the clearance of woodlands, for timber, for fuel and for pasture, and the drive for more pasture, in the growth of the wool trade, led to major enclosures, the destruction of many arable villages, and the rapid development of new kinds of capitalist landlord” (1973, p. 53). Additionally, the Renaissance Europe was suffering from a polluted environment; therefore, people were seeking a literary refuge in the idyllic landscapes drawn in pastoral works because their material realm was polluted, and “all you could see was the hot glow of fire in the forge, a hollow brick table full of coals” (Fletcher, 1967, p. 41). In his book *Environmental Degradation in Jacobean Drama* (2013), Bruce Boehrer collects environmental problems of the time under three headings as ‘concentrations of pollutants,’ ‘improper land use,’ and ‘natural disasters’ by contending that “[f]or concentrations of pollutants, there is atmospheric coal dust, the runoff from tanneries, and so forth; for improper land use, there is deforestation,

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<sup>5</sup> One should make a differentiation between forest and woods here as forest is more of a cultural entity while woods occur without human intervention.

enclosure (both urban and rural), and fen drainage; for natural disasters, bubonic plague and syphilis spring quickly to mind. Each of these features [...] has its roots in human manipulation of the natural environment" (p. 2).

In the light of these discussions, both traditions – Anatolian village plays and the pastoral tradition – have double edges. Here the question should be what they do convey from generations to generations. What if, in lieu of a love and respect for Nature, these plays trigger tendencies to strengthen anthropocentric desire for taming the physical environment as the status quo? What if these works deploy the physical environment as a cruel entity trying to devour humanity, hence worsening the Naturalcultural perceptions? By segregating nature and culture, these works indeed ignite the historic grand struggle, hence making inroads into the cultural domination over the physical environments. Disavowing the material agency independent from humanity, these works are attuned to anthropocentric, ecophobia, and dominion. Granting the cogency of a post-human age, we should work hard to destabilize human being from their privileged chairs and degrade them into one of the factors in Naturalcultural formations. And these works apparently do not do that. They do glamorize Naturecultures for the benefit of human beings.

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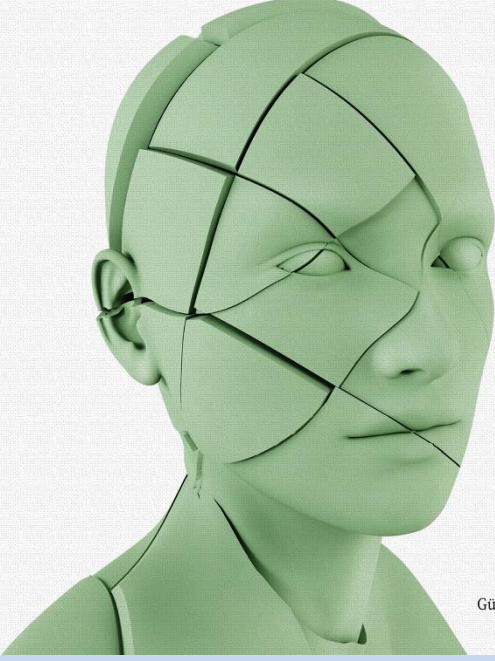
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# TÜRK BİLİMKURGU EDEBİYATI VE ARKETİPLER

DR. VELİ UĞUR



Günce Yayınları

Oktay Yivli

# Öykü Nasıl Okunur

modern öykü ve yöntem



Günce Yayınları

MAKSUT YİĞİTBAŞ

Edebiyatın Ebemkuşağı

Halit Ziya Hikâyeciliğinde

Renklerin Dili

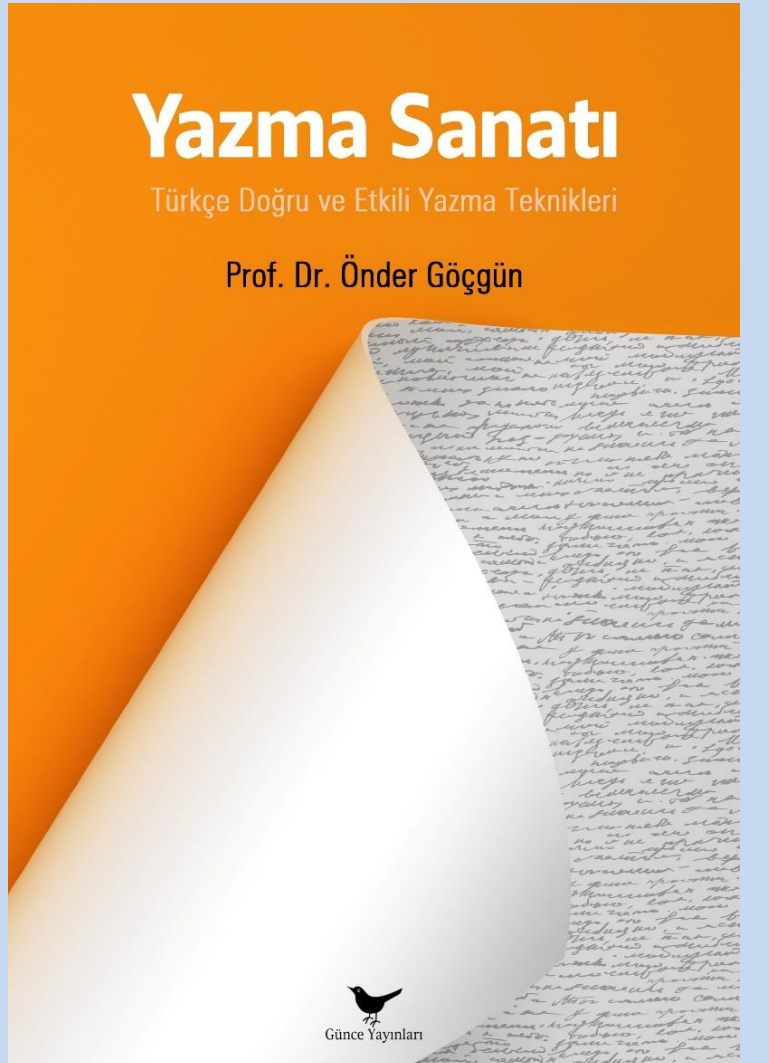


Günce Yayınları

# Yazma Sanatı

Türkçe Doğru ve Etkili Yazma Teknikleri

Prof. Dr. Önder Göçgün



Günce Yayınları