

# Neurosurgery in Turkish Poetry: Three Poets, Two Poems and Two Neurosurgeons

## *Türk Şiir Dünyası'nda Nöroşirürji: Üç Şair, İki Şiir ve İki Nöroşirürjiyen*

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### ABSTRACT

Poems are essential in art and vital organs in literature. Similarly, surgery (and neurosurgery) is also regarded to be an art in medicine. From Hippocrates to nowadays, there is a debate on whether medicine -especially surgery- is a kind of an art or a field of science or a combination of both. This close relation becomes clearer during the practice of surgery, especially in neurosurgery. Herein, the relation between Turkish poetry and Turkish neurosurgery is being presented by researching the interesting and exciting stories about three poets (Can Yücel, Hasan Hüseyin Korkmazgil, Nazım Hikmet), their poems; and two Turkish neurosurgeons (Gazi Yaşargil, Yücel Kanpolat).

**KEYWORDS:** Poetry, Turkish poems, Turkish neurosurgeons, Art

### ÖZ

Şiirler edebiyat dünyasının temel taşlarından biri olarak sanatın esas yapılarından birisidir. Benzer olarak cerrahi (ve nöroşirürji) de tıp sanatının dallarından birisidir. Hipokrat'tan günümüze kadar tıbbın (ve özellikle cerrahinin) bir sanat dalımı olduğu veya bilimin bir alanı mı olduğu veya her ikisinin kombinasyonu mu olduğu halen tartışmalıdır. Bu yakın ilişki cerrahi pratikte ve özellikle nöroşirürjide daha net olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Yazıda, Türk Şiir Dünyası ile Türk Nöroşirürjisi arasındaki ilişki, üç şair (Can Yücel, Hasan Hüseyin Korkmazgil, Nazım Hikmet), şiirleri ve iki Türk Nöroşirürjiyen'in (Gazi Yaşargil, Yücel Kanpolat) ilginç ve heyecan verici öyküleri araştırılarak sunulmaktadır.

**ANAHTAR SÖZCÜKLER:** Şiir dünyası, Türk şairler, Türk nöroşirürjiyenler, Sanat

From Hippocrates to nowadays, there is a debate concerning whether medicine -especially surgery- is a kind of an art or a field of science or a combination of both (1,4,6,8,13). This close relation becomes clearer during the practice of surgery, especially in neurosurgery (2,3,5,12,14,15).

Poetry is a unique field of art in literature. Emotions and observations lead the poet to collect words in such a pattern that the poem exceed the words' individual meanings, becoming more than sentences to read. That could be considered as a common point with neurosurgery where the surgeon unifies all his knowledge, skills and wisdom during the surgery process, having a philosophical journey in the deep nervous system.

Hereby, let us go on a short tour of Turkish poems and neurosurgery.

The cordial friendship between Can Yücel (CY), one of the best known poets in Turkey, and the world-renowned Turkish neurosurgeon Gazi Yaşargil (GY) is common knowledge in Turkey (Figure 1). Can Yücel dedicated one of his poem books "Rengahenk" (Figure 2) to Yaşargil with this verse (16):

"Beynin Piri Reisi\*

Gazi Yaşargil'e"

"To Gazi Yaşargil,

The Piri Reis\* of the brain"

The similarity of these two persons was underlined; while Piri Reis discovered and navigated all the coasts and prepared the map of the World, Yaşargil similarly discovered and prepared the map of human brain after long and onerous work on sulcal anatomy.

Hasan Hüseyin Korkmazgil (HHK), one of the foremost poets in Turkish literature, and Yücel Kanpolat (YK), one the best known Turkish neurosurgeons, had a genuine friendship started in 1980. HHK wrote a novel poem entitled "Sonuçsuz Bir Telefon Konuşması" or "An Inconclusive Phone Call" describing YK as follows (15):

"...

Yücel'i bilmez misin be bedri\*\*

doktor değil mübarek

gecikmiş tanrı

çay devirir bardak bardak

üstüne rakı\*\*\*

anlatırken sanırsın ki incesazdan hüseyini\*\*\*\*

ak gömleği geçirmesin sırtına

hipokrat andı

bir de bahar bahar gülmez mi sana

al başını çık dağlara

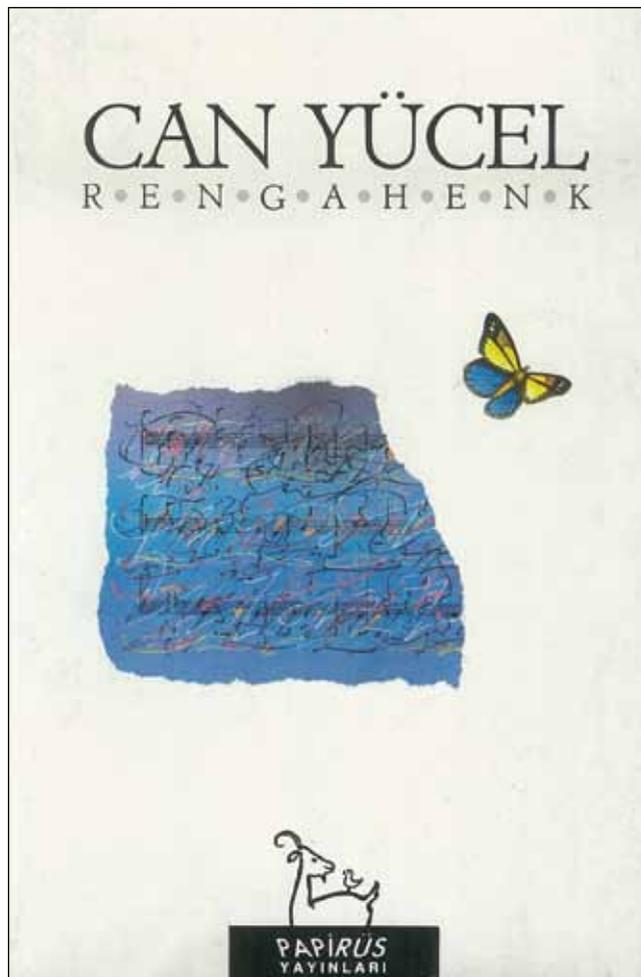
Yücel'i bilmez misin be bedri



**Figure 1:** Yasargil and Yücel's photograph when they were soldiers (11).

sâfi tümör celladı  
kızdırmasın gelsin diyor  
'bin kelleyi bir cıdaya dizerim  
kızarsa beynim'  
diyor  
..."

"Don't you know *Yücel, Bedri?*  
He seems to be beyond a doctor  
But a delayed God  
He drinks tea cup after cup  
And then raki\*\*\*  
As he talks, you hear incesazdan hüseyini\*\*\*\*  
But when he wears his white coat  
His words becomes a part of The Hippocratic Oath  
And he laughs, evoking the spring  
Hop and you go to mountains  
Don't you know *Yücel, Bedri?*  
The real tumor executioner



**Figure 2:** Book cover of 'Rengahenk' (16) that has been dedicated to Yaşargil by CY.

'Come; don't make me angry' he says,  
'I align thousands of heads on a lance'  
'If my brain gets angry'  
He says.  
...'

Another poem was written by Nazım Hikmet, one of the best known and popular Turkish poets. Hikmet wrote poems to his wife during his long imprisonment in Bursa due to so-called political offense, in the 1940s. In one of his poems, he mentioned a common sign of lumbar disc herniation, sciatalgia (7):

"Karıma mektup  
Bir tanem!  
Son mektubunda:  
"Başım sızlıyor  
yüreğim sersem!"  
diyorsun  
"Seni asarlarsa

seni kaybedersem;"  
diyorsun;  
"yaşayamam!"...  
Yaşarsın karıcığım  
Kara duman gibi dağılır hatıram rüzgarda;  
Yaşarsın, kalbimin kızıl saçlı bacısı  
En fazla bir yıl sürer  
yirminci asırlılarda  
ölüm acısı  
...  
Haydi bunları boş ver.  
Bunlar uzak bir ihtimal.  
Paran varsa eğer  
bana fanila bir don al,  
tuttu bacağımın siyatik ağrısı.  
Ve unutma ki  
daima iyi şeyler düşünmeli  
Bir mahpusun karısı."

"A letter to my wife  
My one and only,  
In your last letter you say;  
"My head is throbbing  
My heart is stunned"  
You say:  
"If they hang you  
If I lost you;"  
You say;  
"I'll die!"...  
You'll live my lovely wife,  
My memory will vanish in the wind like a black fume;  
You'll live red-haired lady of my heart..  
The grief lasts at most a year  
In the hearts of the people  
In the twentieth century  
...  
Don't bother..  
Those are long shots.  
If you've got money  
Buy me a flannel and an underwear  
It starts again, the sciatica of my leg.  
And don't forget  
A wife of a prisoner  
Must always thinks good thoughts"  
It is quite interesting that the great Turkish poet Nazım

Hikmet mentions his leg rather than his back. He defines the characteristics of sciatalgia correctly in his poem in a way that may reflect the natural researcher personality of a poet as could be seen in Nazım's art all through his life.

There are a few articles on the relation between neurosurgery and poetry. The neat relation of art and epilepsy surgery was described in a paper (11), where a patient who underwent epilepsy surgery had chosen poetry as a tool to explain his/her dilemma lyrically (9). Poetry is thoroughly integrated in Dr. Henry Power's life as much as neurosurgery. When Dr. Power's poems are evaluated, one can get hints of the days when microscope use in neurosurgery was being suggested (3). Dr. Oliver Wendell also described the morning visit of a neurosurgeon in an artistic manner (2).

In conclusion, it is worth asking what joins neurosurgeons with poets and/or other artists? What makes a neurosurgeon be addressed in the dedication of a poem book (GY) or being the main character of a poem (YK)? All three poets (NH, CY and HHK) and two neurosurgeons (GY, YK) have something in common: searching for the depths of the human soul. In fact there has been no recognized Turkish neurosurgeon poet until now. Neurosurgeons probably reflect their art in their practice

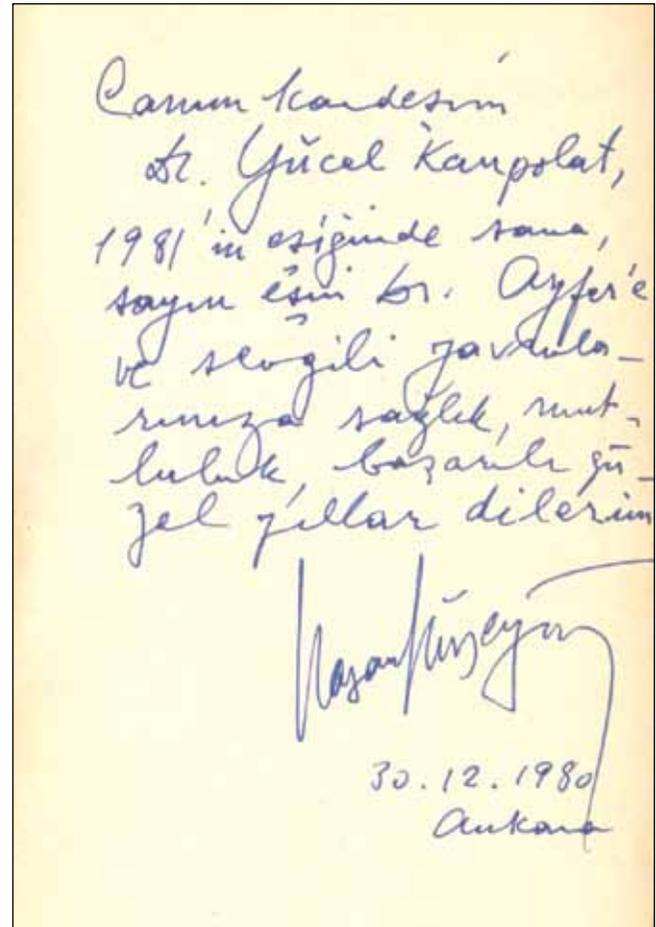
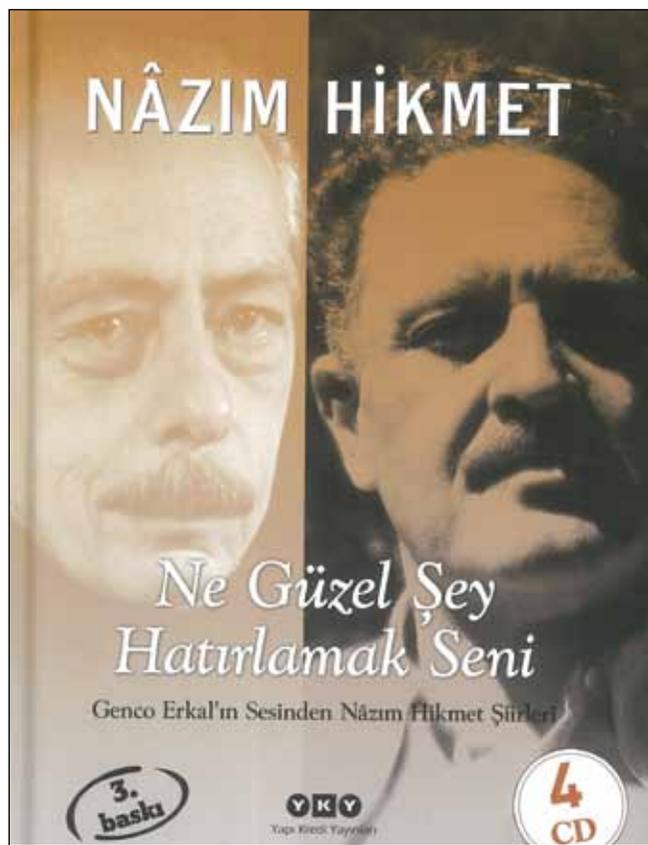


Figure 3: Original letter to Kanpolat on the cover of 'Aclara Tutunmak' (10) by HHK.



**Figure 4:** Book cover of 'Ne güzel şey hatırlamak seni' by Nazım Hikmet (7).

of neurosurgery. In an operating theatre, or in a prison-cell, independent of where they are, it is the search of the meaning of life and the awareness of humanity that bring conscious people together. Neurosurgery is a lifestyle comprising all the profound sensibilities rather than just being a simple practice.

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\*Piri Reis (PR) is an Ottoman admiral, geographer, and cartographer who lived in the XVth Century and navigated the Mediterranean, Africa and South America. His world map is considered to be the oldest known map showing the New World. It is also speculated that PR has also used the lost maps of Christophe Colomb in his maps.

\*\*Bedrettin Cömert (Bedri): A friend of HHK and YK who was killed by anarchic groups during iniquitous political cases in Turkey in 1978. HHK wrote this poem as a salutation to his best friend as if he was alive.

\*\*\*Rakı is one of the most-preferred traditional alcoholic drinks in Turkish culture.

\*\*\*\*İncesazdan hüseyni is a phrase defining sensibility. İncesaz; a musical group performing with traditional Turkish musical instruments. Hüseyni is a high-pitched musical tone, a Turkish traditional elegy musical mode.