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Flâneuserie in Trkan Yeşilyurt's 'Fahri': the circulation of the female body in the city

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Trkan Yeşilyurt's poetry collection *Fahri* through feminist literary theory, focusing on the concept of the flâneuse. Traditionally defined as a male observer of the city, the flâneur has been reconceptualized by feminist scholars to include the flâneuse, representing women's embodied experiences in urban space. In *Fahri*, the female subject is interpreted as a poetic flâneuse who reclaims visibility through bodily and mnemonic presence in the city. Using qualitative textual analysis, the study explores how space, memory, and the female body interact in the poems. The analysis draws on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Walter Benjamin's writings on the flâneur, and Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space. Rather than portraying the city as neutral backdrop, Yeşilyurt renders it a layered memory site marked by trauma, longing, and gendered social dynamics. The flâneuse emerges not only as an observer, but as an agent who transforms space through poetic language and challenges patriarchal boundaries. Through affective and spatial circulation, the poems construct a feminist poetics of resistance. In doing so, the article contributes to feminist urban poetics in contemporary Turkish literature by foregrounding the co-production of gendered mobility, spatial memory, and digital mediation.

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1. Introduction

Trkan Yeşilyurt's poetry collection *Fahri* can be regarded as a significant literary work that opens the experience of the city to poetic reflection through a female subject. This poetic construct not only offers an inner personal world but also critically engages with the possibilities and boundaries of being a woman in public space. Within this context, the figure of the flâneuse holds a central role in understanding the multilayered relationship that the female subject establishes with the city, her body, and societal norms.

The concept of the flâneur, historically shaped within a male-dominated public sphere, has been reinterpreted by feminist criticism to evolve into the flâneuse. This transformation demonstrates that it is not only the male observer who can make sense of the urban experience on aesthetic and political levels, but also the female subject. Medine Sivri and Hande Altar Lidar articulate this shift in the context of modernist literature as follows: 'The introspective wanderings of the flâneur and flâneuse act as mediators in accessing memory within the modern urban space, which is a site of conflict between tradition and innovation' (Sivri and Lidar, 2025).

Furthermore, the literary representation of female poets is a significant indicator of a society's cultural advancement. As Ayfer Yılmaz notes, 'The presence of female poets in a society is a marker of that society's level of progress and civilization' (Yılmaz, 2012). Accordingly, Yeşilyurt's female subject stands out not merely as an individual narrator, but also as a representative who blends social memory, spatial awareness, and gender politics through the language of poetry.

The figure of the flâneur, initially conceptualized in the writings of Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, refers to a male observer who records cultural memory through his traversal of public spaces. In

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Benjamin's The Arcades Project, the flâneur is depicted as a man who simultaneously belongs to and remains apart from the crowd (Nesci, 2001). However, feminist theorists have criticized this figure for its gendered exclusivity and its role in reproducing women's invisibility in the public sphere (Makoni, 2011).

Feminist thinkers such as Janet Wolff, Griselda Pollock, and Lauren Elkin argue that the flâneur's presumed universality centers male experience, and in response, they have introduced the concept of the flâneuse to define the city-walking woman. The flâneuse is not only a figure of observation but also embodies a site of resistance that transforms her bodily, social, and political experience into urban critique (Bustos Garduño, 2023).

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze Fahri by examining the female subject's urban experience, her relationship with gender norms, and her spatial perception, thereby elucidating how the poetic structure is shaped through the concept of flâneuserie.

1.1. Türkan Yeşilyurt: life, literary identity, and works

Türkân Yeşilyurt was born in Samsun, Turkey. She completed her primary education at Kâzım Orbay Primary School in Samsun and attended Mithatpaşa Girls' High School. In 1988, she graduated from the Department of Dairy Technology at the Faculty of Agriculture, Ankara University, where she had begun her studies in 1984. In 1993, she completed a second undergraduate degree in Economics at Anadolu University (Open Education Faculty). She worked in Ankara for a period, first as an agricultural engineer and later as a certified public accountant and financial advisor (Yalçın, 2010, p. 1127). In 2000, together with Abdülkadir Budak, she co-founded Şiir Odası, a poetry journal that published twelve issues in total.

In 2001, Yeşilyurt began her graduate studies in the Department of Turkish Literature at Bilkent University, Institute of Social Sciences, and completed her MA in 2005 with a thesis titled Kadın Şairde Kadın: Şükûfe Nihal'in Şiirleri (The Woman in the Woman Poet: The Poetry of Şükûfe Nihal). In the same year, she started her PhD in the Department of New Turkish Literature at Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, and received her doctorate in 2010 with the dissertation Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca'nın Şiirlerindeki Temalar (Themes in Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca's Poetry). Her doctoral dissertation was later published as a book in 2013 under the title Dağlarca: "Öyle Aydınlık, Öyle Uzun, Öyle Yepyeni" (Dağlarca: "So Bright, So Long, So Brand-New"). She worked as a lecturer in the Department of Turkish Language at Ankara University (2007–2008) and at Middle East Technical University (2008–2010). In 2011, she was appointed as an assistant professor in the Department of New Turkish Literature, Faculty of Letters, Tunceli University. In 2015, she joined the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Sinop University. She focuses on both academic and poetic studies and has taught courses such as New Turkish Literature, Literature and Cinema, Comparative Literature, World Literature Texts, The Art of the Novel, and Şairce. In addition to serving as head of the New Turkish Literature Division, Yeşilyurt is a member of the Turkish Writers' Union, the Association of Men of Letters, and the Folklore Research Institution, and she continues her academic and literary work at Sinop University (TEİS, 2020).

Yeşilyurt's poetic style is characterized by introspection, spatial awareness, and political resonance. She explores themes such as urban alienation, historical trauma, and digital estrangement, offering an emotionally and intellectually layered literary landscape. Her work *Fahri* centers around a female poetic subject, conceptualized as a flâneuse, who navigates the modern city with a critical and reflective gaze.

According to Ayfer Yılmaz (2012), the presence of female poets is indicative of a society's cultural sophistication. In this regard, Yeşilyurt's poetic identity contributes significantly to contemporary Turkish literature, enriching feminist discourse through a corporeal, affective, and mnemonic engagement with urban space. Her oeuvre situates her among key voices redefining gender and spatial politics in 21st-century Turkish poetry.

Her poetic oeuvre includes several collections, but *Fahri* (2025) stands out for its layered portrayal of the female subject as a flâneuse—a female wanderer who reclaims public space through poetic and corporeal presence. In her critical monograph *Şiirde Flanörlük [Flânerie in Poetry]*, (Yeşilyurt, 2024), Yeşilyurt explores the aesthetics and politics of urban wandering, foregrounding the transformation of the traditionally masculine figure of the flâneur into the feminist flâneuse. This theoretical groundwork underpins her creative production in *Fahri*.

Yeşilyurt's poetry is characterized by a dialogical style that engages with past traumas and collective memory. Her literary identity contributes to feminist and urban discourses by offering a poetic embodiment of female memory and resistance. Her engagement with space is not merely descriptive but deeply phenomenological and political, echoing the works of Bachelard, Benjamin, and Butler.

Yeşilyurt's work has been recognized for its interweaving of sensory detail, historical consciousness, and feminist critique. The female subject in her poems traverses both physical and emotional terrains, making Yeşilyurt a key figure in contemporary explorations of gendered urban poetics in Turkish literature.

1.2. Theoretical framework: *Flâneur, flâneuse, and the circulation of women in the city*

The figure of the flâneur first emerged in the writings of Charles Baudelaire as the aesthetic observer of modern urban life. In Baudelaire's depiction of 19th-century Paris, the flâneur is a male figure who meanders through crowds with both detachment and immersion in the city. Walter Benjamin later described the flâneur as both a witness and a product of modernity, defining him as 'both part of the crowd and apart from it' (Benjamin, 2016, p. 44).

However, this figure entails a significant gendered gap. In a historical period when women were largely excluded from public space, the wandering woman was either rendered invisible or depicted as deviant. Janet Wolff highlights this issue by arguing that it is 'almost impossible to imagine a woman as a detached observer in public space' (Wolff, 1985, p. 37). Elizabeth Wilson provides a more nuanced approach, suggesting that although the flâneuse cannot move through the city as freely as the flâneur, her presence can still transform the meaning of space (Wilson, 1991, p. 75).

In this context, feminist theorists have introduced the flâneuse to recognize women's experiences and presence in urban life. The flâneuse figure does not simply stroll through streets; she engages in a transformative process that includes questioning, noticing, witnessing, and assuming responsibility (Şenel, 2019, p. 246). Hence, she is not a passive observer but a subject who reconstructs meaning through her interaction with the city.

Esen Kara emphasizes this through her analysis of Suat Derviş's novel *Fosforlu Cevriye*, where she identifies *Cevriye* as 'a woman who walks, observes, and experiences the city, thus becoming a literary example of the flâneuse' (Kara, 2023). This interpretation provides a vital contribution to understanding the representation of women in Turkish literature in the context of flâneuserie.

Within contemporary Turkish women's poetry, urban experience is frequently articulated through embodied vulnerability, affective memory, and gendered negotiations of visibility—contexts that can be observed, for instance, in the diverse poetic strategies of voices such as Didem Madak, Lale Müldür, and Bejan Matur. Yeşilyurt's *Fahri* participates in this broader constellation while distinguishing itself through a sustained engagement with flâneuserie as an explicitly spatial and phenomenological practice.

Lauren Elkin redefines the flâneuse as 'a woman who dares to see and be seen in public space' (Elkin, 2017, p. 22). This framing presents flâneuserie as not only a spatial but also a visual and political intervention. For women, walking in the city becomes a practice of resistance.

Judith Butler (2020) supports this view by grounding resistance in the body, asserting that the body is not merely biological but also a product of cultural and social construction. Therefore, the female body's visibility in public space becomes a political act opposing patriarchal surveillance. Michel de Certeau's notion that 'walking is a form of writing' (2009) reinforces the idea that urban movement itself produces meaning.

In Butlerian terms, gender is not a stable essence but an effect of reiterated acts that acquire the appearance of naturalness over time. In lyric discourse, such acts can be traced in patterns of address, naming, repetition, and the staging of vulnerability in public space. Accordingly, the flâneuse in *Fahri* is legible not only as a figure who moves through the city, but as a speaking subject who performs and contests gendered norms through poetic language—turning walking, looking, and being looked at into a situated, resistant practice (Butler, 2004; 2020).

As Yeşilyurt (2024, p. 14) notes, 'Flâneuserie does not merely depict a woman walking through the city; it also brings her layered relationship with space, memory, and her own body into poetry'. In *Fahri*, the poetic subject thus emerges as a flâneuse—navigating not only the physical environment but also

layers of time, memory, and identity. The female body's interaction with the modern city becomes both an aesthetic expression and a political engagement.

Research questions. This article asks: (1) How does Fahri reconfigure the flâneur into a poetic flâneuse, and what forms of embodied visibility and agency does this figure claim in the city? (2) How do memory, trauma, and digital mediation shape the circulation of the female body across urban spaces in the poems?

Methodological note. The study employs qualitative close reading of the full collection Fahri, combining feminist spatial theory with interpretive textual analysis. The analysis foregrounds recurrent motifs (walking, public address, surveillance, sensory traces, and algorithmic/digital unease), and reads representative passages as nodes where body, space, and memory intersect. While Yeşilyurt's own monograph on flânerie in poetry (2024) offers a broader theoretical mapping, the present article narrows the focus to Fahri as a single-author corpus, tracing how flâneuserie is articulated through poetic voice, bodily experience, and mediated urban modernity.

1.3. Between the female body, memory, and digital alienation: tracing the flâneuse in fahri

In Türkan Yeşilyurt's poetry collection Fahri, the female subject engages in a type of urban wandering that unfolds not only across physical but also temporal and emotional layers. This traversal is not a random or aimless act, as in the traditional notion of the flâneur, but rather a poetic gesture in which memory is invoked, the body remembers, and emotions are made visible. As Elkin (2017) emphasizes, 'the flâneuse is not only someone who walks but someone who feels—and transforms that sensibility into poetic narrative' (p. 23).

Spaces such as Ankara, Samsun, Sinop, Kalecik, and Eryaman in Yeşilyurt's poems are not merely geographic coordinates; they function as memory knots through which the subject reinterprets her past, relationships, and emotional ruptures. For instance, the verse 'Ulus Heykel'den Hattı Anıtı'na yürüdüm buruk' (I walked from Ulus Statue to the Hattı Monument, feeling bitter) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 11) interweaves historical strata of place with personal melancholy, turning the walk into a mnemonic practice. Benjamin's concept of the flâneur who 'constructs a montage between past and present' (Benjamin, 2016, p. 68) resonates here as the female body creates a poetic montage.

The line 'Biz geçerken köprü yıkıldı' (The bridge collapsed as we crossed it) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 10) signifies a walk that not only traverses space but also time and severed relationships, underscoring the bodily dimension of memory.

Michel de Certeau's (2009) claim that 'walking is a form of writing' aligns directly with Yeşilyurt's poetic structure. As the female subject walks, she redraws the city's map—not as a geographical document but as a textual topography infused with feelings, traumas, and desires. The body's movement thus functions as an extension of memory (Sivri and Lidar, 2025).

Verses like 'Keçiören otobüs durağında dönüşümü beklemiştin sağanak altında' (You waited for transformation at the Keçiören bus stop, in the pouring rain) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 23) and 'Kadınlar dostluğu imbikten geçiremez mi?' (Can't women distill friendship through the alembic?) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 43) highlight that walking in public space is also a political act. They poetically expose the gendered nature of urban space and the fragility of female existence within it. These scenes echo Butler's (2020, p. 41) notion of public space as 'the stage where normative body politics are enacted'.

Moreover, the flâneuse figure in Fahri operates not only in physical spaces but also in digital and emotional realms. Lines such as 'Yapay zekâ el koymamıştı henüz dünyaya Hocam' (Artificial intelligence hadn't yet seized the world, Professor) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 11), 'Uyuyan dijital sürüyüz Hocam' (We are a sleeping digital herd, Professor) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 23), and 'Otobüste gençliğimizle karşılaştım birdenbire,/koltukta sarmaş dolaş çifti görünce' (I suddenly met my youth on the bus,/when I saw a couple embracing in the seat) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 20) illustrate the urban woman's alienation in the digital age and her emotional entanglement with nostalgic imagery. The line 'Samsun'dan her dönüşümüzde 'hoş geldin'/derdin, yuvamıza hoş geldin' (Every time we returned from Samsun, you'd say, 'Welcome home') (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 20) emphasizes the affective function of memory in shaping the notion of home. This multidimensional wandering maps the complex relationships the modern female subject builds not only with the city but also

with time, technology, and emotional landscapes. The verse ‘Çünkü kaybetmek benim işim’ (Because losing is what I do) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 6) transforms melancholy into a poetic mode of existence.

These moments of digital mediation can also be read through technofeminist accounts that refuse a simple opposition between body and technology. Haraway’s cyborg figure, for example, foregrounds hybrid subjectivities that emerge within networks of power, discourse, and material interfaces, while Wajcman emphasizes how technologies are socially shaped and gendered rather than neutral tools. Read through this lens, the poems’ algorithmic unease and references to AI intensify—rather than eclipse—the embodied stakes of urban circulation, exposing how gendered vulnerability is amplified and re-coded within contemporary techno-urban regimes (Haraway, 1991; Wajcman, 2004).

1.4. The body of the flâneuse: memory, reminiscence, and sensory traces

In Türcan Yeşilyurt’s *Fahri*, the female subject is not merely a walker through city streets; she embarks on a multilayered journey through time, memory, and space via the body. This poetic subject evolves from the tradition of the flâneur but goes beyond it, emerging as a flâneuse who ‘feels, remembers, and establishes tactile relationships with space’ (Elkin, 2017, p. 191). Her body acts as an archive, storing memories and reconstructing the past through contact with the environment.

1.4.1. The memory of the body and reminiscence

Elizabeth Grosz’s conceptualization of the body directly informs the poetic presence of the female subject in *Fahri*: ‘The body is not only located in space; it experiences and attributes meaning to that space’ (Grosz, 1994, p. 33). Yeşilyurt’s verses—such as ‘Çiy terk edilenin gözyaşdır’ (Dew is the tear of the abandoned) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 7) and ‘Sol gözümden kanlı mürekkep aktı’ (Bloody ink flowed from my left eye) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 14)—demonstrate that the body is not only sensory but also a source of poetic meaning.

Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory is especially relevant here. Postmemory describes how trauma is transmitted across generations through images, stories, and bodily experience (Hirsch, 2012, p. 5). The line ‘Dedem annemi öldürdü Hocam’ (My grandfather killed my mother, Professor) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 43) turns the female body into a poetic medium for voicing silenced or repressed historical trauma.

1.4.2. Senses, space, and memory

Spatial representations in the poems are constructed through sensory perception—sight, sound, smell, and touch. Lines such as ‘Flüt, obua, klarnet, fagot’ (Flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 8), ‘Otobüste gençliğimizle karşılaştım’ (I met my youth on the bus) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 20), ‘Otobüs koltuğuna maça beyi gibi kurulan. Ben/gil değilim’ (Seated like the jack of clubs on the bus. Not one of my kind.) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 40), and ‘Kuşların cıvıltısının sustuğu ormana benzer, öğrencilerin sesinin duyulmadığı okul’ (A forest where birds no longer sing/like a school with silent students) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 41) align with Bachelard’s idea that ‘a space can only be remembered when it echoes within a body’ (Bachelard, 2020, p. 72). Through sensory interaction, the body becomes an echo chamber between past and present. The line ‘Simitçi, hurdacı, ispiyoncu... Burası meşelik/değil maşalık mı?’ (The simit seller, the scrap dealer, the snitch... Is this a grove or a trap) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 37) evokes the threatening and contested nature of public space for women, complicating the romanticization of the flâneuse with a more politically charged tone.

Reminiscence here becomes a discovery rather than a construction (Benjamin, 2016, p. 112). The flâneuse carries out this discovery through the physical act of walking. The verse ‘Sinop esniyor uyuşuk uyuşuk, rüyam yırtılıyor/fa’ (Sinop yawns sluggishly, my dream tears along the F clef) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 15) captures both the atmospheric density of place and the temporal dislocation of the body.

1.4.3. The politics of the body: vulnerability and resistance

In Yeşilyurt’s poetic world, the female body is not only a site of memory but also of injury and resistance. Verses such as ‘Elimin ayarını kaybettim’ (I’ve lost control of my hand) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 40) and ‘Gözlerim acıyor Vela’ (My eyes are in pain, Vela) (Yeşilyurt, 2025, p. 59) convey themes like love, loss, and digital

loneliness through embodied fragility. Judith Butler's idea that 'the body is both shaped by and capable of resisting social norms' (Butler, 2004, p. 202) is given poetic form in Fahri.

Yeşilyurt's female subject goes beyond merely observing space; she listens, touches, remembers, and transforms it. The body serves as both the site and the agent of this transformation. Poetry becomes not just a medium of expression but a vehicle for articulating memory and sensation through the body.

2. Conclusion

This study has analyzed Türkan Yeşilyurt's Fahri through the lens of the flâneuse figure, focusing on the circulation of the female body in the urban landscape within the framework of feminist literary and spatial theories. The analysis reveals that the poetic subject is not only a physical wanderer in public space but also a temporal, emotional, and mnemonic traveler who reclaims urban space through a feminist poetics.

Through the lens of flâneuserie, the female subject is shown to reconstitute memory, establish affective connections with the environment, and develop resistance against gender norms. The body is no longer a passive object but a poetic and political agent of visibility and transformation.

The city in Fahri thus becomes not only a space to be walked but a multilayered domain where emotions, recollections, and social tensions are inscribed upon and through the body. By focusing on the poetic representation of this female presence, the study contributes to contemporary Turkish poetry by foregrounding an aesthetic form of resistance that is rooted in gendered spatial experience.

Future research may extend this approach through comparative readings of other contemporary Turkish women poets and urban texts, as well as through a closer examination of how digital infrastructures (platforms, surveillance, and algorithmic governance) reshape gendered mobility and poetic memory in late-modern cityscapes.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Data deposition

No datasets were generated or deposited during the preparation of this article.

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Data availability statement

No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

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