


Standing in the Forest of Being Alive: Art as a Means of Defiance and Survival in Katie Farris's Poetry

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الوقوف في غابة البقاء على قيد الحياة: الفن كوسيلة للتحدي والبقاء

في شعر كاتي فريس

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قسم اللغة الانجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة الجوف، المملكة العربية السعودية

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes Katie Farris's poetry book, *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* (2023), as a major study of survival, resilience, and the shifting power of language in the wake of personal and collective disasters. Farris's work, produced throughout her fight against breast cancer and the COVID-19 pandemic, goes beyond the bounds of traditional confessionalist verse to elevate her public and private pain into a universal story of grief, love, and defiance. By employing broken syntax, rich imagery, and intertextual allusion to literary lineages, the collection presents a poetics of resilience, pushing readers toward complexity in both life and death. Farris considers love and language potent weapons against despair, emphasizing their necessity in turbulent times. This paper analyzes how her depiction of illness disrupts dominant narratives, therefore emphasizing the resilience of the body and writing as a weapon of empowerment. Furthermore, it highlights Farris's innovative poetic devices that further contribute to the emotional depth and complexity. The work becomes understandable from then on as the piece balances its struggles with death, helplessness, and hopelessness, giving readers a notion of how to joyfully and courageously deal with middle-ware life as it proves that *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* works as a personal tale and a larger commentary on vulnerability and perseverance.

Keywords: Katie Farris, Resilience, Survival, Love, Illness American poetry.

الملخص:

تحلل هذه الورقة ديوان الشاعرة كاتي فريس Katie Farris "الوقوف في غابة البقاء على قيد الحياة" (2023) بوصفه دراسة عميقة في مفاهيم النجاة، والمرونة، وتحولات قوة اللغة في أعقاب الكوارث الشخصية والجماعية. كُتبت هذا العمل في ظل صراع كاتي فريس Katie Farris مع سرطان الثدي وفي ذروة جائحة كوفيد-19، متجاوزاً حدود الشعر الاعترافي التقليدي، ليحوّل الألم الخاص والعام إلى قصة إنسانية عالمية عن الفقد، والحب، والتحدي. من خلال استخدامها للبنية النحوية المتكسرة، والصور الشعرية الغنية، والإشارات التناسية إلى تراث الأدب، تقدم المجموعة ما يمكن اعتباره شعراً للمقاومة، دافعة القراء إلى مواجهة تعقيدات الحياة والموت على حد سواء. ترى كاتي فريس أن الحب واللغة أدوات فعالة في مواجهة اليأس، وتؤكد على ضرورتهما في الظروف المؤلمة. تحلل هذه الورقة كيفية تمكين الشاعرة كاتي فريس للسرديات لصالح التعايش مع المرض واليأس من الحياة، مما يبرز مرونة الجسد وقابليته للتعايش، مستخدمة الكتابة كأداة تمكين وسلاح دفاعي. كما تسلط الورقة الضوء على تقنيات كاتي فريس الشعرية المبتكرة التي تسهم في تعميق البعد العاطفي وتعقيده. وعليه يعتبر هذا العمل الشعري ما هو إلا موازنة دقيقة بين الصراع مع الموت والعجز والانتكاس والشجاعة والتفائل والفرح. يثبت هذا أن "الوقوف في غابة البقاء على قيد الحياة" ليس مجرد سرد ذاتي، بل تحدي كبير للانتكاس وأداة للتخطي والتجاوز.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كاتي فريس، المرونة، البقاء، الحب، المرض الشعري الأمريكي.

1. Introduction: Memoir as Defiance and Witness

Katie Farris is known worldwide as a poet, author, translator, and editor. Born on 10th August 1983, her strong and unique voice in contemporary literature makes her a celebrated figure. Farris's memoir-in-poem form, *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* [SFBA] (2023), has received accolades. As an American confessional poet, Farris's collection is more than a poetic memoir. It shines as an act of defiance against deeply personal and global strife. The collection created during her struggle with breast cancer in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and political turmoil serves as a powerful reflection on survival, grief, and the healing quality of words. Farris's work, which was nominated for the T.S. Eliot Prize and named one of the Publishers *Weekly Top Ten Poetry Books* of 2023, marks a shift toward using poetry as a source of testament and transformative rage. Her collection exemplifies what Claudia Rankie calls "a poetry of witness," where witnessing suffering through language that is poetic is an act of defiance to silence (Rankie 2020, p. 530).

The title of the collection is *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive*, which is paradoxical. The title evokes the paradox of the speaker embracing life while simultaneously grappling with the concept of death. This duality of fullness and emptiness is constant in the collection, placing Farris both as a participant and observer of her survival. The collection not only invites the reader to witness, but also to immerse themselves in the same 'forest' of uncertainty, love, pain, and revelation. In Farris' case, love poetry becomes radical not because it is naive, but as a necessity in times of catastrophe. Farris's poetry contends that the act of writing, especially writing about love, transforms not just into therapy but revolution.

Additionally, *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* reveals a defiance against succumbing to despair. Instead, Farris positions poetry as a boundary of recovery. Through her metaphors that merge the vicious and the beautiful, she illustrates the fragility of life without softening the impact of suffering. Her choice of words and grammar enables

deceptively simple constructions that hint at a labyrinth of emotion. This is how Farris grieves while still expressing grace, rarely achieved with such elegance. From this perspective, Farris's poetry is in step with the contemporary turn of the poetic narrative as incarnate testimony. Farris rewrites not just her experiences but the entire cultural narrative of illness. Instead of rendering sickness as surrender, she frames it as a profound realization of love and, ultimately survival. Her collection transforms into a guidebook not for escaping the forest but for learning to fully dwell within it.

Farris' voice emerges from intertwining poetic and philosophical traditions as a writer, translator, and educator. The collection reflects a Heideggerian conception of mortality in which awareness of death is what affords life its richness (Torrance, 1964). Farris does not shrink away from death's finality; she embraces it as a fuller, more truthful encounter with being. Her voice radiates the clarity and wonder present in the work of Mary Oliver, who famously asked her readers to "Pay attention, be astonished, and tell about it." ("The Summer Day", 2017, line 12). For Farris, this astonishment lies not in passive observation but in active meaning-making. This early understanding reveals that her poetry goes beyond personal contemplation and makes a broader statement about art as a means of survival and resistance.

This paper applies an analytical close reading of Farris's poetry, blending textual analysis with thematic analysis. From the linguistic, thematic, and stylistic perspectives of selected poems, the study seeks to understand how Farris grapples with themes of illness, survival, and resilience. This approach looks at how poetry is created as a way to heal and express oneself, showing different aspects of each poem and how they connect to broader ideas.

Fueled by contemporary poetry, this paper aims to capture attempts to extract beauty from the unknown's brutal nature and the looming fear of death. This paper simultaneously aims to bring a glimmer of hope from the depths of despair. The importance of the paper is also rooted in the bound

quality of the poems written during health conditions, which had the potential to greatly influence the sorrowing era of poetry. Additionally, this paper addresses gaps in feminist poetics, providing an analysis of Katie Farris' work to showcase how contemporary poets craft deeply

2. Embodied Illness and Writing the Cancer Experience

In *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive*, the author undertakes a profound consideration of cancer's physical and emotional impacts. Katie Farris does not passively accept her medical prognosis; rather, she actively resists, reflects, and transforms herself in response to the diagnosis. She demonstrates how illness narratives can be reframed to empower an individual recounting an experience of suffering embodying profound duality—a human body excels both in fragility and resilience—shattering the matrix of helplessness. Farris rewrites the script of silence surrounding her illness into one suffused with knowledge, creativity, and artistry. As Frank asserts, illness narratives serve as “acts of reconstitution” where patients work with what has been done to them so that they can reshape their experience into a new story with an identity that gives back self-agency (Frank 2021, p. 576).

Heeding the powerful perspective of the transformative approach, Farris works through her diagnosis as something that requires high resolve rather than hopelessness, shifting her approach to the poetry she writes. In her collection, *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* (2023), the poem “Why Write Love Poetry in a Burning World” [WWLPBW] serves as a captivating entrance to the poet's examination of beauty within turmoil, addressing personal and environmental catastrophes, both in a single phrase. The phrase “to train myself to find in the midst of hell / what isn't hell” (“WWLPBW”, lines 1,2) shows a resolve to try and find hope even amidst a crisis. “Climate chaos as hell” (“WWLPBW”, line 3), paired with the trauma of cancer, depicts a blend of

personal, yet universally relatable, complex emotions and themes. By studying the structure and content of the verses that poetically echo the indefatigable spirit of survival, the study illustrates the impact literature can have in times of violence and healing.

public and private suffering. This interplay is what poetic finesse looks like; it fuses Farris's inner struggles with the outside world's pressing issues. The intertwining of bodily illness and environmental collapse in “Why Write Love Poetry in a Burning World” reveals how personal disintegration mirrors global disintegration. Through the metaphor of a burning world, she crafts both an allegorical and lived experience, urging readers to confront death on multiple levels.

In blending medical documentation with spiritual reflection, Farris presents an unusual viewpoint that unites clinical and lyrical elements. Her poetry melds the sterile settings of hospitals with the natural world, suggesting that even amid suffering, the body retains its capacity for wonder. For instance, again in “Why Write Love Poetry in a Burning World,” she writes, “This scene has a tune, / a language I can read, a door/ I cannot close. I stand/ within its wedge, / a shield.” (“WWLPBW”, lines 11-14). This fusion of clinical and poetic elements encapsulates a profound survival instinct, suggesting that the beneficial effects of poetry can coexist with medical intervention.

Katie Farris interrelates her cancer experience with poetry by equating medical procedures to theatrical acts. She treats surgical operations as theatrical performances in which her body is the stage and the medical staff are the actors, capturing the performative and surrealistic elements of dealing with sickness. This form of art enables Farris to address frailty and death while contemplating her medical experience through a lyrical journey of life, struggle, and endurance. In “On the Morning of the Port Surgery,” [OMPS] Katie Farris notes the intersection of dramatic imagination and surgical practice. The “operating theater”

("OMPS", line 5) is both real and metaphorical, where Farris is 'cast' into the 'defining role' ("OMPS", line 7). of a cancer patient. With the frame of the surgery as the "opening act" ("OMPS", line 6), she expresses someone who is powerless yet became transformed. The imagery of a heart that is fragile and wounded, yet continues to beat in the surreal world, vividly illustrates the tension between vulnerability and the will to live.

Katie Farris sustained cancer in her body and life; she explains this framing as a metaphor for cancer that embodies an act of writing. In this way, cancer emerges as an uninvited ghostwriter, scripting her identity and bestowing upon her a new narrative—one of marked fragility and deep-seated fortitude. One's diagnosis and treatment phase resembles the act of writing a text: invasive, iterative, and fundamentally transformative. Farris's striking metaphors, which fuse medicine and poetry, capture the way cancer brands itself onto her body and consciousness, compelling her to append and reappraise her identity in perpetuity, rerouted through survival.

In "Woman with Amputated Breast Awaits PET Scan Results", Katie Farris explores illness as a fracture of waiting and enduring simultaneously. Waiting becomes abundant, not only in an aspect of time but also as an experience rich with expectation. By placing "waiting" ("WWABAPSR", line 13) next to "to live" (line 12) she depicts the struggle of enduring existence while hoping for something better off. The relationship between spell and waiting unfolds through various meanings. Spelling involves pauses and the formation of words, while the phonetic resemblance between "wait" and "weight" combines the anticipation of anticipation with a heavy burden. Moreover, the use of 'waiting' as a gerund, which evokes an active, ongoing state, stands in sharp contrast to 'living' as an infinitive. Such an arrangement implies that waiting is part of life, but awaiting shows that one must "live" for a goal. The complexity of coping with illness is captured in language's layering, such as when

the desire to survive exists alongside the reality of an ever-changing clock (David 2024).

Justification of illness is best shown in these lines in which Katie Farris vividly personifies cancer as a form of writing upon the body. In "After the Mastectomy [AM]", "the six-inch scar" ("AM", line 8) transforms into an unforgettable symbol. One that is utterly intrusive, like a text that edits her physical and personal identity. The scar is transformative and invasive, just like the words that can be cut and fragmented at any given moment. Upon presenting herself with her "tongue out" ("AM", line 5) and "shirt unbuttoned" ("AM", line 6), Farris does not disguise the unbearable show of vulnerability that cancer imposes. Her candidness immortalizes the body's etched narrative. What ultimately transforms the scar into a depiction of what is lost and a symbol of triumph and endurance while militarily carving a text of struggle?

Farris views her cancer care as fundamentally relational, despite the common perception of cancer as an isolated occurrence. In "In the Event of My Death," she narrates in solidarity with her cat that during the first round of chemotherapy, "her whiskers are shed upon/ the hardwood floor" ("IEMD", lines 7-8). Her poems demonstrate that the treatment involves more than just administering the IV to the patient. All partners, such as the cat and the environment, are also impacted by the chemotherapy and surgery, and vice versa. In a remarkable poem that she wrote, a pathologist's report is paired with Farris's voice in her poem "Have I said it slant enough": "Dear Doctor—you've done my work for me in your first first line/with your tidy slanting rhyme of specimen and formalin" ("IEMD", lines 1-3). Throughout the text, diverse interactions among individual bodies bring together the relations of care to a poetics of the body. Nielsen refers to healing through poetry as 'crip poetics' (Nielsen 2016). It is a poetic method that shows poets how to challenge standard notions of coherence, resolution, and recovery. Instead of attempting to heal the damaged body, Farris displays it as

a changing dynamic system with multiple dimensions and complete openness. The poet rejects finality by showing readers that both poetry and life continue as a process of continuous negotiation.

3. Intertextuality: Poetics and Feminism

Katie Farris's *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* stands as a dual narrative that narrates both illness and survival alongside rich literary references. Through direct and indirect connections to poetry and feminist theory and modern authors, Farris establishes an intertextual dialogue, which Nelson (2020) defines as Intertextuality refers to the relationship between texts and how they influence, reference, or echo each other.

In discussing intertextuality, it is important to point out how it enriches the narrative experience. Katie Farris's collection exemplifies this by weaving a dual narrative that explores both illness and survival. The depth of the text is further enhanced by its numerous literary references, which serve as a backdrop for the emotional and thematic nuances of the story. Farris skillfully incorporates both direct and indirect connections to poetry and feminist theory, creating a tapestry of influences that resonate throughout the work. This approach deepens the reader's engagement and invites them to consider the broader conversation surrounding these themes. As Nelson notes, intertextuality refers to the relationship between texts and how they influence, reference, or echo each other (Nelson 2020).

By establishing this intertextual dialogue, Farris not only honors the literary tradition that precedes her but also positions her work within a contemporary feminist framework. This layering of references allows readers to draw parallels between the themes presented in Farris's work and those explored by earlier authors. Consequently, this approach enriches the reader's understanding and encourages a dialogue that transcends time and context. For instance, she invites readers to reflect on the enduring struggles and triumphs of women throughout history. This connection not only honors the literary giants that came before her but

also emphasizes the ongoing relevance of feminist discourse.

As such, Farris's work serves as a bridge between past and present, allowing readers to appreciate the evolution of feminist thought while considering its implications for contemporary society. In this way, the intertextual elements in her writing create a complex pattern that fosters more profound engagement and critical reflection among her audience. Farris operates in a poetic community because her collection carries on a broad conversation with various literary traditions that women authors have used to defend themselves and heal through language. The collection begins with the instructive poem "Why Write Love Poetry in a Burning World", which thoughtfully uncovers the motivation behind writing and—through its very demanding inquiry—offers insight into the author's bond with writing. Imagination, beauty, and elegance may coexist together in a single line: "The body bald/ Cancerous but still/Beautiful enough to/ Imagine living" ("WWLPBD", lines 3-5).

The intertextual connection is most expressively manifested in "Row of Rows" through a dialogue between Farris and her husband, Ilya Kaminsky, which illustrates the relationship between human nature as expressed by Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. (Stephen, 2022, p. 99). Such lines as "A pleasant row/of rows, little rugs/on the strings/of our love, / just enough/ to pull out days/taut" ("RR", lines 1-7) embody the Dickinson's elliptical, interior lyricism. Farris situates herself at the nexus of Whitman's exuberant, inclusive vision and Dickinson's elliptical, interior lyricism. She skillfully blends expansive and restrictive elements, revealing herself through public statements that hold private secrets. This hybrid nature allows her poetry to connect with both ecstatic feelings and maintain intimacy through its expressive forms. In her poem "I had been hungry all the years," Emily Dickinson reflects, "So I found/ That Hunger—was a way/ Of Persons outside Windows/ The Entering—takesy" ("I had been hungry, all the Years", lines 17-22). Farris embraces Dickinson's work by stating, "Today I placed/ your collected poems/ over my breast, my heart." ("ERA", line 12). Maybe Eros is cherishing a fault after the earth

underneath us has quaked (ALHS, 2023). During her interview, Farris states that her preferred shorter style in writing love poems compelled her to adopt a two-beat-per-line meter reminiscent of two heartbeats resonating together (James, 2023).

Furthermore, she draws inspiration from Dickinson's alternation of three and four beats along with iambic pentameter. She employs fragmented syntax and enjambment, incorporating ample white space. Farris's connection to Dickinson becomes especially significant. She adopts Dickinson's techniques by using fragmented lines, dashes, enjambments, and blank space to represent the hidden truths. Each minimal line depends on unspoken elements to create a power structure between expressed words and unexpressed words. The brief lines in "Emiloma: A Riddle and an Answer," along with their ambiguous nature, symbolize both medical uncertainty and the indescribable aspects of illness. Through these poetic choices, Farris develops poetic forms that duplicate the interrupted patterns of trauma. According to Jackson, she chooses to respect the ruptures by structuring them as core elements within her verse (Jackson 2022, p. 126).

Moreover, Farris employs various formal techniques to capture the essence of a speaker's experience. "Eros Haiku" is a fleeting glimpse of a poem that indicates the short duration of a feeling. Poems written in couplets that culminate in a solitary word, or single-word stanza, encapsulate the emotion of loneliness the speaker feels as a cancer patient. The poem "After the Mastectomy" describes how people gawk at her and conclude with the line, "My bald head the beacon, the first slam, the alarm" ("AM", line 10). The term "alarm" connotes the act of escaping danger. In those inescapable moments, the speaker senses utter solitude, which is enforced through the word "alarm" being jettisoned to its own line.

Through these fragmented structures, she embodies, as Griffiths (2011) argues, a "feminist poetics of trauma," which emphasizes disrupted forms and embodied expression as structures of authentic writing. In "To the Body," she speaks directly to her body: "You are not broken; you are

only rewritten. ("TB", line 7) The language shift from damage to revision indicates that Farris dismisses the narrative of decline. Her words exist in minimal form yet create powerful images, while her metaphors touch readers physically and her sentence structure breaks often to match the struggling body and disordered memory patterns. According to Naishtat, "The fragment with: "My bald head, the system of the Enlightenment" functions as a strength because it accurately depicts the real nature of trauma (Naishtat 2025, p. 389).

Farris's poetry attempts to provide hope and tackles feelings related to illness. Devastating news often brings with it anguish and frustration. For Farris, this trauma is evident in her choice of form, which has stripped her lines of structure and divided them into terse, staccato fragments. In "Emiloma: A Riddle and an Answer," she asks, "What is born full grown/ and never named in it?" ("ERA", line 9). The power of this riddle is in how it conveys the curtailing of one's timeline of living; cancer shifts one's reality so suddenly and unexpectedly. Farris employs this form of riddle physically, not to the more obscure aspects of illness without the aim of resolution. Cathy Caruth's (1996) theory of trauma guides Farris' poetic schema. The articulation of trauma is often incomplete in its construction, disjointed in its expression, and instead characterized by a sense of absence.

Her poems guide readers to experience complex realities without needing Farris implements the "poetics of survival," as defined by ORR, which refers to writing as a method for rebuilding oneself after experiencing traumatic breaks. (ORR 2005, p. 133). Trauma is a central theme; her poetry becomes instrumental in reconstructing new perceptions of the body, culminating in her definitions. Through this innovative structure, Farris presents a feminist interpretation of conventional lyrical poetry. Through her personal voice, Through her writing, she presents herself as a patient while simultaneously expressing her identity as a woman, wife, mother, and artist during times of transformation. Her work illustrates De La Bellacasa's concept of "matters of care" by showing how affective ethics and politics are interconnected in a complex relationship (Bellacasa 2017, p. 11).

The poetess has the fortitude to tolerate life in the most trying circumstances, and her view of it is brimming with optimism that the suffering will eventually be alleviated. So, even if she's sick, you must recognize her beauty. Perhaps this optimism stems from the resilience that is inherent in femininity.

Moreover, Farris challenges societal conventions surrounding female breast cancer narratives by resisting traditional themes of triumph or victimhood. Instead, she forges a voice that Jackson describes as "fragmented, resisting definitive conclusions and absolutes" (Farris 2022, p. 122). This fragmented structure authentically reflects the continuous transformation of identity. Kauffman posits that poetry empowers individuals confronting illness to establish relational autonomy, expressing their dignity and care in response to medicalization (Kauffman 2009). For too long, cancer narratives have been casting patients as either experiencing 'resilience' or 'suffering,' sanitizing their reality to parcel it into socially digestible frameworks of tragedy or bravery.

The speaker's strong desire to be considered more than a patient, to avoid being desexualized or framed exclusively through the realm of illness, is indicative of a pervasive need for human intimacy, desire, and pleasure, which exists alongside physical vulnerability. These components drive the ailing body's imagination, marking a defiant resistance toward framing cancer sufferers as sexual. In "An Unexpected Turn of Events Midway through Chemotherapy," for instance, there is the utterance, "I'd like some sex, please./I'm not too picky—/after all, have you seen me?/So skinny you could/shiv me with me?" ("AUTEMC", lines 1-5). The humor in the phrase "So skinny you could shiv me with me" ("AUTEMC", lines 4-5) highlights the speaker's self-deprecating view of their body. illustrates a commentary on the complex nature of the body and its relationship to diet. The speaker does not attempt to avoid the harsh realities imposed by illness; instead, they find an irreverent way to express their experience. By apathetically asserting her wish for intimacy with the phrase, "Whatever you've got, I'll take it" ("AUTEMC",

lines 9- 10), the speaker suggests that she is reclaiming her body from the tyranny of medical surveillance.

During cancer treatments, patients often experience the disassembling and reconstruction of their bodies, which diminishes their sense of ownership. The insistence on intimacy and nudity affirms that the body, although perceived to be outside the societal notions of beauty and health, is still capable of sensual experience. Farris's poetry matches Peacock's definition of a "poetics effect" by making vulnerability serve both as an emotional expression and as a powerful tool for revealing structural and social injustice (Peacock 2013, p. 11). Through her fragmented style and intimate language, Farris demonstrates feminist resistance by showing how open emotional and poetic expression can lead readers toward empathetic understanding and relational awareness. The lyric form of Farris redefines the physical body as a foundational structure for poetry. The poet incorporates surgical scars together with chemotherapy rituals and bodily changes into her verse structure. The disjointed stanzas, together with the irregular rhythms and tactile imagery, replicate the reconstructed self that emerges from illness. The collection moves beyond being about the body to become of the body because every poem represents a scar, a breath, and a pulse. Through her intertextual writing methods, Farris establishes powerful connections between personal narratives and broader literary heritage. Through her innovative poetic form and feminist approach, she establishes the lyric as a force for freedom instead of confinement. Through her multifaceted creative work, she creates meaningful expression that accepts uncertainty while respecting suffering and demanding happiness as a valid poetic destination. This discussion returns to the main argument that Farris's poetry draws upon feminist and literary traditions to reimagine how we think about resilience and transformation.

4. Enhancing Love

The poems in *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* present love as an oppositional force against illness and death, as well as societal collapse. Through her poetry, Farris establishes love as well as language

as powerful instruments against opposition. She maintains meaningful expression by intentionally naming and depicting all forms of human experience, despite their weak nature. Through poetic vulnerability, people gain power to reclaim their storytelling agency, as Dubrofsky and Magnet explain (2022, p. 827). Farris asserts her position. Through language, Farris demonstrates how she rescues beauty from catastrophic events.

According to Farris, love requires active engagement rather than passive feelings. In "Why Write Love Poems In A Burning Day", she provides a purpose. This purpose resists despair through creation, echoing what Branicki describes as a feminist ethic of care: "to actively construct a livable future, even in uncertain times" (2020, p. 7). Through her dedication to love, Farris selects survival as she keeps her heart open despite the danger of total destruction. Every poem serves as a small defiance against the void, refusing to cut off perception and emotional experience. In the apologetic fervor as well as in the humor of a dedication, Farris commences one such poem: "So here's/ your god-/ damn/ poem" ("Quid Pro Quo: A Dedication", lines 8-11), which captures as well as sustains swift movement in the vocative. While attempting to avoid the abyss, Farris gravitates towards awe, a resolute commitment to life, and ultimately reaches a place of quiet reflection within the self. Farris narrates as if he is captivated by wonder, saying, "And whom can I tell how much I want to live? I want to live. ("Woman with Amputated Breast Awaits PET Scan Results", line 5)

Through metaphor, Farris illustrates intimate domesticity in "Row of Rows" when she writes, "Of our love/ Just enough/ To pull out days/ Taut" ("ROR", lines 5- 7). These poetic lines present an image that shows how life remains suspended yet connected through the joint efforts of two people. Through her focus on physical touch, she connects her poetry to the physical world, which acts as a stabilizing force in the face of medical and existential disorders. Through the physical world, she enriches her soul and enhances existence. "When you walk over/the earth, it asserts/ itself:/ "Here. Here./ Here," it says to your/feet./ You must

reckon with the earth,/ though it enters...you less." ("When You Walk Over There", lines 1- 4), eco-elimination resists illness in an ecological context. The lines compel you to acknowledge the earth, even as it becomes a part of you.

Furthermore, Farris resists self-absorption by linking her personal illness to social, ecological, and philosophical contexts. In "What Would Root," the speaker takes a walk in the woods during spring, depicted in eight-line stanzas: "Walking through a cathedral of oak trees/and bristlecopines,/scolded by squirrels" ("WWR", lines 1,3). That formal choice morphs into total submission as the speaker blends into the non-human world. In "Outside Atlanta Cancer Care," Farris describes her desire as material, as a body imitating a tree: "For if you long hard enough, do you not find fruit in your palms?" ("OACC", lines 14-16). A self grows toward the recipient of its wonder, and for Farris, this wonder is trenchant, standing to offer an origin hypothesis for human beings. In this context, there is a distinction between the origins of our sense of self and the turmoil of our most intense emotions (Roth 2024).

Farris displays an aesthetic quality that emphasizes the extraordinary quality of everyday experiences. Through her work, Farris follows Mary Oliver's guidance to have readers experience awe by living through the transitional areas that blend fear with wonder (2017). She discovers elegance through close relationships with her physical being as well as her experiences of suffering and affection. In her poetry, she shows that one can remain tender, present, and open to experience even when destruction reigns. The approach mirrors Frank's argument about how illness narratives require the maintenance of raw lived experience instead of coherent narratives (Weingarten 2004, p. 301). Farris navigates her landscape with the gentle unsettling of where the world ends and the self begins, gentle as the parenthetical hinge within the love poem: Why do love poems attract birds, as sure as seed or worm or nectar?" ("In the Shadow of This Valley," lines 1, 2). There is something about the bird's smallness. When caged, a bird is a heart, a self, beating steadily. If released, it flies from one poem to the next, carrying messages addressed to

anyone. Farris addresses multiple different figures in his poems. Poems ending with em dashes, such as "The Wheel," echo Emily Dickinson's "over-and-over" and also enact the suspicion that the speaker's life might be curtailed, cut off, or shattered by the potentiality of real nothingness. Elsewhere, Farris writes of cancer: "I name you 'cactus'/ carcinoma be damned. /"Tell It Slant," ("ITSOTV", lines 2, 3).

Farris's poems insinuate national notions and blend them with intimacy. Farris addresses bridges between oneness and otherness. When a poem addresses a certain figure, it mediates and, like Eros, measures the space between the self and what it reaches toward. Farris plays with this notion: "As an anti-capitalist act, I reject your hierarchies of worth, America" ("In the Early Days of a Global Pandemic", line 2). Farris writes in a clear statement of poetics, "All things are erotic." ("Invention of America", line 5). Farris unfurls the capacious ethos of address, weaving her addressees into intimate vocatives. Here, the vocative holds America cursorily in its gaze before naming the enduring "cockroach"—cockroach, / smooth as a lozenge, glossy/ as hard candy, antennae/ clever as spun/ sugar, come/ into my mouth" ("IDGP", lines 4,5). This is no comparative device; this is a dance of invocation and imperative, a sense of rhyme encompassing the entirety of being.

Moreover, through her poetry, Farris combines individual lyrical expression with political thought, transforming personal experience into a platform for shared contemplation. In "In the Early Days of a Global Pandemic," Farris recounts America as being how it "Twists itself into an eagle,/ condenses into a bowl of hot chicken soup,/ then a factory never retrofitted to make ventilators, then a trillion /dollars, then fresh water, then saltwater/then salt" ("IEDGP", lines 11-14). In addition to the breadth of imagination, each line is a microcosm of America and a distillation of an image that precedes it, and the swift, shapeshifting movement in this poem is itself a perspective of America as something never static and difficult to define. The poem "Five Days before the Mastectomy, Insurrection at the Capitol" asks, "What is the door/ the bullet makes/ in the body?"

("FDBM", lines 1-2). Suddenly, the body serves as a stand-in for America, with its cancer representing the disease of political turmoil. Using an approach that offers multiple perspectives, the America we glimpse in these poems is more complex than a two-party political system, and instead of answers, we come away with questions. Farris participates in an ongoing poetic tradition of revolutionary souls, which emphasizes that personal expression carries political significance. She refuses to alter her narrative. Farris demonstrates radical clarity when she declares, "I'm not afraid to name the hurt," ("FDBM", line 3), while she carries pain inside her mouth "like water." ("FDBM", line 4) This metaphor of holding pain as something simultaneously essential and dangerous speaks to the dual burden and necessity of expression. The poem establishes similarities with Rankine's lyrical method, which produces spaces that witness their lyrical nature while fighting against the silence and display of events (Rankine 2015). The poet's commitment to feeling functions as resistance against cultural desensitization caused by speed and fear. Her work demonstrates the power of vulnerability, according to Dubrofsky and Magnet, because it enables individuals to occupy space and transform dialogue during times of disruption (Dubrofsky and Magnet 2015, p. 304).

Thus, what also emerges is that the work titled *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* expresses a refusal to surrender to despair. Instead, Farris positions poetry as a terrain of reclamation. Through metaphors that braid the beautiful and the brutal, she captures the fragility of life without romanticizing suffering. Her diction and syntax remain deceptively simple, allowing for layers of interpretation and emotional depth. This poetic strategy allows Farris to hold space for both grief and grace, a duality rarely managed with such poise. The metaphors that describe the home present both decorative and philosophical value. Being-toward-death, according to Heidegger, makes people focus on their present experience of the world. Being and Time by Heidegger (Torrance, 1964) explains how death awareness gives value to life and makes human existence more significant. In her work, Farris shows this intensification that the world shows greater depth because its duration

is limited. Illness makes ordinary things holy by stripping them of their familiar quality. Farris follows Mary Oliver's advice by recording each heartbeat because she sees it as an expression of gratitude. Through their intellectual and poetic dialogue, the love between partners functions.

Farris portrays this love as an unfinished experience, oscillating between hesitation and ethereal tension. Farris uses poetic structures in her work that correspond to this unfinished love. Through her deliberate enhancing of love and caring, she thinks that caring is love. She expresses her wish for cared-for love in the lines in "Marriage": "If marriage/ is a series/ of increasing/ intimacy,/I would still/ beg your forgiveness for asking for your assistance and unwinding that pale hair from my hemorrhoids." ("Marriage", lines 1-6). Through this revelation, Farris presents a declaration without resolution that lingers between thoughts and existence to emphasize love's nature of offering no assurances. The will to love emerges as a form of salvation because it exists within the will to live. Her examination of love in times of crisis not only renders you beautiful, but also leaves you susceptible to predators.

Love introduces Farris to loss and pain, as well as disappearance, while she acknowledges its capacity to open one up to these experiences. Love remains her answer, although she depicts it as hesitant yet luminous and enduring. The specific words and images she chooses help her craft poems that function to both remember, fight against, and bring back from extinction. Her collection presents itself as a journey into the heart of flames, which uses love and poetry as protective elements. The work reaffirms the idea that love and language, for Farris, are survival and rebellion tools under active deployment, even in the midst of despair. Farris's poetic vision also transcends the personal, as she broadens the representation of illness beyond individual experiences. Her poetry fosters dialogues between her corporeal experience and global ecological crises, alongside political threats and existential dangers, illustrating how personal vulnerabilities reflect broader instability. Dubrofsky and Magnet characterize this approach as "poetic resistance," allowing vulnerability to

serve as a critical lens (Dubrofsky and Magnet 2015, p. 826). By situating her suffering within a larger context of shared human exposure, Farris avoids isolating her experience.

Conclusion

Farris poetically oscillates across a spectrum of what it means to be human while chronicling grief and finding ways to process it. In listening to Farris's poetry, like *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* (2023), one discovers a blend of illness, survival, perpetual resilience intertwined intricately crafted into her poetic voice. Within these themes lies the revelation that Farris is using language far more complex than expression with intensity; dominion of memory and myth trembling with the body over the narrative of brutality and endurance manifests a world where language is weaponized and reality is set contested within human suffering.

Every different perspective in her poetry shatters simplistic interpretation where the individual and collective exist through personal trauma as sickness contextualized by cultural nostalgia becomes interlacing frameworks that tell a timeless tale of strength. Through her work, she concretely establishes art as a tool that transforms, enabling both the poet and the audience to transcend the confines of pain and grief. This new triumph over the shackles of oppression stands in stark opposition to how trauma has traditionally been victoriously presented; Farris exerting resistance through poetry reshapes reality, mythology, imagery, and symbolism into the striking depiction of vivid trauma.

Additionally, the authors blend personal narrative with rich historical culture which provides a glimpse into identity formation in the context of struggle. It would be unfair to claim her work is self-reflective when largely it remains an investigation on how people from marginalized communities reconstruct identities given deep-rooted violence and trauma in their lives. Even with the contributions mentioned above, there is not a lot of research looking into the implications of the works of Farris within contemporary literature. For instance, more research can be conducted on the transcultural dimensions looking at how the poet's

identity informs the acclaimed ethereal quality of her works. This might include a comparative approach to Farris' poetry with other post-colonial or diasporic poets to uncover the engagement her work features with issues of migration, dislocation, and cultural hybridization from a cross-nation perspective. It may broaden the understanding of poetry's role in defining personal and collective memory, and in reconstructing history in the face of today's globalization.

Other relevant areas of further research include the application of gender, race, and identity as components of Farris' poetry. While the previous section discussed this paper's objectives, there remains deeper analysis that can be done through the study of her trauma, especially through the lens of gender and race. Such studies can focus on how Farris constructs the idea of womanhood, particularly through mental health, to advance and engage with feminist and postcolonial poetics. Given her body-centered approach to illness, resistance, and survival, those studies could also examine how her work grappled with the body in contemporary poetry defies dominant notions of gender and embodiment.

Moreover, Farris's use of myth and history does pave the way for novel avenues of research. This paper has considered her retelling of myth and memory, but those discussions may be directed toward analyzing how such allusions function as more than literary markers but rather as tools for socio-cultural and historical analysis. Research may explore how Farris's use of mythology contests the prevailing myths that dominate ideologies have deployed to silence women and people of color.

One of the most profound ways to study poetry is to look at its impact in-depth. Advanced studies could look at the significance of Farris's work in the framework of contemporary therapeutic models focused on addressing mental health issues, trauma, and building resilience, as they cross disciplines in nonacademic and clinical settings. With poetry being a dominant art form of the time, I would not be surprised if some focused on the impact Farris's work has where she is socially active, analyzing her

work as literature through an audience reception approach. My expectation would be that readers and audiences figure actively bound notions of healing and clarity through a range of collective or individual journeys in her poetry. Some research foci might study how Farris can be introduced in a course teaching the application of her work with trauma, survival, and creative survival. Most definitely, a layer of Farris's poetry offers preliminary resources for developing guided lessons for first time teaching poetry.

The power, strength, trauma, and artistry use in Farris's poetry is striking and evokes contemplation in contemporary society, illustrating the potential of a person's emotions and artistry infused. Farris's poetry can be discussed as part of classroom or workshop literature, where scholars can analyze Farris's works engage new audiences with identity, survival, resistance, and other issues. In essence, the goal of this essay has been to demonstrate how Farris's *Standing in the Forest of Being Alive* is simultaneously a personal journey and a enduring celebration of the power of poetry.

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