

### FSH REVIEW 2020 3

This is a poem about social isolation in the time of coronavirus. It employs the image of standing in line to represent the passivity and loneliness that the threat of COVID imposes. It offers hope in the idea that we can redefine connection, and that through phoning a loved one or making eye contact and laughing with a friend, if we cannot literally hold off the march toward death, we can make the life we have worthwhile. The title, which refers to the "corona" or crown part of the virus, is clever and apropos. The idea that we are all facing, or trying to avoiding, a march toward death is authentic and compelling.

The writing is somewhat uneven, good in some parts and less good in others. As I noted, the title is great, I like the occasional use of internal and end rhyme, and the image of standing in line is poignant. I believe that a poem should be as concise as possible, and for this reason have suggested a few cuts. I also recommend avoiding conventional punctuation whenever possible, unless it is added to convey specific meaning. A poem is not an essay, and does not require following the same conventions. Further, the traditional formality of capitalizing the first letter of each line has been increasingly replaced by capitalization of words that start a new thought. I've suggested adopting this approach, which I think suits the conversational nature of this poem better. I've also recommended different line breaks and different language in a few places.

Of greater concern is that, to me, the main message of the poem, which has to do with the importance of social connection in these terrible times, is not always expressed clearly and the resultant confusion is distracting. While I like the somberness of the image of "march toward death," in the concluding lines of the final stanza it sounds as though the author believes that human connection can actually ward off sickness and death. This doesn't quite make sense to me - is it a kind of magical thinking? An irrational hope? It doesn't have to be logical, but the way it is written, it sounds like fact rather than yearning. I'm hoping the author can rewrite with a little more nuance.

Similarly, although it is lovely how this conclusion echoes earlier speculation about the thinking of the man in the coat, this part of the poem was also confusing to me. First, how can connection with others "slow the spread" of the disease? Perhaps the author means that the man might be hoping that connection can keep him safe - this is fair. But if this is the case, the lines should be rewritten to express this idea. Also in these same lines, the author seems to be saying that keeping in touch can "maintain connection." This sounds tautological to me. Keeping in touch IS maintaining connection. So this idea needs to be reworked.

Overall, my conclusion is that while there is potential in this poem, it needs better crafting. Simpler writing and punctuation will help; and cleaning up the two areas mentioned above should improve the overall impact on the reader.

#### Comments to Author:

Thank you for this thoughtful poem which, in my read, about social isolation in the time of coronavirus. It employs the effective image of standing in line to represent the passivity and loneliness that the threat of COVID imposes. It offers hope in the idea that we can redefine connection, and that through phoning a loved one or making eye contact and laughing with a friend, even if we cannot literally hold off "the march toward death," we can make the life we have worthwhile. The title, which refers to the "corona" or crown part of the virus, is quite clever and apropos. The idea that we are all facing, or trying to avoiding, a march toward death is authentic and compelling.

The writing is somewhat uneven. As I noted, the title is great, I like the occasional use of internal and end rhyme, and the image of standing in line is a poignant one. I believe that a poem should be as concise as possible, and for this reason have suggested a few cuts. I also recommend avoiding conventional punctuation whenever possible, unless it conveys specific meaning. A poem is not an essay, and does not require following the same punctuation conventions. Further, the traditional formality of capitalizing the first letter of each line has been increasingly replaced by capitalization of words that start a new thought. I've suggested adopting this approach, which I think suits the conversational nature of your poem better. I've also recommended different line breaks and different language in a few places.

Of greater concern is that the main message of the poem, which to me has to do with the importance of social connection in these terrible times, is not always expressed clearly and the resultant confusion is distracting. While I like the somberness of the image of "the march toward death," in the concluding lines of the final stanza it sounds as though you believe that human connection can actually ward off sickness and death. This doesn't quite make sense to me - is it a kind of magical thinking? An irrational hope? If this is the thought you want to express, it doesn't have to be logical, but the way it is written, it sounds like fact rather than yearning. I'm hoping you can rewrite these lines with a little more nuance.

Similarly, although it is lovely how this conclusion echoes earlier speculation about the thinking of the man in the coat, this part of the poem was also confusing to me. First, how can connection with others "slow the spread" of the disease? Perhaps you mean that the man might be hoping that connection can keep him safe - this would be fair. But if this is the case, the lines should be rewritten to express this idea. Also in these same lines, you seem to be saying that keeping in touch can "maintain connection." This is a tautology. Keeping in touch IS maintaining connection. So this idea needs to be reworked.

**Overall, the starkness of the writing appealed to me, and the images of the line, the man, and the narrator laughing through his mask lingered in my mind - by my criteria, the sign of a good poem. By working a little more on the craft, and thinking through a little more exactly what you want to say, you will have created something memorable and moving.**