

FHS REVIEW 2020 4

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Thank you for the opportunity to read your poem. I especially appreciated your tribute at the end to the poem to the courage and wisdom of co-workers and institutional leaders in your healthcare institution.

There are aspects of this work that I liked. The decision to address coronavirus directly was a creative one, because it suggested putting humans and virus in engaged dialogue with each other. Perhaps this idea could be developed further. The poem also has some interesting turns of phrase: for example, I was intrigued by the framing of the virus' strength as its ability to "consume the minds/of all the world." Finally, I liked the irony reflected in the last two lines: coronavirus fills our entire frame; it has become the only thing we can see; yet we cannot see it at all.

But given the intensity and tragedy of the crisis unfolding around us, the poem seemed excessively abstract, philosophical and speculative, so that while it poses some interesting questions (manmade? God-made?) the lines intended to trigger an emotional response (e.g., "we do nothing but think of you"; the crushing of hopes and dreams, the way the virus has "halted" our world) left me unmoved, although in real life I am devastated by the ramifications of the disease. This lack of emotional connection was a real stumbling block for me.

On a small level, in the first stanza, second line, I was unclear whether the adjectives "complex and present" were intended to modify the virus; the way it is written, they modify "me." Also, although in principle I appreciate the pondering about the origins of the virus, the canard that this is a Chinese virus unleashed on the world has become so politicized that I felt it had connotations the author likely did not intend.

Thank you for this work and tackling the difficult subject of the pandemic. I encourage you to keep writing about this topic and others that grab your imagination.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: I think in the months and years to come, we're going to see some great writing about COVID-19 and coronavirus, but in my estimation this is really not it. This is not a badly written poem. The decision to address coronavirus directly was a creative one, which had the potential to put humans and virus in engaged dialogue. The poem also has some interesting turns of phrase: for example, I was intrigued by the framing of the virus' strength as its ability to "consume the minds/of all the world." Finally, I liked the irony reflected in the last two lines: coronavirus fills our entire frame; it has become the only thing we can see; yet we cannot see it at all.

But given the intensity and tragedy of the crisis unfolding around us, I was strangely unmoved by the poem. I was disappointed that the use of the second person "you" didn't really move me as a reader closer to an "encounter" with the virus. I think one problem may be the tone. It is philosophical and speculative, so that while it poses some interesting questions (manmade? God-made?) the lines intended to trigger an emotional response (e.g., "we do nothing but think of you"; the crushing of hopes and dreams, the way the virus has "halted" our world) left me cold, although in real life I am devastated by the ramifications of the disease.

On a small level, in the first stanza, second line, I was unclear whether the adjectives "complex and present" were intended to modify the virus; the way it is written, they modify "me." Also, although in principle I appreciate the pondering about the origins of the virus, the canard that this is a Chinese virus

unleashed on the world has become so politicized that I felt this allusion had connotations which you likely did not intend.

I did not see any way of easily "improving" the poem and for this reason I'm recommending reject. I regret reaching this conclusion, because I'd like to encourage writing about the pandemic. But I think we could do better.