



## Post-Covid Anima Mundi (Umbra Mundi) Poem

It is fascinating to read the chapter in Brenda Hillman's book *In a Few Minutes Before Later* entitled "V. The Sickness and the World Soul." In the chapter's 24 poems, we see how she was dealing with the realities of the Covid pandemic and writing her way through her perceptions as they came to her. One phrase stands out: "World Soul." She quotes Hegel:

This bare and simple infinity, or the absolute notion, may be called the ultimate nature of life, the soul of the world, the universal life-blood, which courses everywhere, and whose flow is neither disturbed nor checked by any obstructing distinction, but is itself every distinction that arises, as well as that into which all distinctions are dissolved.

Georg Hegel,  
*The Phenomenology of the Spirit*  
(*The Phenomenology of Mind*)

Now that the pandemic has moved into its endemic phase, we have experienced the worst of Covid and can begin to try to articulate what has happened, to our world, our home, and most of all, to our selves, for while "the ego project is doomed to fail" the soul-building project is rigged in our favor. If not in this lifetime, one of the next. The world soul has something to communicate to us and we must be in the here and now to get it.

Brenda gives us clues to how she was wrestling with Covid-19 and its connection to something happening to all human beings alive during that period when she writes in the poem: "::::[a ragged white moth passes by]::::"

& when  
*we thought of the world soul, how should distances apply?*



and:

*i, a poet on the island of a thought, with love nearby  
lit a candle throughout the spring.*

and ends the poem with:

*in the green springing hills the grace-footed  
dark-haired spirit of the world will-not-end*

Other lines in this chapter of the book which reference the phrase “world soul” include:

*& the ragged world soul  
goes about its business:*

and:

*& the world soul floated over  
the bored children with their handhelds & the adults with their own  
beasts & their own apocalypse  
while the sickness passed by*

The world did not end. What the world soul was intending is up to our interpretation. An idea early on during the pandemic by one Jungian scholar was that the *Umbra Mundi* was what was at work during the pandemic. Murray Stein said:

*Umbra Mundi is a companion to Anima Mundi. Anima Mundi is the soul of the world, the divine within material cosmos. Umbra Mundi is its shadow. You could say it is the dark side of God, as Jung and many of his students have written about this unpleasant topic. Because it is archetypal it infects everyone.*



*Its most essential features are invisibility, universality, and numinosity: Because Coronavirus moves among us invisibly; is found on all continents, and strikes us as awesome and powerful, it represents the Umbra Mundi. We don't know who has it or if we have it ourselves. It is everywhere, in all parts of the world, and it instills fear in the collective psyche, which we all feel. Moreover, as Rudolf Otto says about the numinous experience, it is awesome. The perception of Umbra Mundi makes us shudder. It is a mysterium tremendum et fascinans, and it infects us with a mysterious terror and sense of vulnerability: We are not in control, and it is cold and relentless.*

It is true we were not in control during the pandemic, but what may have been more scary is that we are never in control. Any sense of control is an illusion and all we can do is set our own intention and be ready to improvise. Writing poetry in the projective manner already cedes a great deal of “control” to the language, which was here before us, will outlast us and has a great deal more power than our human ego. To find out what we think by writing projectively, we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, so the vulnerability we felt during the pandemic is a familiar feeling and that takes more of the terror out of the equation.

How do we begin to explore the lessons for ourselves from this period in time, make our harvest and prepare ourselves for the next such crisis which is sure to come more quickly than we know? Write.

Brenda Hillman has given us a start, with the notion of the “world soul” and her own explorations of it. Murray Stein suggests the “world shadow” is a more precise metaphor for the Covid pandemic. David McCloskey and the early bioregionalists knew that we have to stop living as invaders of the place in which we live and become inhabitants or “reinhabitants.” McCloskey said: “The intimacy of our relationship with place is as close as soul to body.”



How did (does) the world soul (or world shadow, or both) manifest in your watershed?

9:47am

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Casa del Colibrí

### Works Cited:

Brenda Hillman, *In A Few Minutes Before Later*

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