



Cover Essay

Palladia

Loggetta del Sansovino, Piazza San Marco

Μάρκος προς Παλλάς

My mettle is found wanting. In the fight
against this pestilence, I favored flight.
I, then, assumed a gospel writer's right
to dwell and read and watch and brood. Enlight-
ened scribes do otherwise. Pallas, their plight
is dire. Pray, what says your second sight?

Παλλάς προς Απόλλωνα

Apollo, poets and physicians cite
your lore yet. How might their arts hold the fight
to best contagia, or has Earth's plight
passed the plenipotentiary flight
of viable intervention? Shed light
unto Mark's question of how one should write.

Απόλλων προς Ερμύ

Hermes, consider Marsyas, whose rite
of art, through pipes alone, could well incite
the grave to metamorphose into light;
that said, as how to sing such souls to fight
back tears induced by rhetorical flight,
illuminating what's right—that's a poet's plight.

Ερμής προς Ειρήνη

Apollo errs. We dare not gloss the plight
of those bedeviled by infection. Right,
Eirene? Lyrics leavened by loves' flight,
as Orpheus knew, hearten our shared sight
to don the mail, lead the charge, and then fight,
as Pallas fights, steadfastly toward the light.

Ειρήνη προς Παλλάς

Although I blanch at your trope's martial light,
we're at one, Hermes: Their collective plight
with plague is without end. Pallas, their fight
needs but philosophy. When rhapsodes write
votives vowing salvation is in sight,
their wits have taken Icarian flight.

Παλλάς προς Μάρκο

Philosophy. Eirene's right. The flight
from sickness unto health commands the light
of learning as it does the learned sight
of its philosophers to see the plight
of humanity in what poets write.
Redouble the reckoning of this fight.

Apprehend your flight. Intimate their plight.
Embody the light. Courageously write.
Acknowledge their sight. Judiciously fight.

Mark Olival-Bartley



ABOUT THE POEM AND THE POET

A photograph of the American poet Ezra Pound, late in life, sitting in St. Mark's Square at the base of the Column of St. Theodore and looking in the direction of the adjacent Lion of Venice, was the germ that inspired "Palladia." This image of a poet alongside centuries-old (or, in the case of the Lion of Venice, millennia-old) statuary led to a vision of a dialogue between them on what they had borne witness of history.

Having endured waves of epidemics for centuries, the city-state of Venice sought countermeasures to their deleterious effects, some of which were religious (e.g., votive churches) and others based on science (e.g., lazarettos). "Palladia" is set in the heart of Venice, St. Mark's Square, between St. Mark's Basilica and St. Mark's Campanile. At the base of the campanile is a small building, Loggetta del Sansovino.

The Italian postage stamp from 1970 on the cover of this issue commemorates the architect of the Loggetta, Jacopo Sansovino (1486–1570), who also created the four bronze sculptures of Greek gods adorning the front of the building, which, from left to right, are Athena Pallas (Παλλάς), Apollo (Απόλλων), Hermes (Ερμής), and Eirene (Ειρήνη).

The poem posits an ekphrastic dream vision, depicting a conversation about an unnamed pandemic devastating the city. The first speaker, Mark, seeks counsel from Athena Pallas. Then, Athena Pallas, the goddess of wisdom and strategic warfare, consults her three attendants (Apollo, the god of poetry and healing; Hermes, who ferries the dead to Hades; and Eirene, the goddess of peace) before offering her own answer to Mark.

As to who, exactly, Mark is—the poet, the saint, the Lion of Venice, or, simply, "a mark" to serve as a kind of Everyman—is, despite wording that might be assigned to any of these identities, left deliberately ambiguous.

Written in the form of a sestina, an invention by the twelfth-century Occitan troubadour Arnaut Daniel, the poem is comprised of thirty-nine lines—six sestets and a tercet—and its six end words are used in every sestet, the last of one becoming the first of the next and mixing in a fixed pattern; the tercet serves as an envoi featuring all six words. In English, as here, a sestina is often written in iambic pentameter.

This form of verse allows the myriad facets of its selected words (and their homophones), like diamonds in the hands of a gemologist, to be considered from different points of view. That said, the six words offered here (in the order of the envoi)—flight, plight; light, write; sight, fight—constitute a kind of summation of the poem's subject, the experience of a present pandemic and its lessons for the next.

This poem is dedicated to Dr. Peter Daszak, the President of EcoHealth Alliance, whose Cassandra-like prophecy on *60 Minutes* in 2004, vital work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (not least in speaking truth to power), and decades dedicated to mitigating emerging-disease spillover gave voice to Pallas. Ευχαριστώ πολύ to Stamatia Sakorafa and Isabella Georga for their assistance with the Greek, and *grazie mille* to Dr. Giorgia Tommasi for her assistance with the Italian.

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