

St. Cassian of Imola, Writing Teacher, Martyr

Professore, even at the end, carried away
by your own passion for perfection,
you would be heard, lecturing on
in the steamy courtroom
while distant dogs and tradesmen
chanted the day away. The judge,
ex-army politico with no love
for those whose hearts hemorrhage
at the slightest mystery, those
who preach the potential divinity
of every member of every class,
was bored as could be, having
listened to hundreds before you
dying to profess that all must agree.
He'd somewhere else to be hours ago,
and still you ranted on
about conception, inspiration and The Word.
He sentenced you to die, but not
in any of the trite ways—no barbs
from illiterate gladiators, fangs
of lions keen for human meat.
He ordered your writing students
to stab you with their pens.
A bad class, they were too happy
to oblige, hating you
for your stinging insistence
on the spirit and law of each letter.
In bold strokes still read,
every word a mortal wound,
you made them tell the truth.

— David Citino