





MARIO STEFANI

NO
OTHER
GODS

*55 poems translated by
Anthony Reid*

*with linocuts by
J. Martin Pitts*



The Kouros Press

☞ Mario Stefani was born in Venice in 1938, and love for his native city is the hallmark of his poetry. 'If Venice had no bridge' (he writes in one of his Epigrams) 'Europe would be an island.' Boys, the lifeblood of a dying Venezia, provide a unifying theme.

A scholarly man, with University honours and many important literary prizes to his name, Stefani has published twelve books of poetry. Some are in Venetian dialect and all have enduring charm. They are characterised by a limpid clarity of expression — a deceptive simplicity.

Like Japanese *haiku*, his poems often encapsulate much in tiny compass. With how few brush-strokes he can bring alive for us Campo San Giacomo, his own beloved square. The magic and music of such verses, their haunting nostalgia, are all too often lost in a translation.

This version does not claim to be the exception, although the translator enjoyed many advantages. A former interpreter, Anthony Reid lived for many years in Italy. He knows Venice well, is a friend of Stefani and has secured the poet's warm approval for this book. ☞



☞ With all your youth, you were
my wine;
and, through my window, were
my morning breeze;
Spring ever-coming-back you were
that never died;
the gleam of sun
that lit my balcony.

☞ The sudden eruption
of a boy's happy voice
behind the house.

☞ Apollo is for me
the dark-eyed
lovely boy
I meet at times
giving me meaning smiles
angel for sure
archangel perhaps
of unpermitted joys.

☞ Fair sea-farers,
who never heard
of Leopardi or D'Annunzio,
but well aware
of how to steal maids' hearts
with their enchanting eyes;
clad in white-azure vests,
engaging with their bodies
more vividly than any Dante verse
my lover's soul.

☞ They'll lock me up
for sure
seeing me with my statue
my Apollo
thinking I've stolen it
from some Museum
when they observe
the incarnate
classic beauty
of your face . . .

☞ A cardiograph's no use
for hearts like mine.

☞ His agile frame
that tops the slope
so easily
carries my love;
oh happy bike
that carries you
light playing
on your hair.

☞ At night I listen
to your breath . . .
voice . . . silence . . .
and I find no peace,
wondering
what binds me to you:
your purity
burns in my veins,
your body soars
above the tremulous
white marble
of palazzi,
over the tired dreams
of water,
your body lovely:
the body of a boy.

☞ *In the soft-swaying craft
bare to the sun's embrace
his body seemed
a statuette of Eros
or Attis
or Apollo
unburied from the past
his form as fair
as Plato's Charmides . . .*

☞ *He was an angel
out of heaven
to soothe a poet's soul:
blue eyes and crimson lips
and faultless frame
of a young pagan lad.*

☞ *My heart you've filched,
my watch, my wallet, boy.
My heart, alas, who can recover that?
Boy, try to rob from me
the recollection of your loveliness!*



☞ *Dreams*
unassailable
by time.

☞ *From Sybaris for the Olympic Games*
he's come
fine form fragrant with oil
and overcome
the Greek Simonides
first in weightlifting
then the jump
and sprint
fast from the mark
black hair
proud of the victory wreaths
eyes shining.

☞ *Eros my bedfellow*
gives me no peace tonight;
he's come from ancient Greece
to agitate
the home of my affection.



☞ Boy
smiling at your reflection
in the water
singing
with joie-de-vivre
you said
you always thought of me
but a mere breeze
can blow away such lies.

☞ Head all awash with rain
and wind
and tranquil happiness
Campo San Giacomo,
square of my district's kids,
with their sweet boasts of love.

☞ About you I adore
that certain smile,
your youth
that comes back with a shout
into my life.

☞ I'm off!
yes sir
with no mosquito-net
alpenstock aqualung
on a Grand Tour
of his anatomy
pausing pleasantly
at every station
hoping the hours concede
discreet complicity.

☞ Remember my explorings of your body
travelling
ardent inquisitive
discovering
highways and byways
with little bites and kisses
lover voracious for forbidden joys?
Remember how I kissed your face
eyes opening then shut
so teasingly
that mouth of yours
its taste of bitterness?

☞ *Amid the crowd
one solitary lad
grinning March hare
teeth gleaming white
hair tufted on his brow
who mocks the world . . .
and grins.*

☞ *Arabesques of void
of emptiness
sky flecked with blue
along the strand
stretched motionless
a boy in all his beauty.*

☞ *Loneliness
is not to be alone
but love
without return.*



☞ Pressing light kisses on your hand,
I said:
I'll have no other gods but you.'
You laughed . . . a silver smile.

☞ Graceful my boy
like a sea-gull in flight
that's gone one day
leaving me lonely
lacking his smile
searching the sky
for solace from its blue.

☞ From tiny moments
in life's fabric
this:
a voice recalled,
spellbinding
voice.

☞ If Paradise existed,
it would be
to gaze at a sweet boy
eternally:
the everlasting
smile of youth,
the never lost
intoxication of the flesh.

☞ I just saw down the street
a poem walking
'What!'
Franco returning
all happy from the match
brown eyes aglow
with glory from the game,
and just below his chin
a vivid scar
crimson with blood.

☞ I've lost my eyes
to that boy;
now I'm blind
how can I walk away?



☞ *Compact of beauty
he surrendered
to a glance
then bit by bit
to love;
a cloud
has clouded
sense
thinking of him
boarding the train,
and my heart
tires of life.*

☞ *'Thank you' I said
'It's nothing' he replied
not knowing
why I thanked him
nor what he'd given me.*

☞ *To find again your lips
sleep-tinted.*

☞ Angels, archangels
and angelic host:
I know you all.
Sometimes I meet you
on the street
beauty made flesh.

☞ Santa Barbara
guardian of sailors
succour me;
enchanted boys
wound me with love;
of your bounty
succour me.

☞ His voice
I'll hear again;
make love,
finding
myself again
within his eyes.

☞ They roam the street
each with an arm
around the other
laughing joyfully
frankly revealing
all their private thoughts
in tones as soft
as down upon their cheeks.

☞ Lovely the lad
sprawled out on deck
in such carefree abandon;
and the young fruit-seller
black-haired
whose languid drowsy pose
shows
grace and gentility;
and campo boys
glancing with hooded eyes
remembering me
sensing the line
that strips them bare.



☞ *I don't recall your name
but what of that
my body
is a string
already plucked,
record,
sea-shell
that treasures up the past.*

☞ *Morning
has gone
in death's
soft silences;
thoughts
blow about
like veils
in calm
of loneliness
amid palazzi;
here in the harmony
of a young
adolescent form
I have found
peace.*

☞ *A photograph:
bare rocks
cold Northern sea
and a blond boy
hair blown back by the wind.*

*A photograph:
image that's timeless
without place . . .
yet in my thoughts
we have said much.*

*And every day:
I take my wallet out
to gaze at you . . .*

☞ *Over that alabaster form
my restless yearning hands
caressed your flesh.
Such light that day,
such skies!
Time intertwined with us
smiles
scattered April joy.*



☞ In your bed
and from your bitter lips
I've learnt all that love means.
And I've sought other lips
that gave and took
for pay.
But now
forgetting other paths
I come to you
Back to the classic fount
to find the satisfaction
for my thirst.

☞ Your body
glimpsed
at a street-corner:
splendid strength;
Noise
of passing tram
and people's talk
talk talk . . .
And in a mist
dreaming of you
longing
to hold time still.

☞ Convert to life
convert to love
Venetian Mario
sent maybe
by some strange quirk
of fate
from pagan times
to laugh
at all religious sects
and warn the world
never to lose
the gift of living.

☞ How lovely those eyes were
and how they shone!
Heart
put aside
the age-old passion.
But hope
bizarrely burns;
if . . . if . . .
some day
those perfect lips
might wear a smile
for me.

☞ *Arcadian joy must be
this pastoral love
poised between heaven and bell,
yearnings and promises:
mechanic
engineer
your robust certain hands
bold all the riches of Arabia
your hands that smell of oil
good glowing hands.*

☞ *That boy's smile
is my heart's happiness
his shining eyes
grief's remedy
in very truth
my joy.*

☞ *A wounded bird was nestled to my breast
bright-eyed a boy
came up to me and said:
'May I caress him if I hold him tight?'
'Why yes, and I'll bug you.'*



☞ Your Greek refinement
and your perfect smile
an overture . . .
prelude to joys
far more intense:
How I remember . . .
this torrid afternoon
long restless hours
remember . . .
be quiet, heart,
and, mind, do not recall . . .
too vivid still
that recollection.

☞ Already in the alleys
young boys play
happy with paper planes
and I'm like them
in love with trifles
nothings
each has his saving grace
his recompense.

☞ Hair dark and soft
as the caress
of angel's wing;
eyes gleaming bright
like scintillating sun
in the sea's deep;
moving about the house,
slim fingers bent
as if in prayer;
and as he goes
a sensual thrill
as when rose-petals fall.

☞ 'I love you' I said
and the words came tumbling
from uncertain lips,
drifting in the air for ages,
then lightly fell on you.

☞ To work or steal are you abroad
at this hour of the night?
You're both a thief and killer
with your glance.



☞ *By happy chance
I've given the gondolier
at the Rialto ferry
flowers
instead of cash.*

☞ *Dear lad,
whom memory recalls
so briefly
before your face dissolves:
sweet flesh
and bandit grin
that night of so much love.*

☞ *I don't regret
spending my life
on futile love affairs
I don't want power
nor do I burn with hate
I love boys' loveliness
their voices
happy smiles.*



☞ Of this book,
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are Blado and Poliphilus.
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