

Gaspara Stampa

Fifty Selected Sonnets

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Introduction

Gaspara Stampa (1523-1554) was born in Padua, her father Bartolomeo being a prosperous jewel merchant. After Bartolomeo's death in 1530, her mother Cecilia returned, with her children, to Venice, her native city. Cecilia was highly-educated, and her house became a gathering place for cultural figures of the day. By the mid 1540's Gaspara and her sister Cassandra were praised for their musical ability, and Gaspara likely composed and performed settings for the madrigals she wrote, as well as being a notable singer of others' works. Near to Christmas (see Sonnet 2), in 1548, she met Count Collaltino di Collalto, a member of a wealthy family owning land around Treviso. He was a soldier, the same age as Gaspara, and also a published poet (1545), who spent much of his life in military engagements in France and Italy, before his death in 1569. There is a notable portrait thought to be of Collaltino in armour, painted by Veronese. Their connection seems to have terminated around 1551. Gaspara died in April 1554, leaving behind her unpublished sonnets and other *rime* recording her apparently unrequited love for Collaltino, amongst other subjects, which were published, through the efforts of her sister Cassandra, in that same year. In dedicatory poems prefacing that edition she is referred to as the 'Sappho of our day.'

Gaspara Stampa is invoked by Rilke in the first of his '*Duino Elegies*', primarily as an example of a notable woman possessed by unrequited love, but that is to under-estimate the sheer literary quality of her verse, which stands as part of the long tradition of love-poetry, from Sappho and the Roman elegiac poets through to Dante and Petrarch, including the many poems addressed to a '*love afar*', as seen, for example, in Troubadour poetry and the works of Catherine de Pisan. Gaspara can be seen to explore this tradition, and that of the Petrarchan sonnet, as a creative artist in her own right, not simply as someone involved in an apparently one-sided love affair. Without doubting her love for Collaltino, one should note her equal passion for the Muse.

Translator's Note

Due to the limited number of rhymes available in English compared to Gaspara's Italian, the rhyme scheme in these translations has been altered

throughout, in order to produce viable English rhyming verse, while preserving the basic structure of the sonnet form. With the same objective, a few minor changes to the content have also been made, which do not substantially alter the sense and intent of her verse. The numeral given, before the bracketed Italian opening line of each sonnet, is the number of that sonnet in the 1544 edition.

Sonnets

I: All you who hear in these sorrowful rhymes (1: Voi ch'ascoltate in questo meste rime)

All you who hear, in these sorrowful rhymes,
These accents, sorrowful and darkening,
The music of my deep love, my lamenting
A pain that beyond all other pain climbs;
Wherever worth's esteemed in our time,
Glory, not only pardon, for such lament,
I hope to find midst those of high descent,
Since its cause, indeed, proves so sublime.
And more, I hope some woman then may say:
'Most happy is she, that she thus sustained,
For so dear a cause, a suffering so dear.
Ah, why does such Fortune not come my way,
Such love, for such a noble Lord attained,
That I may, of such a Lady, prove the peer.'

Note: the opening line echoes Petrarch's first sonnet of the Canzoniere.

II: Twas close to the day our Creator came (2: Era vicino il dì, che'l Creatore)

Twas close to the day our Creator came,
In human form, and with a human face,
Forth from the Virgin womb, who in high place
Might yet have chosen ever to remain,
That my illustrious Lord, he for whom
I have scattered such laments, known such woe;
He who might in nobler place have lodged so,
Found in my heart a nest, where it made room.
Such a fine fortune, and felt so rarely,
I welcomed with delight, my sole regret

That the gift, of which it made me worthy,
The Eternal Care so late did grant; I set
My hopes, my thoughts, my gaze, all, endlessly,
On him who does all others o'er-top yet
That the sun lights, in rank and courtesy.

Note: the date of their first meeting was near to Christmas, 1548.

**III: If from a rough shepherd of flocks and herds (3: Se di rozo pastor
di gregge, e folle)**

If from a rough shepherd of flocks and herds
Ascra's heights could yet bring forth a poet,
Hesiod, that among those praised would sit,
Such that he o'er-topped others with his words,
What wonder if a high and verdant hill
Raises me, humble, low, to pen my woe,
More than mere learning or the planets, so?
Its sacred, honoured, fatal shade yet will
From my heart, much like some sudden tempest,
Drive all ignorance and all baseness, till
It lifts me from my low place, and shall best
Renew my style; with song my veins shall fill,
And in my soul make inspiration guest.

Note: Ascra was a town in ancient Greek Boeotia, situated on the lower slopes of Mount Helicon, and the birthplace of the poet Hesiod. The 'high hill' is, in Italian, a play on the Count's name, Collaltino.

**IV: When that my noble Lord was first conceived (4: Quando fu prima
il mio Signor concetto)**

When that my noble Lord was first conceived,
Every planet in the sky, all the stars,
Granted him such gifts as, beside all ours,

Might show a true perfection thus achieved.
Saturn granted him highest intellect;
Great Jove the pursuit of worth and beauty;
Mars made him more fit for martial duty;
Phoebus his form with sense and style decked;
Venus made him handsome, and elegant,
Mercury gave eloquence, but the Moon,
She made him far colder than I would want.
Each of his rare and many gifts, full soon,
Lit the bright flame in me, that doth enchant,
Yet but that one made him with ice commune.

Note: Gaspara here grants Collaltino qualities which reflect those traditionally associated, in astrology, with the sun, moon and planets.

V: Ladies, if you would seek to know my Lord (7: Chi vuol conoscer, Donne, il mio Signore)

Ladies, if you would seek to know my lord,
Picture a man pleasing and sweet of aspect,
Young in years, though mature of intellect,
That glory and valour's image doth afford.
Blond his hair, lively his hue doth prove,
Tall of build, broad, firm in every respect,
And finally, in all ways, made perfect,
Except (ah, me!) a little cruel in love.
And if you would seek to know me, picture
A woman in actions, and in seeming,
Who shows Love's pain, and Death's image, ever;
For true and constant faith, yet a dwelling,
One, who sheds tears, and burns and doth suffer,
Yet from a cruel lover pity cannot wring.

VI: If I, a low and abject woman, may (8: Se così come sono abietta, e vile)

If I, a low and abject woman, may
Bear, deep within myself, so bright a flame,
Why should I not show the world today
A mark of the style and vein of that same?
If, to a place I could not seek to claim,
Love's new, unfamiliar spark has raised me,
Why should it not, with fresh skill, equally,
Give 'pain' and 'pen' in me an equal name?
And if not by the simple force of nature
Perchance by some miracle, that may
Overcome, exceed, break every measure.
How this might be I cannot truly say,
I only know that, with my great venture,
I feel my heart sets a new style in play.

**VII: If Love should render me myself, someday (9: S'avien, ch'un
giorno Amor à me mi renda)**

If Love should render me myself, someday,
And, from that heartless Lord thus release me,
Which my heart fears, more than wishes, truly,
Such joy it seems to find in pain, always,
You'll summon up my endless faith in vain,
And my immense, immeasurable love,
Too late, your wrongs, your cruelty, will move
You to repent; to hear you I'll not deign.
And I, who'll sing of new-found liberty,
Once free of these harsh, savage ties that bind,
Will pass on to that future state, lightly.
And if heaven with my just prayers I find,
Perchance I'll see you seized most cruelly,
Your life in the grip of my vengeful mind.

**VIII: High Hill, that is both pleasing and gracious (10: Alto Colle,
gradito, e gratioso)**

High hill, that is both pleasing and gracious,

My new Parnassus, my new Helicon,
Where my laurel wreath I shall wait upon,
Resting-place from labours, sweet and precious:
A lofty aim spurs me to speak in rhyme
Of how, among us here, your fame has grown,
How you are praised, by the Garonne and Rhône,
Yet I dare not begin; all that, in time,
I might thus sing could but cast a shadow
O'er the truth; for all that, indeed, is true
Beyond my pen and others' pens doth go.
May heaven, in branch and crown, preserve you,
And keep you a refuge for lovers so,
Gentle hill, yet worthy of Empire too.

Note: 'High hill', in Italian 'Alto Colle', again plays on the name of Count Collaltino, who is now absent, fighting for Henri II of France (1549). Once again Gaspara conjoins 'pain and pen' linking her love and admiration for the absent Collaltino with her literary aspirations.

**IX: Ah, why were my eyes so late to open (12: Deh, perche così tardo
gli occhi aspersi)**

Ah, why were my eyes so late to open
To that divine, non-human, yet dear face,
Wherein I found, carved and incised with grace,
An ocean of diverse wonders hidden?
I'd not have bathed my eyes, alas, in vain,
Uselessly grieving for this foolish life,
Nor had my soul so mourned, or known such strife,
Through Love's and Fate's gifts, of which I complain.
Perchance all of Adria, and its shore,
Thanks to the pen he has granted me,
Had ne'er my name been able to ignore.
I weep for the time I wasted, only,
Setting my gaze elsewhere; and yet the more
I hope to make my flame the more worthy.

Note: Adria is Gaspara's name for Venice and the Adriatic Sea.

X: Who then will grant a Dove's or Eagle's wing (13: Chi darà penne d'Aquila, ò Columba)

Who then will grant a Dove's or Eagle's wing,
To my low style, so that it flies, my soul,
From east to west, likewise from pole to pole,
To where all's free of arrow, and of sling?
That, like to a trumpet, resonant and loud,
I might sound the valour and the beauty
Of that face for which I sigh so deeply,
That unique face, and of my work be proud?
But, since that's denied, and I may not climb
Alone, to where I might, could my poor style
But match my content, and so march in time;
Bathed by Adria's blessed waves, the while,
This happy shore alone will hear my rhyme,
Harbour of my delight, and bitter trial.

XI: Those who gaze, all intently, at the sky (19: Come chi mira in ciel fisso le stelle)

Those who gaze, all intently, at the sky
Will ever find some new sight there, above,
That, once unseen, will brightly seek to move,
A fiery spirit, o'er the world, on high.
Gazing so at those fine, high gifts of yours,
My eye, my Lord, indeed, sometimes discerns,
Some new virtue, that thus new reason earns
To write or speak of you, on these fair shores.
Yet, just as mortal tongue, in human veil,
Can barely tell of all the keen eye sees
Of the heavenly lights, is doomed to fail,
I may upon you gaze, and never cease,

And yet my tongue also will scarce avail
To speak of all I see, all that doth please.

**XII: Sometimes I seek to speak to Love, saying: (25: Trami dico ad
Amor talhora, homai)**

Sometimes I seek to speak to Love, saying:
Loose me from the grip of this savage lord,
Who lives for my shame, and pain doth afford,
For whom I burned, burn still, and sang, and sing.
Why must my cries and suffering not bring
To my lord what might sate his fierce will?
O, when of my blood shall you drink your fill,
Diana's temple, cruel, ever-thirsting?
Then I recall my thoughts, and I repent
In my anger, he's recalled, and I grow calm,
Seek not one torment less that I am sent.
With such new art, new power, new charm,
The beauty I love, and fear, therein pent,
Darkens, entangles, conquers every qualm.

**XIII: I wept, I burned, I sang, I burn and sing (26: Arsi, piansi, cantai,
piango, ardo e canto)**

I wept, I burned, I sang, I burn and sing,
I shall weep, and burn, and sing forever –
Till Death, or Fortune, or Time, as ever,
Dim wit, eyes, heart, style, tears, fire, everything –
The beauty, worth, and wisdom outright,
With which, in fair, wise, honourable fashion,
Love, Nature, and learning temper passion,
In his face, breast, and heart, with holy light.
For, as the Sun comes and goes, then day,
Winter, summer, each passing hour of night,
Shadow and light, he brings and takes away.
So that, with outward and with inward sight,
I find in his deeds, words, his every way,

A sweetness there: grace, splendour, shining bright.

**XIV: Whoe'er knows not how sweet to lose one's heart (31: Chi non sà,
come dolce il cor si fura)**

Whoe'er knows not how sweet to lose one's heart
It is, how sweet to cease from suffering,
How sweet, too, to calm one's every longing,
So that the soul cares yet for naught but art,
Must come and witness the rare occasion
Of hearing you sing, Count, one single time,
When you sweeten, ever, with song and rhyme,
Heaven, earth, all that Nature doth fashion.
For whene'er your amorous accents sound
The air grows calm, the storm-wind ceasing,
The proud wave, the tempest's tightly bound.
And, when they receive all you are bringing,
They will believe bears, tigers, serpents found
Themselves thus charmed by Orpheus' singing.

**XV: I swear Love, by your every arrow (32: Per la saette tue Amor ti
guiro)**

I swear, Love, by your every arrow,
And by your powerful and sacred flame –
I care not if my heart you burn and maim,
Nor if you wound me now to the marrow –
That in no other age, past or future,
Take whom you will, your fire so fiercely,
Nor that sharp barb of yours so acutely,
Has loving woman felt, or will feel ever.
There's a virtue born from this suffering,
That dims and conquers my sense of pain,
So that it's barely felt, scarcely hurting.
This, that torments soul and body again,
This is the real fear presaging my dying:
What if my fire be only straw and flame?

**XVI: Welcome me, O benign Hill, O river (35: Accogliete benigni ò
Colle, ò fiume)**

Welcome me, O benign Hill, O river,
Home of the divine Graces, and of Love,
I, who shall your noble Lord approve,
Burn, and live, solely by his light ever;
And if you can make my inflamed heart,
Perchance, consume itself less fiercely,
I'll ask the winds to be your friends, truly,
And every nymph and god to take your part.
And I'll carve, in the bark of your fair trees,
When, finally, I am forced to leave you,
My memories of all your courtesies.
Yet alas, I feel, my flame leaps anew,
That should lessen, and, despite my pleas,
Here, both my love and my desire renew.

Note: the 'Hill' is again a play on Collaltino's name. The sonnet addresses his estates in the Veneto. The river is the Piave or Anasso, from which she derived a poetic name for herself, Anasilla.

**XVII: Waves, that trouble this sea, these waters, so (40: Onde, che
questo mar turbate spesso)**

Waves, that trouble this sea, these waters, so
As I am troubled still by jealousy,
Come now, and offer me your company,
Being so near, and dear to me also,
May northerlies and southerlies prove less
Importunate, and so less cruel to you,
And Aeolus, sometime, grant peace anew,
A gift I sought from love without success.
I have found so much to weep about, alas,
That the moisture flowing from my eyes

Does little or no good; as these waves pass,
Grant me your moisture, as your waters rise,
Enough to allow me to unleash, en masse,
As befits my deep woe, my tears and cries.

Note: the sea is the Adriatic, Aeolus the Greek god of the winds.

XVIII: Ah me, if only the noose bound you thus (41: Ahi, se così vi distrignesse il laccio)

Ah me, if only the noose bound you, thus,
That tightens about me, constrains my woe,
You would no longer seek to drag me so
From one scourge to another, yet because
I am one made of fire, and you of ice,
You are at liberty, while I'm oppressed,
I am exhausted, and you fresh from rest,
You live content, while I die once, then twice,
You lay down strict laws, for me, not even
Milo's shoulders would have strength to bear,
How can I, weak and frail, obey them, then?
Pursue what heaven ordains as my share,
Perchance, someday, Amor will think again,
Perchance, someday, justice will be my fare.

XIX: If you could see O mother of all loves (44: Se tu vedessi ò Madre de gli Amori)

If you could see, O mother of all loves,
And your beloved son, the living flame
That rages in my breast, the very same
That outdone, or matched, by no other proves;
If you could see the ocean of my woe,
That, since my heart was subject to you two,
These sorrowful eyes have wept, all due
To that charming and graceful form, I know

That you would take pity on my weeping,
And this the flame, evil and pitiless,
That bursts forth in my writing and singing.
But first you strike, and then you flee, no less
Swiftly than does a flash of lightning,
While I am left, to tears and flame's excess.

**XX: You, who in paint or wax, in bronze or marble (55: Voi, ch'en
marmi, in colori, in bronzo, in cera)**

You, who in paint or wax, in bronze or marble,
Imitate, and even outdo Nature,
Forming now this, now some other figure,
So, their own true form they then resemble,
Come gather now, in gracious company,
To fashion here the most handsome creature
That, since the Primal Care shaped each feature
Of the first man, none wrought here equally;
Portray my Count, and also keep in mind
What lies without, and within him, there,
So that naught is lacking in what we find,
Only be sure you grant him a heart to spare,
For, as you see, two are to him assigned,
His, and mine, that Love placed in his care.

Note: an extant portrait in armour, by Paolo Veronese, believed to be that of Collaltino, tentatively dated to the period 1546-1550, is in the collection of the Chateau of Jaromerice nad Rokytnou, in South Moravia (Czech Republic).

**XXI: Portray me next, set in another space (56: Ritragette poi me da
l'altra parte)**

Portray me next, set in another space,
Alive without a soul, without a heart,
A rare, new miracle of Love and art,
Just as you see me; show there my true face,

Like a vessel, sailing without rigging,
Without foremast, canvas, or a rudder,
Gazing on the gracious light, as ever,
Of his Pole Star, wherever I am drifting.
And ensure that my left side conveys
A countenance that's sad and afflicted,
While my right is vibrant, lit by his rays.
My happy state today is, *here*, depicted,
While my Lord, as yet, before me stays,
There, fear he'll love elsewhere is predicted.

**XXII: Why, my Lord, weary themselves, in vain (57: À che Signor'
affaticar' in vano)**

Why, my Lord, weary themselves, in vain,
Sculpting in marble, painting on canvas,
As Buonarotti or as Titian has,
These others who in art high fame do gain,
To capture you, imprinted, as you are,
Openly, plainly in my breast and mind,
So that your image, ever, there I'll find,
No matter whether you are near or far?
Perchance the reason is you would be seen
As loyal and gracious in your semblance,
As in act and gesture, elsewhere, I mean;
While I, alas, as I scarce dare instance,
Bear your likeness as you, to me, have been,
An inconstant and disdainful presence.

Note: this sonnet and the preceding one, form a double 'portrait' of Collaltino and herself. Buonarotti is the sculptor Michelangelo (1475-1564); Titian (1488/90-1576) a representative of Venetian painting, both living contemporaries of Gaspara.

XXIII: Receive of me my courteous lament (66: Ricevete cortesi I miei lamenti)

Receive of me my courteous lament
And bear it faithfully to my great Lord;
O blessed happy winds of France, consent,
To whom those bright handsome eyes light afford.
And tell him, in accents sadly yearning,
That if he be not moved to aid this heart,
The light from out my eyes must swift depart,
Should he nor write, nor be soon returning,
For the extreme and the endless torment
I've suffered through his absence pains me so,
Death alone is my fear and my intent.
And if my dying words were to blow
Through the sky, in vain, though truly meant,
I've no defence, no art of mine to show.

Note: Collaltino left Venice in the summer of 1549 for France, where he supported Henri II against the English at the siege of Boulogne. He returned to Venice in November of that year.

XXIV: My life's a sea, the waves of my weeping (72: La mia vita è un mar, l'acqua è'l mio pianto)

My life's a sea, the waves of my weeping,
The winds are but the breath of my deep sighs,
Hope is the vessel, and my desire plies
The oars, and sets the sail, of its moving.
My Pole Star is the ever-sacred light,
Shining from each bright, each starlike eye,
On which I gaze, though far from me they lie,
With no pilot, or tiller, in my sight.
The perilous storm, the sudden tempest,
Are my fear, and that ice-cold jealousy
Swift to arrive, slow to depart at best.
Calm waters have not been known to me,

Dear Count, since you departed, I'll attest,
For, with you, went all my serenity.

**XXV: Bind those eyes to which you bound me, Amor (78: Gli occhi,
onde mi legasti Amor' affrena)**

Bind those eyes to which you bound me, Amor,
So, they cannot gaze on other beauties,
The other graces, other courtesies
Of fair ladies of which France has full store.
For then my life, oft sweet and pleasing,
Will be quite free of tears and bitterness;
My life, that does but pure disdain express
For all but their light, so bright and calming.
And if it happens that, by chance, he's shown
Some object that of his love is worthy,
So that his strong heart with flame is sown,
Wound him with your leaden arrow swiftly,
Or slay me with your dart of gold, for, surely,
I could not bear to live if such were known.

**XXVI: Weep Ladies, and since my death moves not (86: Piangete
Donne, e poi che la mia morte)**

Weep Ladies, and since my death moves not
This Lord so cruel, who far off doth remain,
May you, who possess hearts sweet and humane,
Open the gates of pity, mourn my lot.
Weep with me, and grieve for my bitter fate,
Call Love, and heaven, evil and inhuman,
And the hand, which wounded this poor woman,
Merciless, for my death twill not frustrate.
And since but dust and ash I soon must be,
May one of you, of pity, with voice of woe,
Lit by a spark from my flame, say of me:
'Hidden by this harsh stone, lies, here below,

Poor Anasilla, whose fidelity,
A rare example of great love did show.'

**XXVII: A new and rare miracle of Nature (91: Novo e raro miracol di
Natura)**

A new and rare miracle of Nature –
Though neither new nor rare to that Lord
Whom all the name of Love must here accord,
One whose work surpasses every measure –
That my lord's worth who, ever, wins the prize
From all, defeating those who valour show,
Is vanquished, alas, only by this sorrow,
No other breast endures, nor with such sighs.
Just as in beauty, zeal, nobility,
He does exceed each and every knight,
He's undone by my faith and I, wholly.
Miracle of Love, now brought to light,
Grief one must know to credit it, ah me,
Conquering what lies beyond the finite.

**XXVIII: Like to some fugitive and wretched deer (93: Qual fuggitiva
cerva e miserella)**

Like to some fugitive and wretched deer,
Who a dart sunk deep in her flank doth hide,
Flying from Death, who travels at her side,
Midst fields and woods, as the hounds draw near;
So, I, struck hard by that wicked arrow
The savage hunter discharged, cruelly,
Fly – at my side desire and jealousy –
Nor can avoid now what my stars do show,
That my life to pitiful death must draw,
If my Sun should fail to return to us,
That yet brings comfort to a foreign shore.
He is my dittany, that must heal me thus,
And turn to pleasure and delight once more

My fate that proves both harsh and noxious.

**XXIX: O Night, to me more brilliant and more blessed (104: O notte, à
me più chiara, e più beata)**

O Night, to me more brilliant, and more blessed,
Than the most blessed, and most brilliant, day,
Night, worthy of being praised; not, I say,
By me alone, but minds of the rarest,
You were the faithful minister, truly,
Of all my joys; all that was bitter here,
In this, my life, you've rendered sweet and dear,
Placing me in the arms of him who bound me.
All that was lacking was that I became
The fortunate Alcmene, then, for whom
Dawn once delayed her customary claim
On heaven's gate; and yet it is my doom,
Bright Night, ne'er to so praise your name
That my subject fails my skill to consume.

**XXX: Set me where savage waters break and moan (111: Pommi ove'l
mar irato geme e frange)**

Set me where savage waters break and moan,
Or where the waves are gentler and calmer;
Place me where the Sun is fiercer, brighter,
Or where the harsh cold pierces to the bone.
Set me in the icy Don, the Ganges' chill,
Or where the noxious air breeds its venom,
Or where they laugh and groan from Love's poison,
Or where the sweet dew manna doth distil.
Set me where the cruel Scythians war,
Or where folk are quiet and sleep at night,
Where'er we live and die; no less, no more,
I'd live as I have lived, and shine as bright,
Be as I have been, could I but be sure
That my two stars denied me not their light.

**XXXI: Enough to win were they, those two bright eyes (118: Bastavan
Conte que'bei lumi, quelli)**

Enough to win were they, those two bright eyes,
The Sun's light, Count, Cytherea's beauty,
Love's weapons; and from me my liberty,
That instant when I gazed at them, unwise.
Enough to make me burn for you forever,
And speak, so some future age may know,
Without you seeking to augment my woe,
And fresh streams of your verse deliver.
To secure me, with your worth and honour
You might tighten the cord, could you do so,
Or increase, could you do so, my ardour.
To this or that I'd scant resistance show;
By whatever Love could do of either,
I'm bound to you, Count, and consumed also.

**XXXII: O, with what effort I have toiled, in vain (123: O tante indarno
mie fatiche sparse)**

O with what effort I have toiled, in vain,
O, what sighs, and yet in vain I've sighed,
O, living fire, O faith, search here inside,
No other froze and burned so, in such pain.
O, pages vainly written, those still to write,
In praise of those beloved orbs that shine.
O, hopes – that tend to these desires of mine,
Worthy of winning me far more delight
Than ever – that the wind steals suddenly,
Now that this wicked Lord of mine has said
That only when I'm near he thinks of me –
Those words to these very ears he has fed –
And that when he leaves then, instantly,
All his remembrance of my love has fled.

**XXXIII: Thus, am I pacified, content to fear (126: Così m'acqueto di
temer contenta)**

Thus, am I pacified, content to fear
Happy to harbour bitter jealousy,
As long as the light whom I hold so dear
Consents, and my sorrows leave him free.
For it is far sweeter thus to contend,
Than to seek pleasure with another,
Nor to repentance now shall I descend,
Regarding my gracious, noble gaoler;
For this earthly life would ne'er allow
Our seizing upon such divine delight,
Unaccompanied by pain, I'll avow.
Thus I, drowned in suffering, day and night,
When once his divine rays light my brow,
Find myself altered from myself, outright.

**XXXIV: Thus, though I lack all life I live in pain (133: Così senza
haver vita vivo in pene)**

Thus, though I lack all life, I live in pain,
And, living without joy, feel no content.
Dead and alive, Love doth me so maintain;
To neither death nor life grants me consent.
So, all folk born discover their own fate;
Such is mine, born neath a cruel planet,
That though I've never scattered seeds of hate,
Sour fruit I harvest, in a parched desert.
And if I wished to put an end to torment,
Through my death, that's not mine to do,
For, lacking life, one cannot give assent
To dying so; nor what Love has in view,
Nor heaven, can I know, or what is meant
By this, except I'm wretched: that is true.

**XXXV: Fair meadows, all the sweet and smiling scene (145: Liete
campagne, dolci colli ameni)**

Fair meadows, all the sweet and smiling scene,
Green fields, and towering forests, grassy dells,
Sheltered valley, where now lives and dwells
He who grants me days wretched or serene;
Caves filled with cool and amorous shadow,
Where the sun's rays fail to penetrate,
Sweet birds, fresh streams, all summer's fair estate,
Nymphs, Pan, Fauns, Silenus, O, let go
Of my Lord, and return him soon to me,
Or render him an account of all my sighs;
You who hold him, speak of my misery,
Say my life must fail as the daylight dies,
If in a little while, no, a few hours, truly,
His light fails to illuminate these eyes.

**XXXVI: Weep Ladies, and may Amor weep with you (151: Piangete
Donne, e con voi pianga Amore)**

Weep Ladies, and may Amor weep with you,
Since he who has wounded me fails to weep;
So that my soul may the more swiftly leap
Beyond the tormented body that you view.
And if any filled with pity, of gentle heart,
Ever fulfilled another's dying wish,
When I am dead and buried, write that this
Is the source from which my sorrows start:
'Greatly she loved, and yet was little loved;
She lived and died in woe, here now she lies,
Who, e'er, the truest of true lovers proved.
Passer-by, halt, I pray, neath peaceful skies,
And learn from her, now from all ill removed,
Follow not those hearts fickle and full of lies.'

Note: the first line is taken from Petrarch's sonnet on the death of Cino da Pistoia.

XXXVII: When Amor reveals to my eyes, and mind (163: Quando mostra à quest'occhi Amor le porte)

When Amor reveals to my eyes, and mind,
The gates to immense, infinite beauty,
That of my only Sun, then, in that glory,
My soul, in its hunger, doth comfort find.
When he, perchance, invokes in that same way,
The memory of unheard-of cruelty,
Pained and dismayed by what my mind doth see,
My soul becomes Death's image, and his prey.
So, in like manner life, death, joy and pain,
And fear and trust, and war and peace, also,
Amor's two hands from the one source maintain.
Nor am I displeased by this changing flow,
Since these tortures are sweet that so enchain,
But fear they're fleeting, and too soon do go.

XXXVIII: Amor, I accuse, sometimes, and the one (166: Io accuso talhora Amor, e lui)

Amor, I accuse, sometimes, and the one
I love; Amor that he binds me tightly,
The other that he could grant life to me,
Yet death he brings; fickle, seeks to be gone.
And yet I forgive them both, even so,
Accuse myself alone, as to my fate;
So little aware my desires, of late,
Of their desire, I garnered my own woe.
For, knowing myself to be unworthy,
I should have gazed at what is less pleasing,
If I had wished to win greater pity.
Phaethon, Icarus, and I, gained nothing,
Seeking much, in our own day, daringly,

Yet scorched by heavenly fire, all-consuming.

XXXIX: Life flies and, alas, in endless sighing (182: La vita fugge, ed io pur sospirando)

Life flies and, alas, in endless sighing,
The greater measure of my years I've spent,
Yet regret not that they were so ardent,
Passed, upon the object of them, gazing.
Were it not that I know not how and when,
Joy may fade, and delight give way to woe,
Little by little, perchance, I might learn, though,
And inure myself to suffering, once again.
Wretched indeed, I know soon it must be,
Either departure, or a change of heart,
Can but mean an end to delight, for me.
Though Love allows me, with prophetic art,
To see the future, yet my heart's frailty
Is such that I may not sustain that part.

XL: Alas! That in the green and flowering meadow (189: Lassa, in questo fiorito, e verde prato)

Alas! That in the green and flowering meadow
Of my delight, amidst fresh grass, where I
Pass, by your leave, Amor, my head held high
Now that my Sun has returned to me so,
There lurks a vile and venomous viper,
That comes now my sweet life to embitter,
And poison the happiest days I'll know.
If such is what comes to pass, this I pray:
That death deprives me, first, of life and sense,
Before this tale attains its final day.
Rather than suffer sorrows so immense,
Better to die, not live in such a way,
And for my pain achieve some recompense.

**XLI: Amor, this, that your proper state we call (192: Amor le stato tuo
è proprio quale)**

Amor, this, that your proper state we call,
Is like to a wheel that's ever spinning,
And she who turns there, sighing or singing,
Without cease must rise, and then must fall.
Now she calls you faithful, and now fickle,
Now makes peace with you, and now feels anger,
Now yields to you as prey, now flees danger.
Now blessed she fears, now hopes to baffle evil,
Now leaps to heaven, now plunges to hell,
Now is far from shore, now reaches harbour,
Now iced with sweat, now feverish for a spell.
I, thus, alas, amidst joy and pleasure,
Am assailed by inner doubts that foretell
A heart held twixt life and death, forever.

**XLII: If to cope with sorrow is to prove strong (199: Se soffrir' il
dolore, è l'esser forte)**

If to cope with sorrow is to prove strong,
And to be strong a sweet and rare virtue,
Then your court it is, Amor, I should view,
And there learn how, amidst no other throng.
For none who dwells there, in your company,
Fails to withstand a thousand fears and pains;
And who a light, bright in appearance, gains,
Must first bear darkness, shadows, patiently;
And learn, there, moderation, equally,
Since from whatever we may most desire,
We must abstain, sometimes, respectfully.
These Virtues, Amor chooses to admire,
I've gained beneath his rule, assuredly,
And my Lord's, sweet, pitiless, and most dire.

**XLIII: At your leaving, all my joy left with you (201: Al partir vostro,
s'è con voi partita)**

At your leaving, all my joy left with you,
And with it my hope departed, my ardour,
My heart, all my courage, and my vigour;
My soul, my life, nigh on departed too.
There alone remains, more so than before,
A burning and importunate desire,
Which, in your absence, but flares the higher,
While infinite woes shake me to the core.
And if a letter brings not sure relief,
Or a messenger, or your own return,
Then indeed my life can be but brief.
For with naught else but death does true love burn;
A thousand times have I proved that belief,
Who own to little hope yet greatly yearn.

**XLIV: Since, such is my fate, you've now turned away (203: Poi che
per mio destin volgeste in parte)**

Since, such is my fate, you've now turned away;
Yourself, and your desire, and hope, I've lost
Of gazing on those calm eyes, to my cost,
Which I have praised so, for many a day,
I myself turn to that great Sun, whence art
And light is granted me, to draw my boat
From out these Syrtian shoals, and so float
The waves, where oar and sail may play their part:
For reason is my sail, the oars my will,
That to the pride and anger of Amor,
Oppose themselves, like to a wall, a hill.
I fear destruction on some reef no more;
Grieve not, but praise a single bright sun still,
And rest in harbour, quiet and secure.

Note: Gaspara appears to invoke the divine 'Sun', replacing that of Collaltino. Syrtes was the name, in ancient times, of the treacherous shoals and shallows off the Libyan coast of North Africa.

**XLV: Sing of that face, no more my Muse, no more (285: Canta tu
Musa mia non più quel volto)**

Sing of that face no more, my Muse, no more
Of those eyes, of that heavenly beauty,
That seemed to my senses beyond worthy,
Senses veiled in shadow, in days before.
But sing of the wisdom in that wise breast,
Its thousand charms, and its thousand treasures,
Nobility that exceeds all measures;
That of my Count, surpassing all the rest.
Now your Castalian Spring, your new Parnassus
Will not show as spume and spray, but the best
Of virtues closed in that form granted us.
This is how with true glory you'll be blessed,
This shall render you noble and famous,
Bringing you honour thus, from East to West.

Note: this sonnet appears to mark the end, in Gaspara's sonnet sequence, of the apparently one-sided connection with Collaltino.

**XLVI: Amor, since you've granted me liberty (205: Poi che m'hai resa
Amor la libertade)**

Amor, since you've granted me liberty,
Maintain me in this sweet and happy state,
So that my heart's my own, as was my fate
In my lost days of youth, fair and free.
Or if you'd have me live, as formerly,
Loving, following you, my path the same,
Let me burn with a more temperate flame,

And if I'm scorched may others pity me.
For, from certain signs, I do seem to see,
That you fashion new darts, some new net,
Seeking to your yoke, thus, to return me.
To this brief peace leave me, Amor, as yet,
Amor, who take such joy in tyranny,
Amor, who so on working ill seem set.

**XLVII: Love has made me like one that lives in flame (206: Amor
m'ha fatto tal, ch'io vivo in foco)**

Love has made me like one who lives in flame.
To the world I'm some new Salamander;
Nor less strange than that eternal creature
That lives and dies, its nest and pyre the same.
This is all my joy, and all my delight,
To live while burning, and ne'er feel the pain,
And, to him who did this, ne'er complain,
Nor seek his slightest pity, day or night.
Scarcely was that first ardour spent in me,
When Love lit another, that doth so thrive –
For I'll ne'er repent of loving ardently –
Tis like to prove more fruitful, more alive,
If he who's newly seized my heart will be
Content, nor yet to damp my ardour strive.

Note: this sonnet appears to mark the commencement of a new love, perhaps that for Bartholomeo Zen, who is named acrostically in the penultimate sonnet translated here, 216. The salamander was thought to survive in the heart of the fire; the phoenix, a mythical bird, to rise again from its own ashes.

**XLVIII: The wound that I believed had now been healed (215: La
piaga, ch'io credea, che fosse salda)**

The wound, that I believed had now been healed,
Thanks to his absence, and that lack of love

His heart, hard as the Alps, and slow to move
And cold as is the winter's snow, revealed,
Opes, now and then; hot to the touch it grows,
It oozes fluid now, and now leaks blood,
So that my soul is fearful, when it should,
By now, be bold and certain, heaven knows.
Even as I seek this fresh noose to cast
About my neck, I cannot yet be sure
The former knot will fail to hold me fast.
They say fire drives off fire, and yet, Amor,
You, set on torturing me until the last,
That proverb's lack of force, in me, ensure.

**XLIX: Boldly, Love set loose his golden arrow (216: Ben si convien
Signor, che l'aureo dardo)**

Boldly, Love set loose his golden arrow,
And, fittingly, twas buried in your breast;
Reluctant to take fire, tardy at best,
That icy reserve, chill to the marrow,
Has melted and your sweet gaze, now, you turn
On me, whence desire joy rains, and delight,
Love binds the soul, the captive heart's noosed tight,
O, beyond measure, till I burn and yearn.
May it seem less harsh, therefore, to you,
Entwined in this noose, to be so taken,
One in which I was held, and tightly too,
Zealous our ardent charity to waken,
Equally twixt us, bearing as our due,
Newly, our sweet and amorous burden.

Note: the sonnet is an acrostic. Extracting the first letter of each line, and then re-arranging the letters so derived, yields the name of her beloved, Bartholomeo Zen, a Venetian nobleman.

**L: Into the midst of those waves that I braved (219: À mezo il mare,
ch'io varcai tre anni)**

Into the midst of those waves that I braved,
Blown by uncertain winds, for three long years,
Nigh on safe harbour, free of all my fears,
Love drives me, wrongly, woefully enslaved.
Redoubling my desire, as I take wing,
He shows so bright an Orient to my eyes,
That I take comfort in the sight, likewise,
And seem less troubled by what fate may bring.
A fire, which equals that first fire, I feel,
And if in such slight space of time, tis so,
Flames greater than the first it may reveal.
Yet what can I do, although to death I go,
When from the one fire to the next, with zeal,
Swiftly, I fly, and ever-willing, show?

The End of Fifty Selected Sonnets of Gaspara Stampa