

Classic Poetry Series

Gaspara Stampa
- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Gaspara Stampa(1523 - 1554)

Gaspara Stampa was an Italian poet.

Biography

Born in Padua, Stampa's father, Bartolomeo, originally from Milan, was a jewel and gold merchant in Padua. When Stampa was eight, her father died and her mother, Cecilia, moved to Venice with her children Gaspara, Cassandra, and Baldassarre; whom she educated to literature, music, history, and painting. Gaspara and Cassandra excelled at singing and playing the lute, possibly due to training by Tuttovale Menon. Early on, the Stampa household became a literary club, visited by many well-known Venetian writers, painters and musicians.

When her brother died in 1544, Stampa suffered greatly and formed the intention of becoming a nun. However, after a long period of crisis, she came back to "la dolce vita" (the sweet life) in Venice, and was believed to have been involved in a love affair with Count Collaltino di Collalto. It was to him that she eventually dedicated most of the 311 poems she is known to have written. The relationship broke off in 1551, apparently resulting from a cooling of the count's interest, and perhaps in part due to his many voyages out of Venice. Stampa was devastated.

Stampa went into a physical prostration and depression, but the result of this period is a collection of beautiful, intelligent and assertive poems in which she triumphs over Collaltino, creating for herself a lasting reputation. It might be noted in passing that Collaltino is only remembered because of Stampa. She makes clear in her poems that she uses her pain to inspire the poetry, hence her survival and fame. After Collaltino, Stampa had another lover and may not have been a courtesan as some believe. There is evidence that she was a musician who performed madrigals of her own composition.

In 1550 Stampa became a member of the Accademia dei Dabbiosi under the name of "Anaxilla." Toward the end of the year Collaltino returned to Venice, and Stampa spent time with him at his estate, but by the end of the year, deeply depressed, she returned to Venice, marking the end of her relationship with Collaltino and the beginning of a new relationship with Bartolomeo Zen.

Between 1551 and 1552, Stampa enjoyed a period of relative tranquillity. But the following year her health worsened, and she spent a few months in Florence hoping that the milder climate might cure her. She then returned to Venice,

became ill with a high fever, and after fifteen days she died on April 23, 1554.

The register of her parish noted that she died of fever and colic, and of mal de mare (Venetian literally for disease of the matrix). In October 1554, Pietrasanta published the first edition of Stampa's poetry, edited by her sister Cassandra. Her poems were published posthumously in the collection, Rime.

Literature

Stampa's collection of poems has a diary form: Gaspara expresses happiness and emotional distresses, and her 311 poems are one of the most important collections of female poetry of the 16th century. This collection was published after her death by her sister Cassandra, and dedicated to Giovanni Della Casa.

The German poet, [Rilke](http://www.poemhunter.com/rainer-maria-rilke/), refers to Gaspara Stampa in the first of his Duino Elegies; which is often considered his greatest work.

By Now So Sick Of Waiting

By now so sick of waiting, I'm by now
so beaten by the pain (by now the burn
won't stop and he forgets so quickly how
I trust in his return and how I yearn),

that I cry out for her to give me rest,
she of the pallid face and reaper's knife
whose chilly touch defines the edge of life,
so hard the need that grows within my breast.

But she is deaf and gives me no relief
as if she spurned my being mad with grief,
and deafly he denies himself to me.

My eyes are always wet, and weeping fills
this villa and its shore with misery,
while he lives smugly up there in his hills.

Gaspara Stampa

Every Planet Above, And Every Star

Every planet above, and every star,
Gave my lord their powers at his birth:
Each one gave him of their special worth,
To make a single perfect mortal here.
Saturn gave him depths of understanding,
Jupiter for fine actions gave desire,
Mars a greater skill than most in warfare,
Phoebus, elegance and wit in speaking.

Venus beauty too, and gentleness,
Mercury eloquence, but then the moon
Made him too cold for me, in iciness.
Each of these graces, each rare boon,
Make me burn for his fierce brightness,
And yet he freezes, through that one alone.

Gaspara Stampa

I Swear To You, Love, By Your Arrows

I swear to you, Love, by your arrows,
And by your powerful holy flame,
I care not if by one I'm maimed,
My heart burned, wasted by the other:
However far through times past or coming,
There never was nor will be woman
Whomever of them you wish to name,
Could know such sharpness, such devouring:

For there's a virtue born from suffering,
That dims and conquers the sense of pain,
So that it's barely felt, seems scarcely hurting.
No! This, that torments soul and body again,
This is the real fear presaging my dying:
What if my fire be only straw and flame?

Gaspara Stampa

O All My Labours Scattered Uselessly

O all my labours scattered uselessly
O, all my useless scattered sighs,
O loyalty, that never, O living fire,
Chilled or burned others so, if I see truly,
O paper marked, to be marked, in vain,
In praise of those loved and ardent eyes,
O those hopes ministering to desires,
That their worthiest prize should claim,

All, all, in a moment, gathered by the breeze,
Since I have heard my impious lord
With my own ears, himself speak free,
Saying when near that he thinks of me,
And yet in leaving, in an instant leaves,
Of all my love, his every memory.

Gaspara Stampa

Rime 08

If I, who am an abject, low-born woman,
Can bear within me such lofty fire,
Why should I not possess at least a little
Poetic power to tell it to the world?
If Love, with such a new unheard-of flint
Lifted me up where I could never climb,
Why cannot I, in an unusual way,
Make pain and pen be equal in myself?
If Love cannot do this by force of nature,
Perhaps as by a miracle he may
Passing and bursting every common measure.
How that can be, I cannot well explain
But yet I feel, because of my great fortune,
My heart imprinted with a strong new style.

Gaspara Stampa

Rime 104

O night to me more splendid and more blessed
Than the most blessed and most splendid of days,
Night worthy of the most exalted praise,
Not just of mine, unworthy and distressed,

You alone have been the faithful giver
Of all my joys; you've made the bitter taste
Of this life sweet and dear, for you've replaced
Within my arms the one who's bound me ever.

I just regret that I did not become
Lucky Alemena then, for whom the dawn
Postponed, against all custom, its returning,
But I can never say such good has come
From you, clear night, for even now my song
Cannot subdue the matter of its yearning.

Gaspara Stampa

Rime 111

Place me where ocean breaks with angry roar,
Or where the waters lie serene and calm,
Place me wherever sun shoots sparks that scorch
Or where the ice pierces with sharpest pain,
Place me beside the frozen Don, by Ganges
Where the sweet dew and manna are distilled,
Or where the bitter air sparkles with poison,
Wherever people laugh and cry for love.
Place me where cruel, heartless Scythians strike,
Or where the people live in peace and quiet,
Or where one lives and dies, too soon, too late
I shall live as I've lived, be what I've been,
As long as my two faithful stars still shine
And will not turn their light away from me.

Gaspara Stampa

Rime 161

Toward that sweet nest where I remained though parting,
And where the better part of me still lingers,
Whether the weary sun returns or leaves,
I always spread the wings of my desire.
And still from time to time I blame myself
For never having used device or force
To stay with you, knowing, away from you,
A thousand times a day I die while living.
My doubtful feet were moved by constant hope
That you would follow soon to visit me,
Extend my fleeting life a little longer.
Observe, my lord, the promise you have given:
To come and make these dreary shores alive,
Joyous and loved, and me grateful and happy.

Gaspara Stampa

Rime 208

Love made me such that I live in fire
like a new salamander on earth
or like that other rare creature, the Phoenix,
who expires and rises at the same time

Gaspara Stampa

Rime 28

When before those eyes, my life and light,
my beauty and fortune in the world, I stand,
the style, speech, passion, genius I command,
the thoughts, conceits, feelings I incite,
in all I'm overwhelmed, utterly spent,
like a deaf mute, virutally dazed, all reverence, nothing but amazed
in that lovely light, I'm fixed and rent.

Enough, not a word can I intone
for that divine incubus never quits
sapping my strength, leaving my soul prone.

Oh Love, what strange and wonderful fits:
one sole thing, one beauty alone,
can give me life and deprive me of wits

Gaspara Stampa

Rime 34

Love, do you know why your fair mother gave you
These arrows to your hands, and bound your eyes?
That you may shoot the first wound and break
The heart of this or any faithful lover;
And tied the blindfold, so you cannot see
The dreadful cruelty you have inflicted
So that it will not let you suffer pity,
Or even moderate your impious furor.
For, if you saw one of my dreadful wounds,
You would not be a god, but a wild beast,
Or it might make you tender, or less fierce
I would not wish you to come face to face
With the rays of my sun; my wound would seem,
Next to his greatness, small and even light.

Gaspara Stampa

Rime 43

Harsh is my fortune, but harsher still is the fate
dealt me by my count: he flees from me,
I follow him; others long for me,
I cannot look at another man's face.

I hate him who loves me, love him who scorns me;
against the humble lover, my heart rebels,
but I am humble to him who kill my hope;
my soul longs for such harmful food.

He constantly gives me cause for anger,
while others seek to give me comfort and peace;
these I ignore, and I cling instead to him.

Thus in your school, Love, we receive
always the opposite of what we deserve:
the humble are despised, the heartless rewarded.

Gaspara Stampa

Sonetto I

LADIES, who of my lord would fain be told,
Picture a gentle knight, full sweet to see,
Though young in years, in wisdom passing old,
Model of glory and of valiancy;
Fair-haired, bright colour glowing in his face,
Tall and well-set, broad-shouldered, finally,
In all his parts a paragon of grace
Except in loving wantonly, ah me!
Who'd know myself, picture a woman wrought
In passion and in presence after pain's
And death's own bitter images, a port
Of safety where untroubled rest remains;
One who with neither tears, nor sighs, nor zest
Wakes pity in her cruel lover's breast.

Gaspara Stampa

Sonetto II

DEEPLY repentant of my sinful ways
And of my trivial, manifold desires,
Of squandering, alas, these few brief days
Of fugitive life in tending love's vain fires.
To Thee, Lord, Who dost move hard hearts again,
And render warmth unto the frozen snow,
And lighten every bitter load of pain
For those who with Thy sacred ardours glow,
 To Thee I turn, O stretch forth Thy right hand
And from this whirlpool rescue me, for I
Without Thine aid could never reach the land;
O willingly for us didst suffer loss,
And to redeem mankind hung on the Cross,
O gentle Saviour, leave me not to die.

Gaspara Stampa