

*Sonnets*

Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli

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## Contents

Sonnets	1
<i>Note on the Text</i>	126
<i>Notes</i>	126
<i>Index of titles and first lines</i>	133
Extra Material	137
<i>Belli's Life</i>	139
<i>Belli's Poetry</i>	152
<i>English and Scots Translations</i>	156
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	161
Appendix	163
<i>Twelve Translations by Robert Garioch</i>	165

## *Sonnets*

*Er ricordo*

Er giorno che impiccorno Gammardella  
 io m'ero propio allora accresimato.  
 Me pare mó, ch'er zàntolo a mmercato  
 me pagò un zartapicchio\* e 'na sciammella.

Mi' padre pijjò ppoi la carrettella,  
 ma pprima vorze gode l'impiccato:  
 e mme tieneva in arto inarberato  
 discenno: "Va' la forca cuant'è bbella!"

Tutt'a un tempo ar paziente Mastro Titta\*  
 j'appoggiò un carcio in culo, e Ttata a mmene  
 un schiaffone a la guancia de mandritta.

"Pijja," me disse, "e aricordete bbene  
 che sta fine medema sce sta scritta  
 pe mmill'antri che ssò mmejjo de tene."

*29th September 1830*

*The Recollection*

The day that Camardella\* faced the gallows,  
 I got confirmed... still seems like yesterday—  
 Godfather, me, the fairground games I played,  
 the treats I got (some knick-knacks and marshmallows).

My father booked a two-horse coach for us,  
 though first there was the hanging to enjoy.  
 "That scaffold, eh?" he said, "the real McCoy!"  
 and hoicked me up so I could feel the buzz.

The very moment that the hangman thwacked  
 the prisoner's sorry arse cheeks into space,  
 Papa struck a blow across my face—

"Take that," he said, "so one day you'll look back  
 and understand: this fate is destined to  
 take down a thousand better men than you."

*Er matto da capo* (1)

Sai chi ss'è rriammattito? Caccemmetti:  
 e 'r padrone, c'ha ggìa vvisto la terza,  
 l'ha mmannato da Napoli a la Verza,\*  
 pe rrifajje passà ccerti grilletti.

Lì pprincipiò a sgarrà tutti li letti,  
 dava er boccio a la dritta e a la riverza:  
 ma mmó ttiè tutte sciggnè pe ttraverza,  
 e ccìa er muro arricciato a cussinetti.

Che vvòi! Nun t'aricordi, eh Patacchino,  
 che ggìa jje sbalestrava er tricchettracche  
 sin da quanno faceva er vitturino?

Che ccasa! Er padre e ddu' fratelli gatti;  
 la madre cola, e ttre ssorelle vacche:  
 e ttra ttutti una manica de matti.

*3rd October 1831*

*Mad Again* (1)

You know who's flipped again? Loverboy Jack.  
 His boss – who's seen it all, and knows the score –  
 has sent him to the Naples nuthouse for  
 some treatment, so he'll get his marbles back.

But Jack went smashing up the beds, and then  
 dashing his head against the walls as well,  
 so now he's in a little padded cell  
 all strapped and hog-tied like a trussed-up hen.

Ah well! You do remember, don't you lad,  
 he had a screw loose long ago, for sure,  
 from when he was a coachman years before.

Christ what a crew! His mum's a grass, his dad's  
 a crook, his brothers too, and then those sluts  
 his sisters... Barking mad, the whole lot! Nuts!

*Accusì va er monno*

Quanto sei bbono a stattenne a ppijà  
 perché er monno vò ccurre pe l'ingiù:  
 che tte ne frega a tte? llassel'annà:  
 tanto che sperì? aritirallo su?

Che tte preme la ggente che vvierà,  
 quanno a bbon conto sei crepato tu?  
 Oh ttira, fijjo mio, tira a ccampà,  
 e a ste cazzate nun penzacce ppiù.

Ma ppiù de Ggesucristo che ssudò  
 'na camiscia de sangue pe vvedé  
 de sarvà ttutti; eppoi che ne cacciò?

Pe cchi vvò vvive l'anni de Novè  
 ciò un zegreto sicuro, e tte lo dó:  
 lo ssciropetto der dottor Me ne...

*14th November 1831*

*The Way of the World*

You're much too nice – why put your back out when  
 the world goes hurtling downhill anyway?  
 So what's the point? Just let it go, okay—  
 or do you mean to push it up again?

Who cares about the future – now's enough –  
 and once you're dead you're dead, that's what I say.  
 The day to live for, sonny, is today,  
 don't waste your breath on all this stupid stuff.

Just think of Jesus Christ, who sweated blood  
 in buckets when he tried to do his bit—  
 but what the hell did he get out of it?!

To live as long as Noah, and you could,  
 I've got a surefire secret – you're in luck:  
 a little cure-all called *Who Gives a...*

*Er giorno der giudizzio*

Cuattro angioloni co le tromme in bocca  
 se metteranno uno pe cantone  
 a ssonà: poi co ttanto de voscione  
 cominceranno a ddi: ffora a cchi ttocca.

Allora vierà ssu una filastrocca  
 de schertri da la terra a ppecorone,  
 pe rripijja ffigura de perzone,  
 come purcini attorno de la bbiocca.

E sta bbiocca sarà Ddio bbenedetto,  
 che ne farà du' parte, bbianca e nnera:  
 una pe annà in cantina, una sur tetto.

All'urtimo ussirà 'na sonajjera  
 d'Angioli e, ccome si ss'annassi a letto,  
 smorzeranno li lumi, e bbona sera.

*25th November 1831*

*Judgement Day\**

Four portly angels, trumpets raised up high,  
 will plonk down in the corners at their ease  
 and blow their horns, and with a booming cry  
 will start to state their business: "Next up please."

The earth will spew a helter-skelter line  
 of skeletons on hands and knees, who'll then  
 assume the bodies of their former times\*  
 and dash about like chicks around a hen.

This hen is not a hen, but God instead,  
 and He'll divide them into Yes and No:  
 the Yes will go upstairs, the rest below...

And last, there'll be a big humdinging flight  
 of angels who, as though it's time for bed,  
 will blow the candles out, and nighty-night.

*Er mortorio de Leone Duodesimosiconno*

Jerzera er Papa morto c'è ppasato  
 propi'avanti, ar cantone de Pasquino.  
 Tritticanno la testa sur cuscino  
 pareva un angetto appennicato.

Vienivano le tromme cor zordino,  
 poi li tammurri a tammurro scordato:  
 poi le mule cor letto a bbardacchino  
 e le chiave e 'r trerregno der papato.

Preti, frati, cannoni de strapazzo,  
 palafreggneri co le torce accese,  
 eppoi ste guardie nobbile der cazzo.

Cominciorno a intocà ttutte le cchiese  
 appena uscito er morto da palazzo.  
 Che gran belle funzione a sto paese!

*26th November 1831*

*The Funeral of Pope Leo XII*

Last night the late great Pope went cruising by  
 Pasquino's corner,\* right in front of us,  
 head nodding on a bed of fluffiness  
 just like an angel kipping on the sly;

and then the muted buglers came on down,  
 and drummers drumming with a muffled din,  
 and mules to haul the mighty baldaquin,  
 and then the papal keys and papal crown;

friars and priests, and next a clapped-out gun,  
 and grooms who held aloft their flaming tapers,  
 and then those bloody guardsmen on display.

The bells of all the churches tolled as one  
 the moment that the corpse went on its way...  
 This country has such entertaining capers!