

## 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





Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli (1791–1863)

# *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 rifajje passà ccerti grilletti.

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

Che vvòi! Nun t'aricordi, eh Patachino,  
che ggìa jje sbalestrava er tricchettracche  
sin da quanno fasceva 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!



*Accusi va er monno*

Quanto sei bbono a stattenne a ppijja  
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 scsioppetto 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 giudizio*

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 rripijjà 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 usscirà 'na sonajjera  
d'Angioli e, ccome si ss'annassi a lletto,  
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 ppassato  
propri'avanti, ar cantone de Pasquino.  
Tritticano 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 intocchè tutte 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!

*La bbona famijja*

Mi' nonna a un'or de notte che vviè Ttata  
se leva da filà, ppoverta vecchia,  
attizza un carboncello, sciapparecchia,  
e mmaggnamo du' fronne d'inzalata.

Quarke vvorta se fàmo una frittata,  
che ssi la metti ar lume sce se specchia  
come fussi a ttraverzo d'un'orecchia:  
quattro nosce, e la scena è tterminata.

Poi ner mentre ch'io, Tata e Ccrementina  
seguitamo un par d'ora de sgocchetto,  
lei sparecchia e arissetta la cucina.

E appena visto er fonno ar bucaletto,  
'na pissiatina, 'na sarvereggina  
e, in zanta pasce, sce n'annamo a letto.

*28th November 1831*

*The Good Family*

My poor old granny leaves her spinning wheel  
and pokes the fire when daddy gets back late,  
and sets the table for the little meal  
we'll sit down to. There's not much on the plate,

perhaps an omelette, cooked so thin and clear  
that if you held it up against the sun  
you'd see the light shine through it, like an ear;  
and then we have some nuts, and then we're done.

While daddy, me and Clemmy take a drop,  
granny does some housework here and there,  
she needs things spick and span before she'll stop.

It isn't long before the bottle's dead,  
and then – a hasty pee, a little prayer –  
and thanks to God we take ourselves to bed.



## *Index of Titles and First Lines*

According to the midwife yesterday	49
After the week or so since Mary had	15
<i>A Girl's Legal Action</i>	25
Ai-ee, my dear, oh my, I don't feel well!	105
<i>A Miraculous Relic</i>	87
<i>An Audience with Two Scotsmen</i>	65
<i>Andrew, the Widower</i>	123
And so you give a woman to me, mate	79
And when they run across each other, Bea	85
Another wife?! And after the to-do	123
<i>Anthony Green</i> – the document was clear	39
A pretty horsey! And a cakie-wakie!	103
<i>A Sure Way to Wed</i>	57
<i>A Terrible Encounter</i>	125
At evensong on Friday last but one	37
<i>Auntie</i>	73
<i>A Very Roman Pastime</i>	75
But say it, apple of my flesh and blood	111
<i>Buying Time</i>	99
<i>Calls from the Tenant</i>	101
Come here and get it combed you filthy swine	31
Confess my sins?! What sins? Confess for what?	77
<i>Coochy-coochy-coo</i>	111
Dad-dah! And this is how I came to know	17
<i>Decuwhorum</i>	35
Don't waste your breath on praising them to me	35
<i>Dying</i>	63
"Father..." "Say the Confiteor." "I did."	33
For cock you've got the shaft, the horn, the prick	29
Four portly angels, trumpets raised up high	9
<i>Girl with Scruples</i>	45
He's gone to heaven – snuffed it yesterday	117
"Hey Isabel, hey Isabel!" "Hey what?"	101

INDEX OF TITLES AND FIRST LINES

Hey waiter, what's the deal here, it's a pisser	41
His fault – he don't explain himself, you see	61
It's not exactly difficult or tough	21
<i>Judgement Day</i>	9
Just listen to a mother talking crap	83
<i>Kiddiwinkies</i>	83
Last night she made me have another fit	95
Last night the late great Pope went cruising by	11
<i>Last Words of a Church-shy Chap</i>	59
<i>Life of the Pope</i>	53
<i>Mad Again</i> (1)	5
<i>Madame Letizia</i>	93
Me as the Pope?! The Pope?! You're joking, damnit!	53
<i>M'Lady's Panics</i>	95
My children, in the devil's house one sees	67
<i>My Daughter-in-Law</i>	69
My mind goes back to being young again	125
<i>My Opinion</i>	79
My poor old granny leaves her spinning wheel	13
My son – oh yes that bad sort, that lowlife	69
<i>Nicholas, the Lawyer</i>	113
Nine months in a bog, then swaddling clothes	43
No kidding? Well praise be to God, Susanna	97
Now hush my darlings, hush my little ones	107
<i>Nursing</i>	49
Oh bloody hell, so not one kiss from you?	45
Palace Teodoli is where that mean	71
Please sir, my saviour – ah the Virgin will	23
<i>Raising the Devil</i>	89
Really? The lawyer? Poor old Nicholas!	113
Scotsmen or coachmen, pal, or anyone	65
<i>Scruff-head</i>	31
<i>Secrets</i>	17
So having read the Gospel, there and then	81
Some splendid news from Father Bernard, sir	91

INDEX OF TITLES AND FIRST LINES

That they've been smitten for a month or more	73
<i>The Beggarwoman</i> (1)	23
<i>The Circumcision of the Lord</i>	15
<i>The Clerk</i>	39
<i>The Cobbler in the Coffeehouse</i> (1)	41
<i>The Confessor</i>	33
<i>The Damned</i>	67
The day that Camardella faced the gallows	3
<i>The Dog</i>	51
The dog? I'd rather someone killed my brother	51
<i>The Dumb Doctor</i>	61
<i>The Enraged Stutterer</i>	121
<i>The Father of Sainly Men</i>	29
<i>The Fruits of the Sermon</i>	81
<i>The Funeral of Pope Leo XII</i>	11
<i>The Gentleman</i>	21
<i>The Good Family</i>	13
<i>The Good-hearted Boss</i>	117
The grocer Mr Corr on Serpent Street	59
<i>The Ingenuity of Man</i>	37
<i>The Ingredients</i>	119
<i>The Life of Man</i>	43
<i>The Mother of Sainly Women</i>	27
The mother of that great colossus, he	93
The people of this world are much the same	47
<i>The Philosophic Café Proprietor</i>	47
<i>The Poor Family</i>	107
<i>The Pregnant Mum</i>	97
<i>The Recollection</i>	3
The servant didn't break an ornament	89
<i>The Sextons</i>	55
<i>The Tenant's Cats</i>	115
<i>The Toddler</i> (1)	103
<i>The Toddler</i> (2)	105
The treat that us lot liked the most when small	75

INDEX OF TITLES AND FIRST LINES

<i>The Unrepentant</i>	77
<i>The Way of the World</i>	7
<i>This and That</i>	85
This much I know: among the rare sensations	87
<i>This New Lotto Business</i> (1)	71
Those Roman sextons eh? For Heaven's sake	55
<i>Through the Grapevine</i>	91
Well accidents will happen! Here's the score	19
Well come on Nina, really, have a heart	115
<i>What Does He Do, the Pope?</i>	109
What does he do, the Pope? He fools around	109
"When will you get a move on, eh?" "What for?"	99
Whoever's got a thing for Katie's cunt	27
<i>Who Travels by Night Is a Dead Man</i>	19
W—why are you s—spreading round the lie	121
Yeah, when it comes to cooking, lard's the best	119
Yes yes, and that unmarried tart, it's true	25
You know who breathed his last as of today?	63
You know who's flipped again? Loverboy Jack	5
You must have lost your marbles, one or two	57
You're much too nice – why put your back out when	7

Extra Material

on

Belli's *Sonnets*

# Appendix

Twelve Translations  
by Robert Garioch



*Agin The Commies [Contro li giacobbini]*

Mind whit ye're letting yersel in fir, Jock;  
 let thaim that bulloxt it redd up the mess:  
 the warld, dispitous, gaes like a k'nock;  
 bide ye at hame, mind yer ain fashiousness.

I wadnae bluidy like to be thae folk  
 that seek the wrack of Rome and Offices;  
 ye're breengein throu a kyle wi monie a rock,  
 dunschin yer heid agin the justices.

Mair like the thing, to eat yer breid and spit,  
 ye ken, nor risk yer thrapple out of greed  
 to pley the lairdie and growe fat on it.

Let water rin dounbye to the mill-lead;  
 ye're dear to Gode – I'm shair ye maun admit  
 hou he's been saving ye yer daily breid.



## ALMA CLASSICS

ALMA CLASSICS aims to publish mainstream and lesser-known European classics in an innovative and striking way, while employing the highest editorial and production standards. By way of a unique approach the range offers much more, both visually and textually, than readers have come to expect from contemporary classics publishing.

### LATEST TITLES PUBLISHED BY ALMA CLASSICS

- 209 Giuseppe T. di Lampedusa, *Childhood Memories and Other Stories*
- 210 Mark Twain, *Is Shakespeare Dead?*
- 211 Xavier de Maistre, *Journey around My Room*
- 212 Émile Zola, *The Dream*
- 213 Ivan Turgenev, *Smoke*
- 214 Marcel Proust, *Pleasures and Days*
- 215 Anatole France, *The Gods Want Blood*
- 216 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Last Tycoon*
- 217 Gustave Flaubert, *Memoirs of a Madman and November*
- 218 Edmondo De Amicis, *Memories of London*
- 219 E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sandman*
- 220 Sándor Márai, *The Withering World*
- 221 François Villon, *The Testament and Other Poems*
- 222 Arthur Conan Doyle, *Tales of Twilight and the Unseen*
- 223 Robert Musil, *The Confusions of Young Master Törless*
- 224 Nikolai Gogol, *Petersburg Tales*
- 225 Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*
- 226 George R. Sims, *Memoirs of a Mother-in-Law*
- 227 Virginia Woolf, *Monday or Tuesday*
- 228 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Basil and Josephine*
- 229. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Flappers and Philosophers*
- 230 Dante Alighieri, *Love Poems*
- 231 Charles Dickens, *The Mudfog Papers*
- 232 Dmitry Merezhkovsky, *Leonardo da Vinci*
- 233 Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov*
- 234 Alexander Pushkin, *Belkin's Stories*
- 235 Mikhail Bulgakov, *Black Snow*

To order any of our titles and for up-to-date information about our current and forthcoming publications, please visit our website on:

[www.almaclassics.com](http://www.almaclassics.com)

