

**A Tale of Two Countries:
Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy**

Towards a definition of 'the poor'...

- Class (in Britain)
- *The Class Sketch*, 1966

She came from Greece she had a thirst for knowledge
She studied sculpture at Saint Martin's College, that's where I caught her eye.
She told me that her Dad was **loaded**
I said in that case I'll have a rum and coke-cola.
She said fine and in thirty seconds time she said, I want to live like **common people**
I want to do whatever common people do, I want to sleep with common people
I want to sleep with common people like you.
Well what else could I do - I said I'll see what I can do.
I took her to a supermarket
I don't know why but I had to start it somewhere, so it started there.
I said **pretend** you've **got no money**, **she just laughed and said oh you're so funny.**
I said yeah? Well I can't see anyone else smiling in here.
Are you sure you want to live like common people
You want to see whatever common people see
You want to sleep with common people,

you want to sleep with common people like me.
But she didn't understand, she just smiled and held my hand.
Rent a flat above a shop, cut your hair and get a job.
Smoke some fags and play some pool,
pretend you never went to school.
But still **you'll never get it right**
'cos when you're laid in bed at night watching roaches climb the wall
If you call your Dad he could stop it all.
You'll never live like common people
You'll never do what common people do
You'll never fail like common people
You'll never watch your life slide out of view, and dance and drink and screw
Because there's nothing else to do.
Sing along with the common people, sing along and it might just get you thru'
Laugh along with the common people
Laugh along even though they're laughing at you and the stupid things that you do.
Because **you think that poor is cool.**
I want to live with common people, I want to live with common people [etc..]

How does this relate to representing 'the poor'?

She told me that her Dad was **loaded** - Economic difference

I want to live like **common people** - See definitions of 'common'

I said **pretend** you've **got no money** - Fiction, unreal; poor only those with no money?

But she didn't understand - Ultimate futility of those from different class fully comprehending the condition of being poor

pretend you never went to school - Think of educational status of 19th-century authors/artists

But still **you'll never get it right** - Ultimate futility of those from different class representing the poor. Can poor represent themselves in art?

You'll never live like common people

You'll never do what common people do - You'll never **speak** like common people?

You'll never fail like common people

Because **you think that poor is cool** - Danger of romanticising/idealising the poor

Definitions of 'common', *Oxford English Dictionary* [oed.com]

5.

- a. Of or belonging to the community at large, or to a community or corporation; public.
- b. In various phrases which translate or represent Latin *res publica*, as †**common good**, **common profit**, **common thing**, **common utility**
- c. **common right** n. the right of every citizen. [Compare French *le droit commun*, la loi établie dans un état, l'usage général.]

6.

- a. Free to be used by every one, public.
- b. **common woman**: a harlot; so **common prostitute**

11.

- a. Having ordinary qualities; undistinguished by special or superior characteristics; pertaining to or characteristic of ordinary persons, life, language, etc.; ordinary.

12.

- a. Of persons: Undistinguished by rank or position; belonging to the commonalty; of low degree; *esp.* in phr. **the common people**, the masses, populace. (Sometimes *contemptuous*.)

14. In depreciatory use:

- a. Of merely ordinary or inferior quality, of little value, mean; not rare or costly.
- b. Of persons and their qualities: Low-class, vulgar, unrefined.

UNCOMMON PEOPLE

RESISTANCE, REBELLION AND JAZZ



ERIC HOBBSBAWM

- 'common people'
- 'the little people'
- = anonymous
- = don't feature prominently in mainstream representations

- '*uncommon* people'

This book is almost entirely about the sort of people whose names are usually unknown to anyone except their family and neighbours, and, in modern states, to the offices registering births, marriages and deaths.

[...] They constitute most of the human race.

[...] *collectively*, if not as individuals, such men and women are major historical actors.

[...] They are not 'featureless and commonplace'.

Towards a definition of 'the poor'...in the C19th

Poverty as normal condition of up to 90% of the population

ENGLAND

- Poor Laws (C16th>, but inconsistent)
- Church - alms, almshouses
- Poor Law circa 1800 - local parishes responsible for poor, through taxes (£7 million 1830)
- Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 (help only through workhouses)

ITALY

- 'l'Italia fin ora non riconosce la necessità che o Stato o Provincia o Comune abbia il dovere di tutelare i poveri'
Jesse White Mario, *La miseria in Napoli*, 1877
- Church

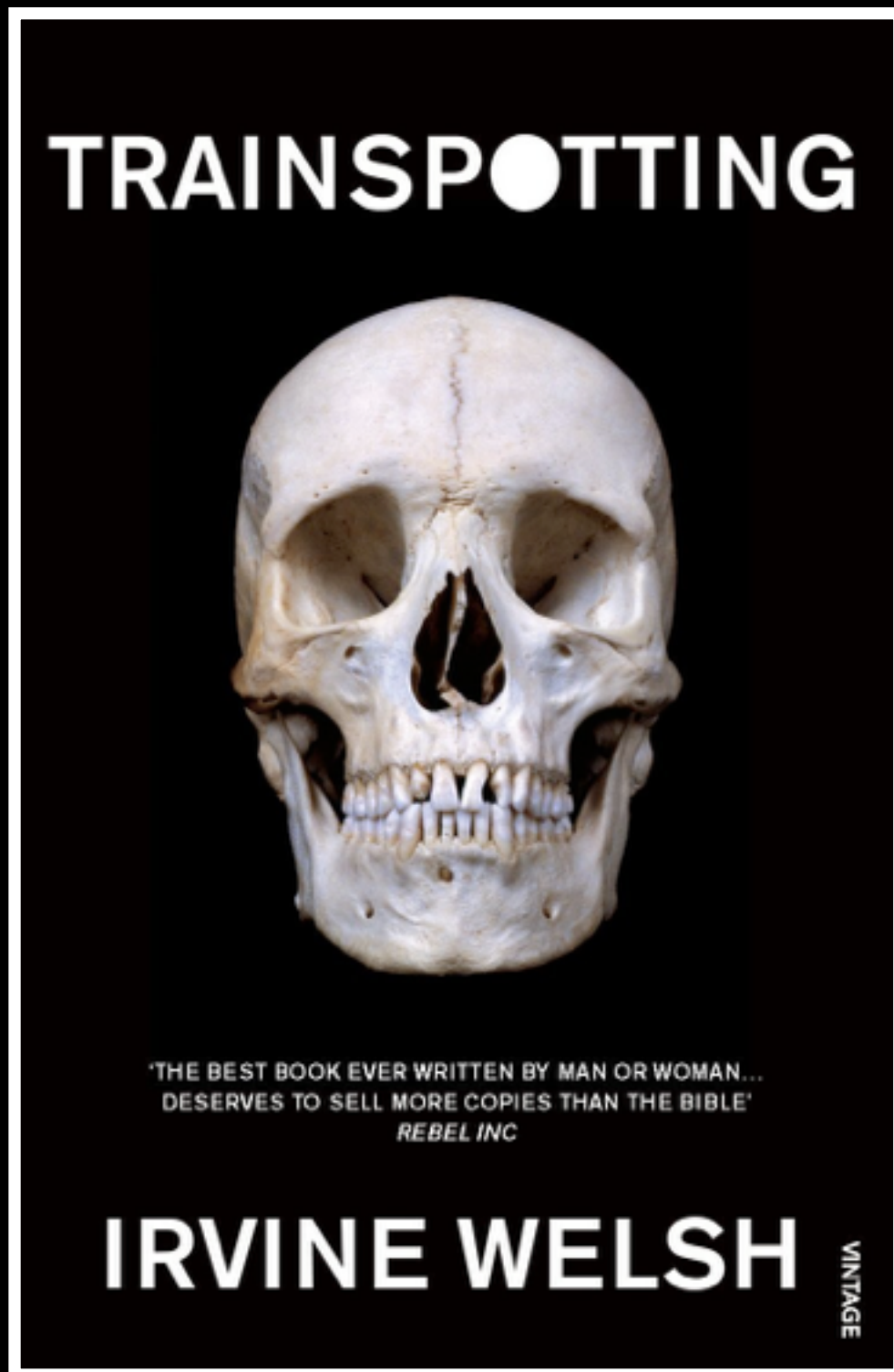
'poor' as 'labouring poor' = those who can work

‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’

Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848

- landowners
- bourgeois capitalists
- proletarian workers

Incipit from *Trainspotting* - characterisation through voice



- What language?
- What *type* of language?
- What register?
- Is it realistic? How does it relate to the recording?
- What audience?
- Whose voices? Author/narrator/character/reader

***Trainspotting* - a mini-glossary**

- oafay = off of
- thegither = together (Scots)
- swedgin = fighting (Scots/dialect)
- radge = crazy person (Scots/dialect), also meaning 'high on drugs'; also term of endearment
- ootay = out of
- visage = face (Scots)
- eywis = always
- deek = look, also vb (Scots)

***Trainspotting* - linguistic identity**

- Place - Lowland Scots (Edinburgh)
- Class - dialect/slang of underworld (crime, drugs, unemployment, poverty)
- Audience? Who is it written for?

Incipit from *Trainspotting* - literature?

- What is literary/conventional about it?
Paragraphing, punctuation (semi-colon in first line!)
- Conventions of orality - c.f. e.g. Shakespeare's Stephano in *Tempest* 'Flout 'em and scout 'em, / And scout 'em and flout 'em'.
- What is unconventional? Language. No speech marks = stream-of-consciousness
- Effect on reader? Unsettling

**A Tale of Two Countries:
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William Wordsworth

- Born 1770; dies 1850.
- Cockermouth, Cumbria = Lake District, north west England, area of outstanding natural beauty
- Upper class
- Rural upbringing, but educated in a grammar school in Cumbria and then at St John's College, Cambridge





1789

- French Revolution 1789>
- Wordsworth has first-hand experience of it in 1791
- Initially shares Republican cause
- French Revolutionary Wars 1792-1802
- Reign of Terror 1793/94 (mass executions) leaves him disillusioned with French Revolution
- Shares ideals - society corrupts good humanity c.f. Rousseau
- England at war with France, W terrified of monarchy being overthrown

Wordsworth's minor revolution in the *Lyrical Ballads*

- 1798 Advert:
'The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purpose of poetic pleasure.'
- 1802 Preface:
Major theoretical statement of his poetics

Wordsworth's minor revolution in the *Lyrical Ballads*

Preface in summary:

- Acute awareness of social changes/anxiety
- Deliberate reduction of class difference/hierarchy - 'Poet binds together [...] the vast empire of human society'
- Democratisation of poetry - ballad form
- Naturalism of content and language
- How is naturalism reconciled with poetry?
 1. Metre and form arouses pleasure in reader
 2. Poetry better than prose for conveying the suffering of human beings
- Metre necessary, but not poetic diction and 'artificial distinctions of style'
- Poetry most suited to discussing human suffering

Goody Blake and Harry Gill

- In 1837, Wordsworth removes local references to Dorset in stanza 4, replacing it with:

Remote from sheltered village-green,
On a hill's northern side she dwelt,
Where from sea-blasts the hawthorns lean,
And hoary dews are slow to melt.

- Part of his aspiration to be a *national* poet, widely read (see Preface to *LB*: Poetry's truth 'not individual and local, but general, and operative')

Wordsworth's minor revolution in the *Lyrical Ballads*

W's prose (Preface) v verse (poems in *LB*) in terms of style etc?

- Preface 'obscure beyond any necessity - and the extreme elaboration and almost constrainedness of the diction contrasted (to my feelings) somewhat harshly with the general style of the poems'

Coleridge

William Barnes

- Opposite approach to Wordsworth (localistic)
- But pastoral if not totally lyrical in Wordsworthian sense
- Idealising - happy poor, no apparent suffering
- No direct engagement with what theorist Theodor Adorno calls the 'social bustle' characteristic of early C19th - poverty question in society

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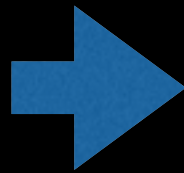
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Coleridge

Goody Blake and Harry Gill

- In 1837, Wordsworth removes local references to Dorset in stanza 4

This woman dwelt in Dorsetshire,
Her hut was on a cold hill side;
And in that country coals are dear,
For they come far by wind and tide.



Remote from sheltered village-green,
On a hill's northern side she dwelt,
Where from sea-blasts the hawthorns lean,
And hoary dews are slow to melt.

- cf also '*canty* Dame' italicised because dialectal - Scots/Northern = 'cheerful, healthy'

William Barnes's poetry in Dorset dialect

- The milk-mâid o' the farm

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The Old Cumberland Beggar

Wordsworth's note to text

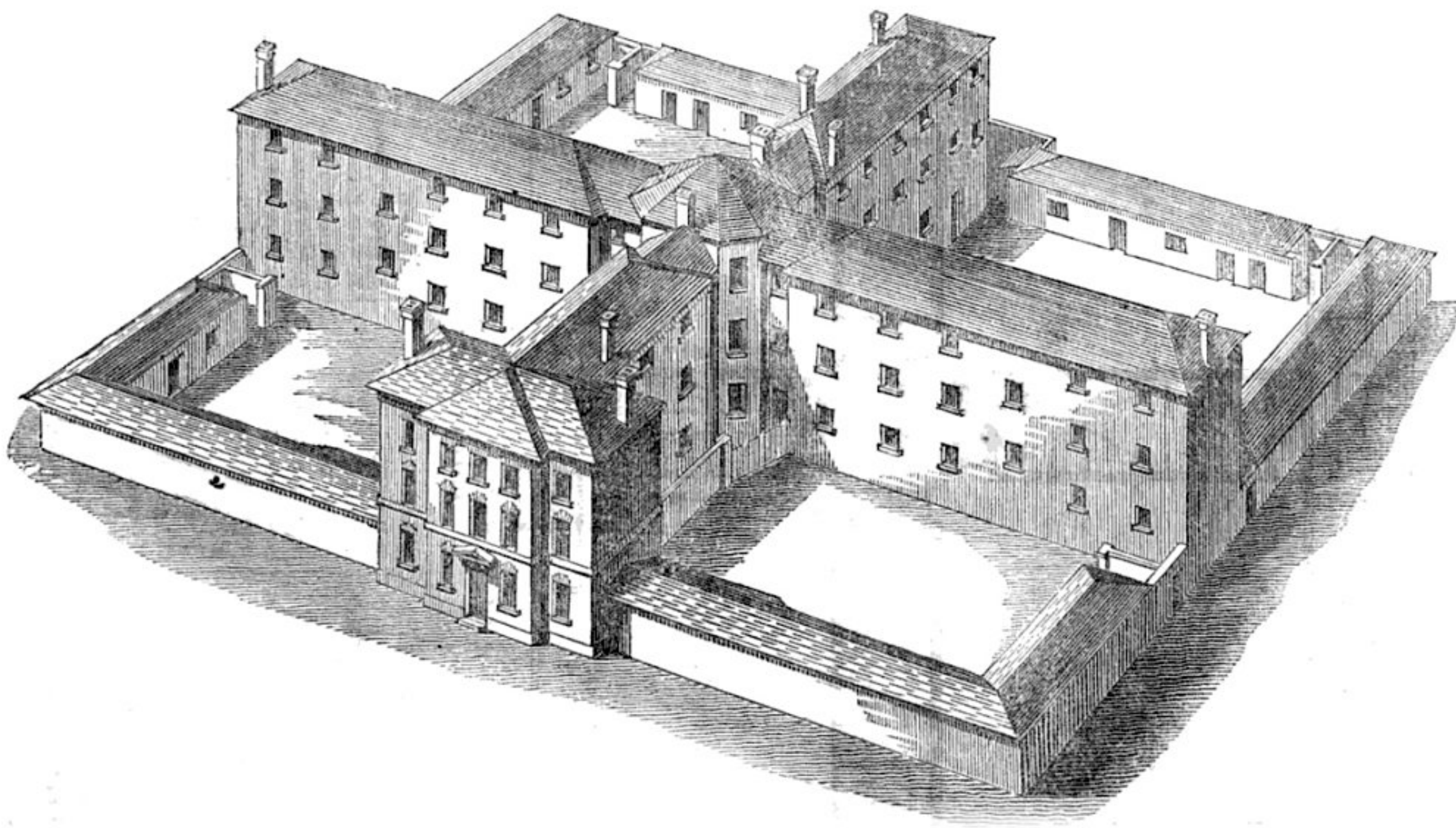
- The class of Beggars to which the Old Man here described belongs, will probably soon be extinct. It consisted of poor, and, mostly, old and infirm persons, who confined themselves to a stated round in their neighbourhood, and had certain fixed days, on which, at different houses, they regularly received alms, sometimes in money, but mostly in provisions.

Letter to William Wilberforce MP, 1801

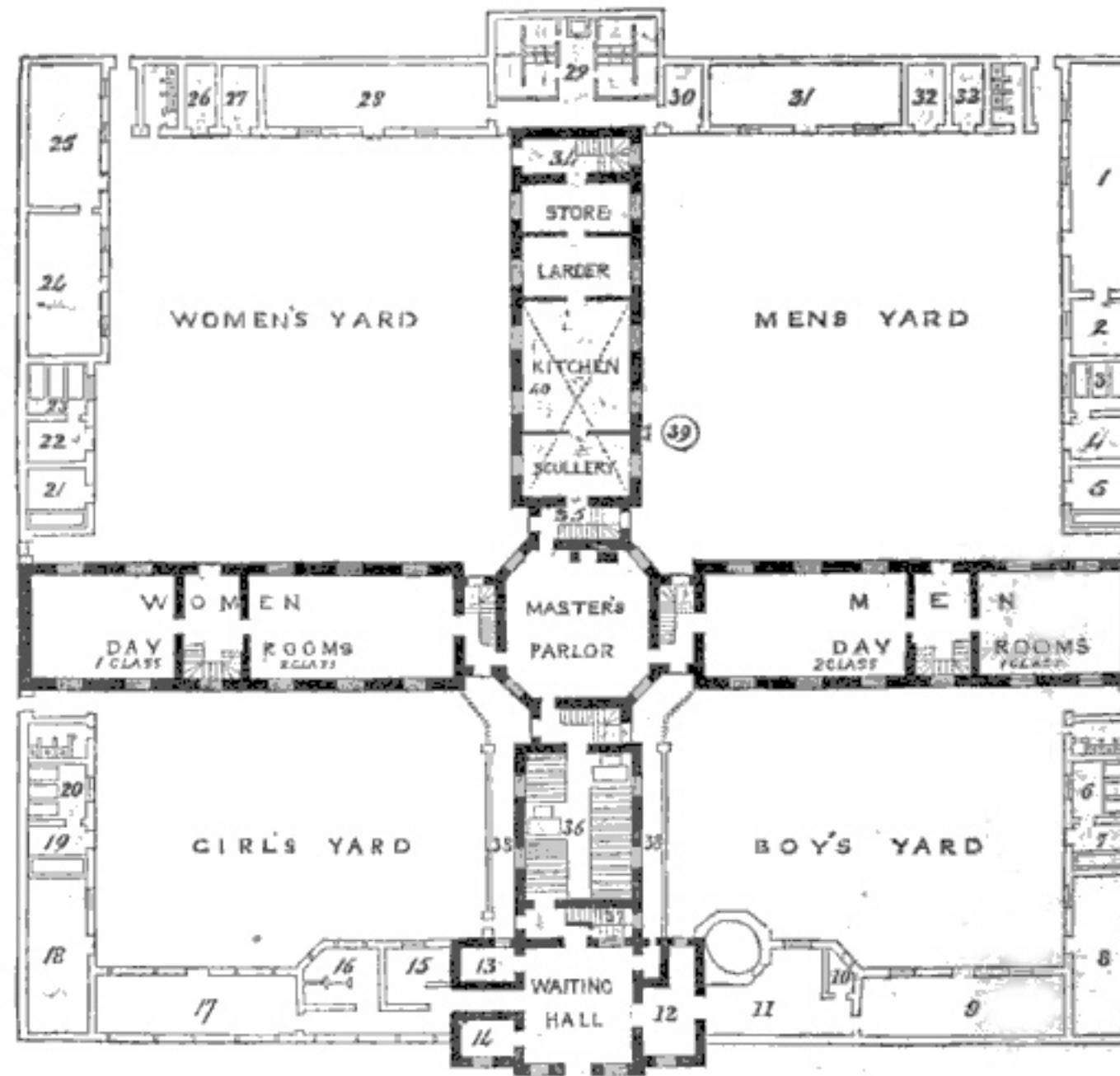
- Wilberforce - Member of Parliament, abolitionist (anti-slavery campaigner)
- Letter accompanying copy of *LB*, written by Coleridge, but bearing Wordsworth's signature
- Another defence of the poetic language of *Lyrical Ballads*
 - Current taste: 'an aversion to the common conversational language of our countrymen'
 - Part of that taste is 'understanding what they [Poets, but also readers] are conscious the lower classes of their countrymen would not be able to understand'
 - Subjects of *LB* 'walk in silence and in a veil' - principally in literature, but equally in society too

Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834 (New Poor Law)

- ‘prisons of the poor’ (Richard Oastler, abolitionist) - confinement, uniform, segregation
- ‘no outdoor relief’ - rural poor moved to urban centres to reduce cost to rural areas
- resentment in North - London-centric
- all of above implicit in Old Cumberland Beggar



Design for workhouse 1835



Design for workhouse 1835

Other key poems in *LB* for W's portrayal of poor

Many silent vagrants - literally voiceless, Wordsworth as spokesman but not direct voice

- Simon Lee
- Poor Susan
- Ruth
- Poems on the Naming of Places
- Michael

Other poems beyond *LB* for W's portrayal of poor

See also, in *Complete Poetical Works*;

- Beggars
- Sequel to the Beggars
- Resolution and Independence - encounter with a leech-gatherer

He told, that to these waters he had come
To gather leeches, being old and poor:
Employment hazardous and wearisome!
And he had many hardships to endure:
From pond to pond he roamed, from moor to moor;
Housing, with God's good help, by choice or chance,
And in this way he gained an honest maintenance.

- Wordsworth compares the plight of the poet to that of the poor [difficult to take seriously, but he makes the comparison]

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The Old Cumberland Beggar

- Domestic metaphor used by Wordsworth in direct address to politicians

But deem not this Man useless. – Statesmen! ye
Who are so restless in your wisdom, **ye**
Who have a broom still ready in your hands
To rid the world of nuisances; ye proud,
Heart-swoln, while in your pride ye contemplate
Your talents, power, or wisdom, deem him not
A burthen of the earth!

“To sweep something under the carpet”



Italy, at beginning of C19th

- Manzoni

“Per nostra sventura, lo stato dell’Italia divisa in frammenti, la pigrizia e l’ignoranza quasi generale hanno posto tanta distanza tra la lingua parlata e la scritta, che questa può dirsi quasi lingua morta.”

(Letter to Fauriel, 9th February 1806.)

Manzoni's *Introduzione*

- That 'distanza' exaggerated with historical setting
- History = glorious deeds of high-born, important individuals - Manzoni about to change that
- Monument, historical accuracy (c.f. Belli)
- New type of reader? National scope
- Recast the language - Manzoni's project

Manzoni's 'povera gente' - are they really poor?

- Renzo is a skilled worker, a silk weaver (Lorenzo Tramaglino), but he's also a landowner (however modest – 'un poderetto', small farm, and he even employs people to work his land), so that 'per la sua condizione, poteva dirsi agiato' – for his class/status, he could be said to be prosperous/well-off
- Glimpses of poorer people - e.g. Ch.4 "Lo spettacolo de' lavoratori sparsi ne' campi, aveva qualcosa d'ancor più doloroso." ; "La fanciulla scarna, tenendo per la corda al pascolo la vaccherella magra stecchita"
- Renzo and Lucia's troubles never really economic, even though the dowry payment from the converted Innominato eases things (particularly in Lucia and Agnese's eyes)
- Renzo and Lucia much more prosperous at the close of the novel as owners of silk mill – suggestion Renzo has become a capitalist even benefitting from *gride* (upward social movement?)
- Manzoni defines them as poor (or his narrator does): Renzo described as 'un contadino', and Lucia 'una contadina'. They repeatedly define themselves as poor: 'povera gente' etc - think of the conclusion: 'Questa conclusione, benché trovata da povera gente, c'è parsa così giusta, che abbiām pensato di metterla qui, come il sugo di tutta la storia.'

Belli's *Introduzione* v Wordsworth's *Preface* - similarities

	Belli	Wordsworth
Appeal to classics for authority	Horace, Ausonius/Martial, Juvenal, Seneca	Quintilian (motto preceding poems)
Novelty/innovation	"[...] novità. Questo disegno [...] non trova lavoro da confronto che lo	"strangeness and awkwardness"
Mimesis	"io ricopio"; "tento d'imitare la loro parola"	"I have proposed to myself to imitate"
Truth	"dirò loro [critics]: lo ritrassi la verità"; "lo testimonio delle orecchie"	"Real language of men"
Popular form?	Sonnet (?)	Ballad
Style	"senza ornamento, senza alterazione veruna, senza pure inversioni di sintassi o troncamenti di licenza"	no "personifications of abstract ideas"; "no poetic diction"

Belli's *Introduzione* v Wordsworth's *Preface* - differences

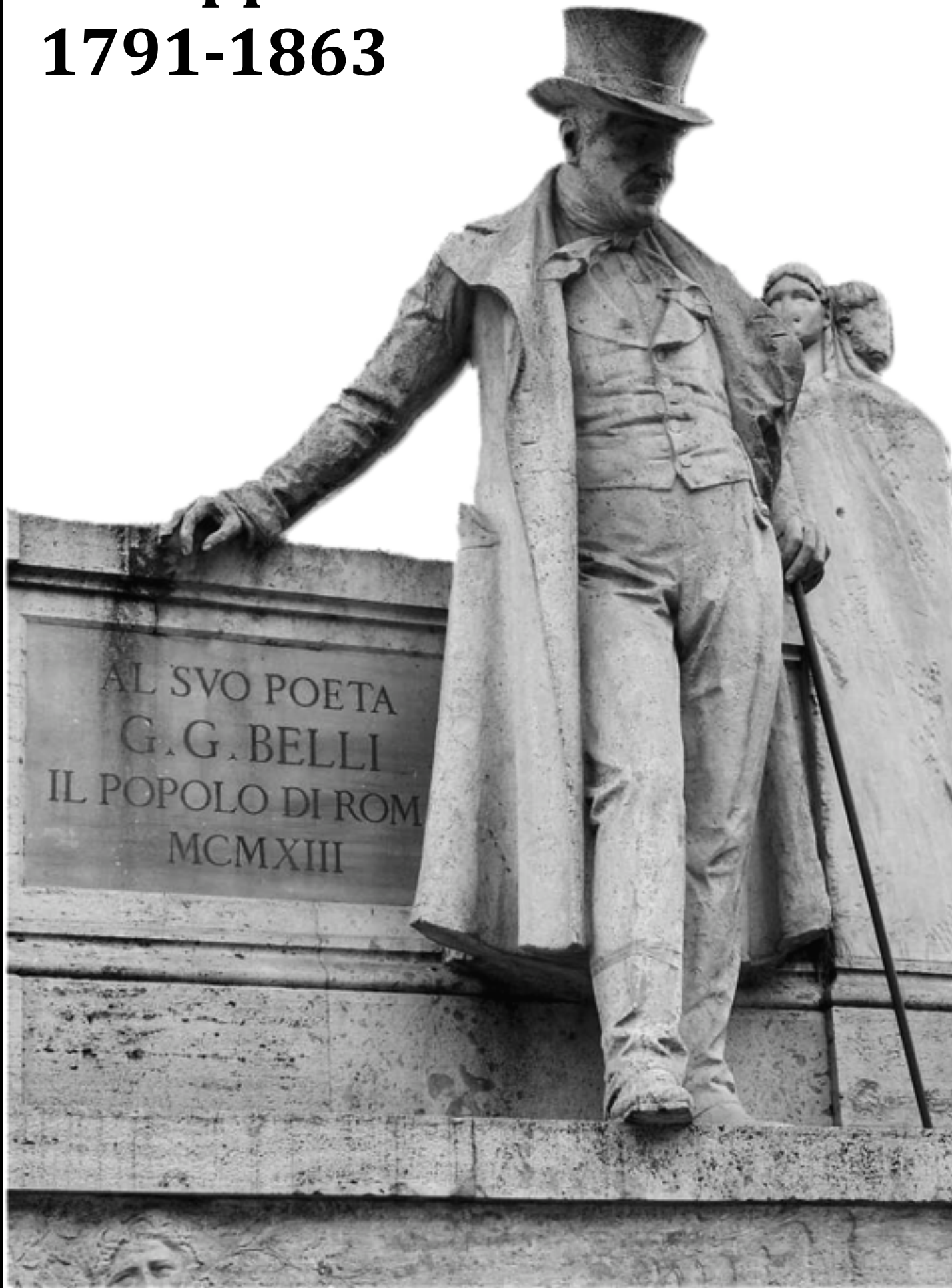
	Belli	Wordsworth
Attitude to class differences	Uses nature to stress a biological otherness of the lower classes	Uses nature to reduce differences to category "man"
Attitude to subjects	Largely negative; no attempt at social change	Positive/sympathetic; active attempt to widen readership
Poetic persona	Of the people; "i popolari discorsi svolti nella mia poesia"; author's voice to be silent in poems	For the people, but not of them. Poet not to speak through mouths of his characters
Form	Little discussion - only hints ("distinti quadretti" etc) at sonnet	Thorough justification for ballad form
Language	More scientific approach (c.f. French naturalism)	Somewhat vague real language of men
Aims	Stresses the local	National scope

“Introduzione”

- Never published by Belli - letter form, but shows he envisaged publication
- Various revisions of the text.
- Attempts to define his subjects:
 - “plebe” [“popolaccio” in 1st draft]
 - “popolani”
 - “volgo”
 - “cittadini”
 - “uomini”
 - “popolo”
 - “plebeo”
 - “romano”
 - “plebe ignorante”
 - “idioti”

Giuseppe Gioachino Belli

1791-1863

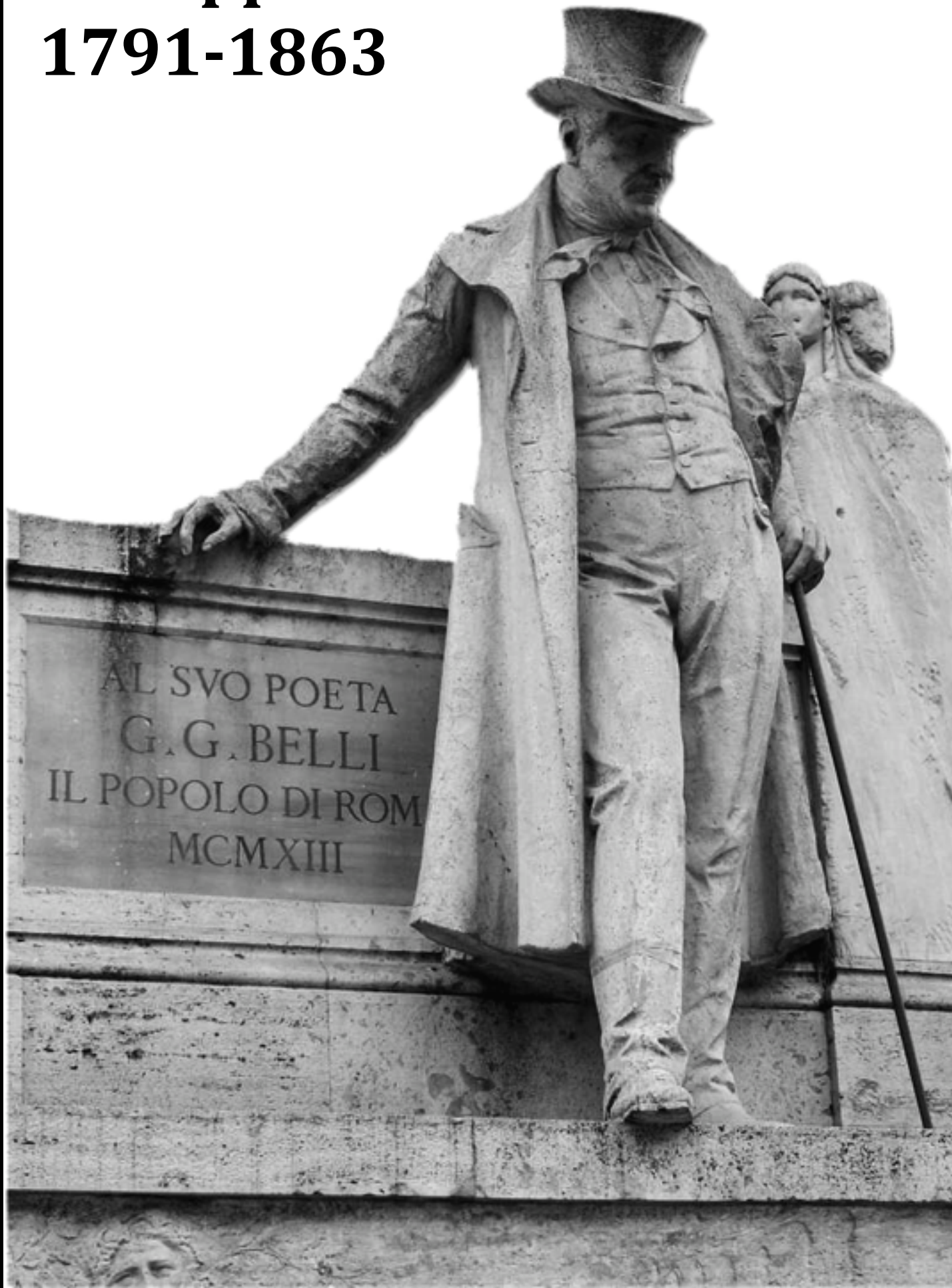


- 2279 sonnets
[Petrarch 317!]
- Mostly written in
1830s
- Published only
posthumously
- Frank, unadorned
language

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Giuseppe Gioachino Belli

1791-1863



- 2279 sonnets
[Petrarch 317!]
- Mostly written in
1830s
- Dates punctuated
by political unrest
- Published only
posthumously
- Demotic, frank,
unadorned
language

Evidence of Belli reciting his sonnets

‘Gioacchino Belli non apparteneva a nessun gruppo; la sua personalità era troppo spiccata. [...] Con questo singolare ingegno che credo potrebbe dirsi il massimo poeta dialettale, io mi trovai più volte a desinare da mio cognato Mons. Luciano Bonaparte, ed erano quelle serate, per cagion sua, piacevolissime. Sorbendo il caffè, dopo essersi un pò fatto pregare, ci recitava quei suoi sonetti, che noi dicevamo proibiti. Pareva egli non potesse declamare a modo, se non sedeva comodamente, e non metteva in capo un berrettino di seta nera, che durante la recitazione veniva rigirando sul cranio. Non era possibile non smascellarsi dalle risa, soprattutto per la serietà a cui atteggiava il suo volto sbarbato, e per se stesso severo, sul quale invano avresti aspettato un sorriso. Quei versi che declamava quasi a ritegno, come ad esempio “*Il Papa non fa niente!*” non c’era caso di farglieli ripetere. A prima vista parrebbe veramente singolare la scambievole simpatia fra il Bonaparte e lui. Ma erano allora all’unisono nella devozione grande e sincera verso la religione cattolica.’

Campello Della Spina, Paolo, *Ricordi di più che cinquant’anni dal 1840 al 1890* (Spoleto: Prem. Tip. dell'Umbria, 1910),

Evidence of Belli reciting his sonnets

‘But surely you have not had the chance to read the sonnets by the Roman poet Belli, which, in any case, you’ll need to hear when he reads them himself. In these sonnets, there is much salt and sharpness, they are completely surprising, and so genuine in their reflection of today’s life in Trastevere that you’ll be reduced to laughter, and this heavy cloud that too often burdens your head will fly away together with the tiring and unbearable headache.’

Gogol, letter to Maria Balabina, April 1838

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 - “idioti”

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Belli's poor - skepticism of written word

- Written word = form of imperialism, designed to enforce social division in eyes of poor/uneducated
- Reading and writing for 'them', not 'us'
- See e.g. 'Er legge e scrive'

E a cche tte serve poi sto scrive e llege?

Làsselo fà a li preti, a li dottori,
a li frati, a li Re, all'Imperatori,
e a cquelli che jje l'obbriga la Lègge.
[1598. *Er legge e scrive*]

Belli's poor - skepticism of written word/voice effects

- “Idiotismo” occasionally taken to an extreme, see the poem entitled ‘Avviso’

Bra-man-do — il — Rev-do — Ven-le— Mo-na-ste-ro
de — San-ti — Cos-ma *virgola* e — Da-mi-a-no
ven-de-re *virgola* o — af-fit-ta-re — un — pi-a-no
d'u-na — su-a — ca-sa *virgola* e — l'in-ti-e-ro

or-to *virgola* il — qua-le — gi-a-ce — a — ma-no
man-ca *virgola* e — al — nu-me-ro — tre-zero
del — Vi-co-lo — Ster-ra-to — al — ci-mi-te-ro
di — San — Spi-ri-to *virgola* con — va-no

per — stal-la punt'e *vvirgola* si — av-vi-sa
tut-ti *virgola* e — sin-go-li — as-pi-ran-ti
virgola che — do-ma-ni — al-la — pre-ci-sa

o-ra — d'o-re — uno — sette— re-sta — in-gi-un-to
al — No-ta-ro — del — Lo-co — Sig. — Bri-gan-ti...6
Che sse vadi a ffà fotte, e mmetto er punto.

[1209. *Avviso*]

Literacy rates

- Italy 22% in 1820; 32% in 1870 (lowest of European countries included)

c.f.

UK 53% in 1820; 76% in 1870

[UNESCO figures, <http://ourworldindata.org/literacy/>]

‘One may assume that at the **time of Unification** [...] only people who were literate were able to use Italian. **The illiterates were all confined to their dialects.** The census figures give about 75 per cent in 1861, but it would be rash to assume that the 25 per cent who were nominally literate could speak Italian proficiently. [...] According to De Mauro’s estimate it is more realistic to assume that in 1861 the number of those able to use Italian could not have amounted to many more than 600 000 (400 000 Tuscans, 70 000 Romans, and about **160 000** from the rest of Italy) i.e., 2.5 per cent of the total population.’

(Lepschy and Lepschy, *The Italian Language Today*)

Literacy rates

- Widespread education for all only comes on a national scale with Unification
- Legge Casati - Unification; Legge Coppino 1877 (5 years' compulsory education for dialectal speaking children)
- Some regional differences - e.g. Regno di Sardegna (Legge Bon Compagni 1848)

Belli voicing the poor - voice effects/form

- Flexibility of sonnet form = technical possibilities
- Apparent monologues
- Reported speech
- Direct speech
- Extended sequences (e.g. 586-593. *Le confidenze de le ragazze* - 8 poems)

1389. Er bordello scuperto

Entrato er brigattiere in ner bordello
je se fa avanti serio serio un prete.

Disce: «Chi ssete voi? cosa volete?»

Disce: «La forza, e pportà llei 'n Castello».

Belli voicing the poor

- Dialogue sonnet/contrasto/dramatic sonnet (English tradition)- entirely made up direct speech without need for narrating persona
- Tradition of this - e.g. Cecco Angiolieri's Becchina sonnets
- Language mixing
- Face to face opposition e.g. 541. *Er custituto*

Voice dynamics - c.f. Porta's *Giovannin Bongee*

«Chi ssiete?» «Un omo». «Come vi chiamate?»

«Biascio Chiafò». «Di qual paese siete?»

«Romano com'e llei». «Quanti anni avete?»

«Sò entrato in ventidua». «Dove abitate?»

«Dietr'a Ccampo-Carleo».1 «Che arte fate?»

«Gnisuna, che ssapp'io». «Come vivete?»

«De cuer che Ddio me manna». «Lo sapete perché siete voi qui?» «Pe ttre pposate».

«Rubate?» «Ggià». «Vi accusa?» «Er Presidente».2

«Ma le rubaste voi?» «Nun zò stat'io».

«Dunque chi le rubò?». «Nu ne so ggnente».

«E voi da chi le aveste?». «Da un giudio».

«Tutto vi mostra reo». «Ma ssò innocente».

«E se andaste in galera?» «È er gusto mio».

[541. *Er custituto*]

1 Chiesetta e contrada al Foro Traiano.

2 Presidente regionario di polizia.

276. 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 ddì: ffora a cchi ttocca.

Allora vierà ssù una filastrocca
de schertri da la terra a ppecorone,¹
pe rripijjà ffigura de perzone,
come purcini attorno de la bbiocca.²

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

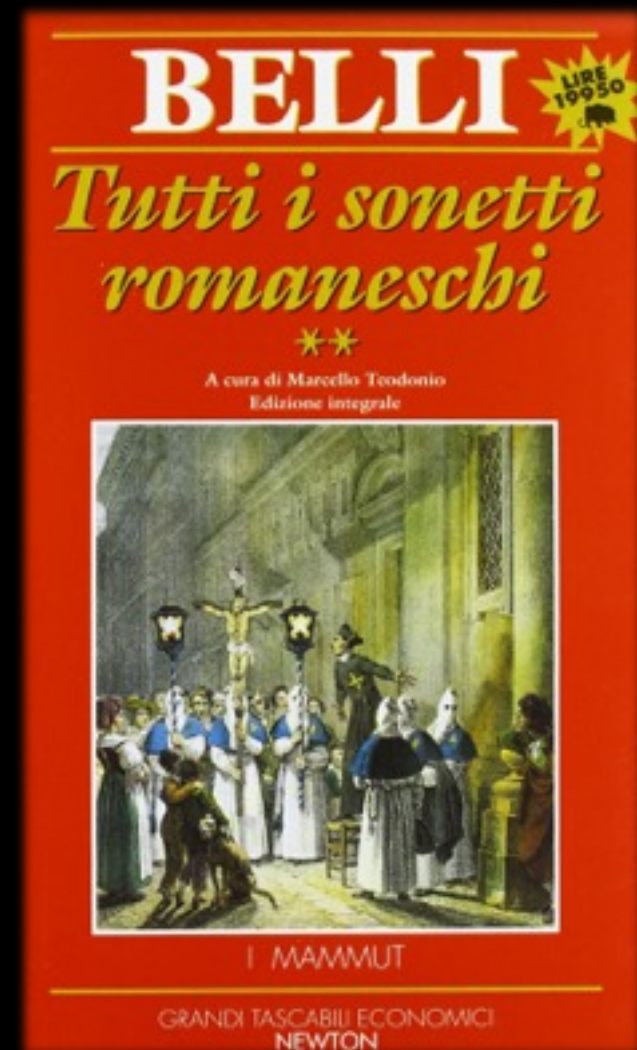
All'urtimo usscirà 'na sonajjera³
d'Angioli, e, ccome si ss'annassi a letto,
smorzeranno li lumi, e bbona sera.

25 novembre 1831

1 Camminando cioè con mani e piedi.

2 Chioccia.

3 Un formicaio, ecc.



And after these things I saw **four angels standing on the four corners of the earth**, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he **cried with a loud voice** to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea...

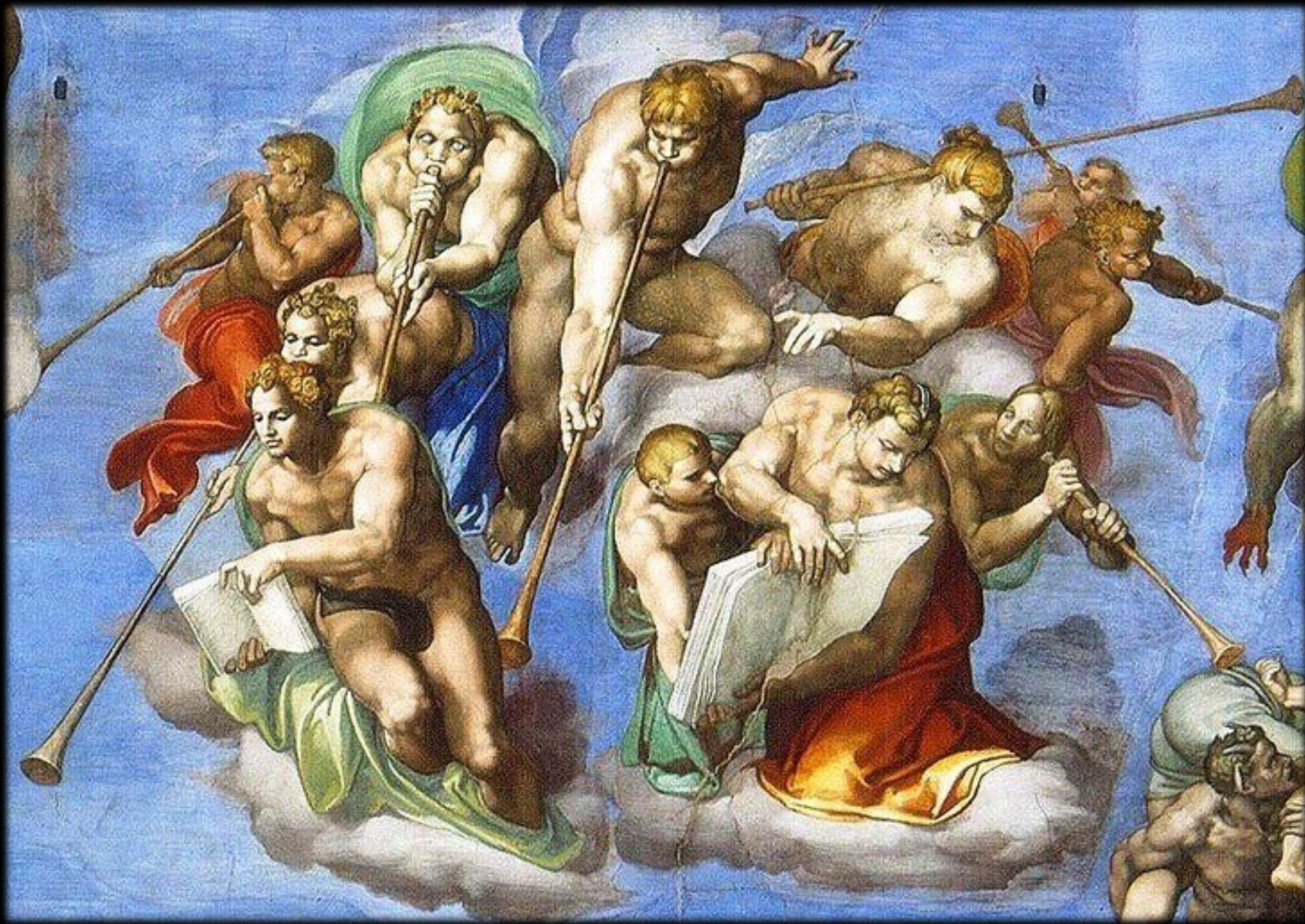
Revelation 7:1-2

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, **even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings**, and ye would not!

Matthew 23:37

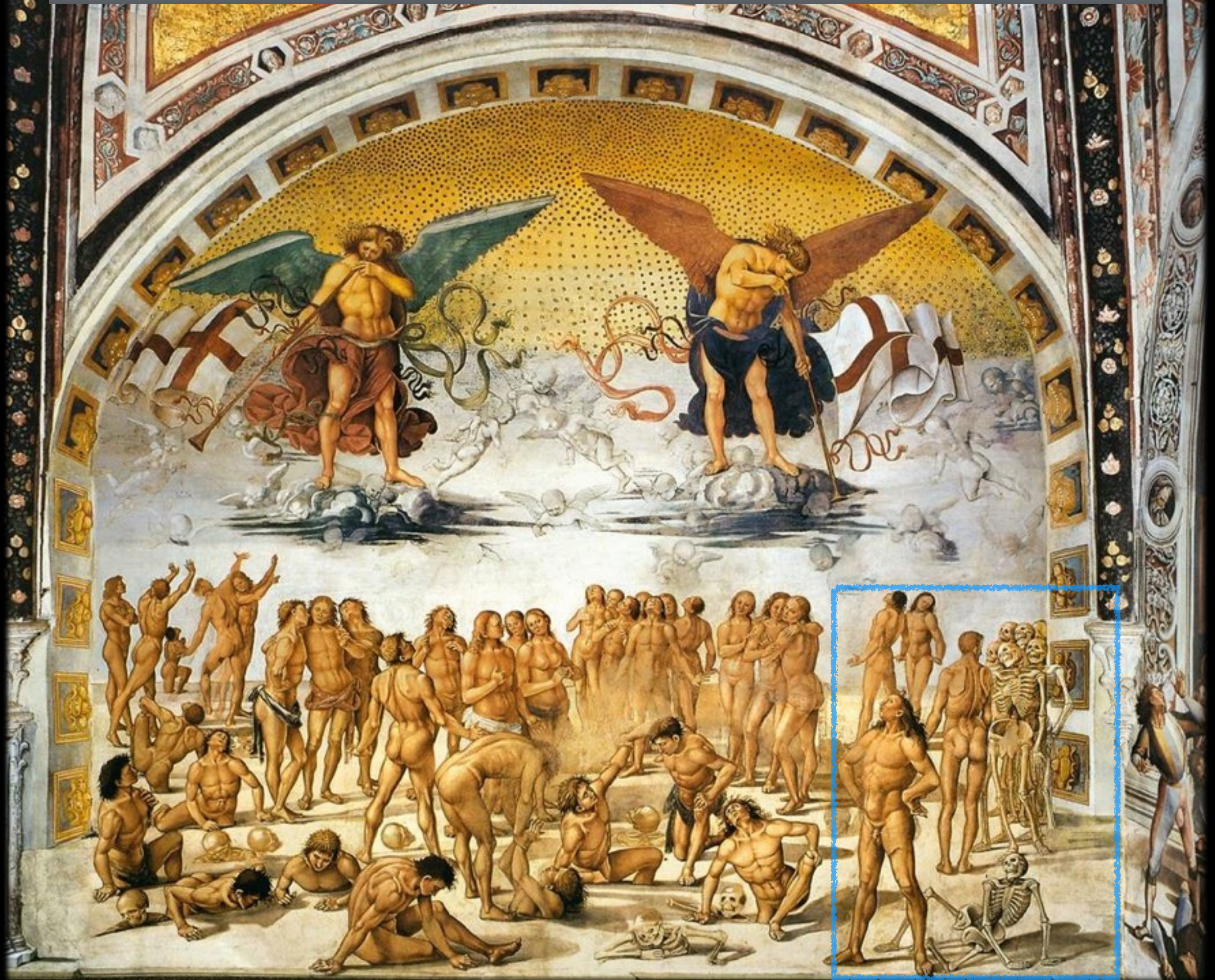
Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Sistine Chapel, Rome







Signorelli's *Resurrection of the Flesh* in the San Brizio Chapel, Orvieto



?



Belli in England - Hans Sotheby, 1874

BELLI'S SONNETS IN THE ROMAN DIALECT.

THE book of which the following pages will attempt to give some account belongs to a very small class in literature, if, indeed, it is not *sui generis*. Written in the singular form of sonnets, it is partly a series of satirical attacks on the Papal Court and Government half a century ago—partly a gallery of cabinet sketches, humorous or pathetic, of the Roman populace in their daily life, taken from their own lips and conversation. It would be difficult to name any book in which the author's personality is more effaced in outward form, or more distinctly present in inward spirit. The former must of course be the case in all dialect poetry written by an educated man, but we know of no other instance of this medium having been chosen for the vent of strong political feeling, or by a man of so much genius. The result is a true work of art, in which all the details have the freshness of a photograph along with that indescribable stamp which no mere transcript from unselected nature ever succeeds in imparting.

Identity of Belli's poor

- Collective identity based on exclusion - **nnoantri** (define themselves as the Others = process of Othering)
- Otherness constructed principally through language, but also animality etc
- 'Us' and 'them' - theme running throughout C19th English Lit. C.f. Dickens
- C.f. social identity theories, e.g. Henri Tajfel's 'in-groups' and 'out-groups', group categorisation, groupings=identity. Almost reversal of reality - the excluded become the 'in-group' in Belli through constant assertion of Otherness
- Literally "voiceless"
Chi abbita a sto monno senza er titolo
o dde Papa, o dde Re, o dd'Imperatore,
quello **nun pò avé mmai vosce in capitolo**
[362. *Li soprani der Monno vecchio*]

Compare Tony Harrison poem 'Them and [uz]'

- How does Harrison use language to create identity?
- How does it compare with Belli?

Is Belli socially/politically engaged?

- Introduzione - no
- Poetry - yes
- How?
- How does Belli's satire work?

Is Belli socially/politically engaged?

A GIUSEPPE GIGLIOLI, a Londra

[Londra], martedì notte [3 novembre 1846].

Caro Giglioli,

Verrò, se mi riesce, a invitar te e la gentilissima moglie tua, in persona; ma intanto sappi, tu immemore d'ogni cosa nostra, che martedì sera, 10 novembre, alle otto, celebreremo il quarto Anniversario della nostra **Scuola** – che dimando a te, e prego umilmente, ma caldamente quanto più so, la tua Signora, di volerci compiacere e onorare della vostra presenza – che saremo *moderati* e ci uniformeremo, quanto potremo, alla Circolare del Card. Gizzi, evitando, anche tra i maccheroni, le dimostrazioni clamorose – che avremo molte Signore Inglesi e che vorrei vedessero gli Italiani riuniti in un pensiero almeno d'insegnamento. Vieni, dunque, perdio; o son io messo con tutte le cose mie al *ban de l'Empire* perché non parteggio per la Lega Pontificio-regio-ducale, prossima come ognun sa? Radice //p254// è a Dublino; l'ho saputo per caso. Addio, ancor sempre, *quand-même* il

tuo

GIUSEPPE

Se trovi qualcuno tanto ardito da dire che il Papa non fa poi gran cosa, dagli il Sonetto che unisco.

19. Croy Street, New North Road.

**A Tale of Two Countries:
Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy**

Divisions within 'the poor'?

GENDER

- France - Olympe de Gouges *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* 1791
- England - Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 1792
- Italy?
- Anna Maria Mozzoni *La donna e i suoi rapporti sociali in occasione della revisione del codice italiano* 1864

WOMAN'S RIGHTS.

THE right to be a comforter,
When other comforts fail ;
The right to cheer the drooping heart
When troubles most assail.

The right to train the infant mind,
To think of Heaven and God ;
The right to guide the tiny feet
The path our Saviour trod.

The right to solace the distressed,
To wipe the mourner's tear ;
The right to shelter the oppressed,
And gently chide each fear.

The right to be a bright sunbeam,
In high or lowly home ;
The right to smile with loving gleam,
And point to joys to come.

The right to fan the fevered brow,
To ease the troubled mind,
And gently tell in accents low,
"All those who seek shall find."

Such are the noblest woman's rights,
The rights which God hath given,
The right to comfort man on earth
And smooth his path to heaven.

M.C.M.R.

Gender questioning in C19th literature

- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 1847

women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (ch. 12)

Men/women dialectics in Belli and Porta

- What difference? What Otherness?
- How are poor women defined?
- Who defines them?
- Are they voiceless?
- Are they powerless?
- Are they worse off than their poor male counterparts?



Useful gender theory

- Lacan *phallocentrism*
- Derrida *phallogocentrism* - emphasis on the linguistic
- Slavoj Žižek:

[...] sexual differentiation is grounded in the very ontological opposition of subject and object, of active spirit and passive matter. Woman is a passive, impressionable object, which means that she is entirely dominated by sexuality.

(‘Otto Weininger, or “Woman doesn’t Exist”’, in *The Žižek Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth and Edmond Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 129.)

**A Tale of Two Countries:
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Ninetta's language

- Porta identifies Milanese as something lowly: **'tutt i lenguagg del mond hin come quell / che parla on sò umilissim servitor'**
- Brandana linguistic dispute of the 1750s Milanese branded as language of **'cucina, dispensa, pentola'**
- Porta himself comes back from the **'scoeura de lengua del Verzee'** at the start of *On funeral* with a basket of linguistic delicacies and local identity, his 'scorbetta / Caregada de tucc i erudizion / Che i serv e i recatton / Dan de solet a gratis ai poetta'. The Verzee as an organic centre of language production
- Food dominates Ninetta's discourse - similes, metaphors abound with food
Pepp 'longh come on salamm'
medina 'desdott in fira e fresca come on oeuv'
Ninetta 'dolza come l'uga'
Ninetta and lover 'e poeù voltavem là come lasagn'
- Overtly sexualised language - part of her trade, her 'mestee'

Charles Dickens

1812-1870



- 1824 - Father imprisoned for three months for debt
- 1824 - Dickens forced to work in a blacking warehouse, labelling bottles
- 1830 Solicitor's clerk
- 1832 Parliamentary reporter in House of Commons
- 1834 Reporter on *Morning Chronicle*
- 1836-7 *The Pickwick Papers* published in monthly instalments

‘The author’s object in this work, was to place before the reader a constant succession of characters and incidents; **to paint them in as vivid colours as he could command**; and to render them, at the same time, **life-like** and amusing.

Dickens, Preface to *The Pickwick Papers*

- *The Pickwick Papers* first publishing sensation
- First instalment sells 500 copies
- Final instalment sells 40000 copies
- All thanks to Sam Weller



Mr Pickwick, innocent, master
to Sam Weller, later father-
figure

Sam Weller, servant to Mr
Pickwick, very sharp, most
intelligent character in book,
practical, witty, but formally
uneducated

Tony Weller, coachman, Sam
Weller's real father, absent
when Sam was young

**Sam Weller 'the greatest symbol in English literature of
the populace peculiar to England'**

G. K. Chesterton

**A Tale of Two Countries:
Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy**

Beginning of *The Pickwick Papers*

The first ray of light which illumines the gloom, and converts into a dazzling brilliancy that obscurity in which the earlier history of the public career of the immortal Pickwick would appear to be involved, is derived from the perusal of the following entry in the Transactions of the Pickwick Club, which the editor of these papers feels the highest pleasure in laying before his readers, as a proof of the careful attention, indefatigable assiduity, and nice discrimination, with which his search among the multifarious documents confided to him has been conducted.

'May 12, 1827. Joseph Smiggers, Esq., P.V.P.M.P.C. [Perpetual Vice-President—Member Pickwick Club], presiding. The following resolutions unanimously agreed to:—

'That this Association has heard read, with feelings of unmingled satisfaction, and unqualified approval, the paper communicated by Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C. [General Chairman—Member Pickwick Club], entitled "Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with some Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats;" and that this Association does hereby return its warmest thanks to the said Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., for the same.

Wellerisms

An expression or form of speech used by or characteristic of the Dickens character Sam Weller or his father, Tony; (usually) spec. a kind of a proverbial expression in which a statement, such as a familiar saying or proverb, is given a humorous or ironic twist by being incongruously or punningly attributed to a particular speaker, typically in a specific situation

[Oxford English Dictionary]

Literary precedents

- **Dogberryism**, after Dogberry, Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*

“Our watch, sir, have indeed **comprehended** two **auspicious** persons”

=

apprehended, suspicious

- **Malapropism**, after Mrs Malaprop, Sheridan, *The Rivals*

The ludicrous misuse of words, esp. in mistaking a word for another resembling it; an instance of this. [OED]

“Sure, if I **reprehend** any thing in this world it is the use of my **oracular** tongue, and a nice **derangement** of **epitaphs**!”

=

comprehend/apprehend, vernacular, arrangement, epithets

Inconsistencies in Sam's speech

- Inconsistencies abound in Sam's speech
 - *wery, werry*
 - *wos, vas*
 - *vy, white*

[all from Chapter 10]

Sam self-aware of his own speech otherness

- Despite his illiterate/uneducated status, Sam is fully aware of his own language

‘What’s your name, sir?’ enquired the judge.

‘Sam Weller, my Lord,’ replied that gentleman.

‘Do you spell it with a “V” or a “W”?’ enquired the judge.

‘That depends upon the taste and fancy of the speller, my Lord,’ replied Sam, **‘I never had occasion to spell it more than once or twice in my life,** but I spells it with a “V”.’

Here a voice in the gallery exclaimed aloud, ‘Quite right too, Samivel; quite right, - Put it down a we, my Lord, put it down a we.’
[Chapter 34]

‘Though you search London you shall not find a Cockney who is half such a Cockney as Sam Weller...who never existed, but who yet remains and will forever remain the typical Cockney.’

Edwin Pugh, *The Charles Dickens Originals* (1912)

‘The average cockney is not articulate. He is often witty; he is sometimes eloquent; he has a notable gift of phrase-making and nicknaming. Every day he is enriching the English tongue with new forms of speech, new clichés, new slang, new catchwords...But the spirit, the soul of the Londoner is usually dumb.’

Edwin Pugh, *Harry the Cockney* (1913)

