



Mrs Malaprop Goes to Hastings: History, Parody, and Language in 1066 and All That (1930)

by Marina Dossena

Alas, poor Yorick! [...].
[...] Where be your gibes now?
(W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, V.i.178, 183)

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last forty years the public has become well-acquainted with a number of satirical and send-up productions; from the success of *Monty Python*, both on TV and at the cinema, to films featuring Mel Brooks and Gene Wilder (lines and scenes from which continue to be popular, such as those from *Young Frankenstein* and *Blazing Saddles*), audiences have shown appreciation of humorous takes on well-known stories or genres, enjoying the twists and turns of familiar plots in jocular renditions.¹ Similarly, in more recent times, the World Wide Web has become an almost inexhaustible source of spoofs: these include farcical newspapers, like *The Daily Mash* (<www.thedailymash.co.uk/>) or *The Onion* (<www.theonion.com/>), in which general interest topics are addressed in an apparently deadpan form, and more specialized sites, such as *Speculative Grammarian* (<<http://specgram.com/>>), which introduces itself as “the premier scholarly journal featuring research in the neglected field of satirical linguistics”. The former present headlines like the following:

¹ For a recent and exhaustive study of the mechanisms of humour interpretation see Sala (2012).



Offline Social Networking Service Called 'Pub' Launched
(www.thedailymash.co.uk/news/society/offline-social-networking-service-called-pub-launched-2015062499538)²

Report: More Companies Offering Paid Maternity Leave to Mothers Who Complete 3 Months of Work Ahead of Time (www.theonion.com/article/report-more-companies-offering-paid-maternity-leav-52887)

Indeed, both websites include the typical sections of online newspapers: news, sports, politics, business, entertainment, and even horoscopes, though always with a distinctly satirical approach.

Speculative Grammarian, in contrast, introduces itself as an academic journal where readers can access the current issue, a random article, podcasts, and special features like *The Compleat Encyclopaedia of Compendious Historical Lexicons of Obscure and Archaic Vernacular and Nomenclature*, the title of which is a mock-quotation of typical Late Modern title pages, in which the spelling of *complete* evokes old-fashioned usage and where the description of its compilation and digitization sounds like a text authored by Jonathan Swift in its often hyperbolic, preposterous, and bombastic style:

a one-of-a-kind resource, compiled by literally generations of lexicographers and philologists over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. [...] Originally compiled from dozens of standard dictionaries, along with hundreds of little-known and specialist lexicons of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, *The Compleat Encyclopaedia* was the most extensive record of the English language ever created. Unfortunately, the unimaginable cost of its creation, its unwieldy size, and its impractical price lead to the eventual demise of the original publisher, and the destruction of most of the volumes of the *Encyclopaedia*.

Several hundred copies of the early volumes were sold, and dozens survive around the world. Only about twenty copies each of the last five volumes were printed before the publisher was forced into foreclosure. No more than five copies of each survive to this day, and as far as we know, *Speculative Grammarian* has the only complete set of all fifty volumes, in its Waterloo, Iowa storage vaults.

Our lexicographic team has been working for nearly thirty years to completely digitize *The Compleat Encyclopaedia* and render the pronunciation guides into IPA – a task begun by a lone researcher on an Apple Macintosh in 1984, and completed by a team of over fifty in 2008, using the *SpecGram* supercomputer, Λόγος – a nearly-petascale computing environment, featuring a 0.93-petaflop Cray XT5 system containing 11,937 compute sockets and more than 204 terabytes of memory. (<http://specgram.com/dictionary.html>)

Similarly, Internet users are familiar with specialized pages in which different branches of academia are satirized: for instance, the cartoons of *Piled Higher and Deeper* (<http://phdcomics.com/>) are about the difficulties of writing and submitting chapter after chapter of a doctoral thesis which seems eternally far from completion.

² All sites accessed in November 2016.



Shit Academics Say, instead, is both a blog and a Twitter and Facebook presence which began as a social experiment and which now is “reaching upwards of 24 million views a month across platforms” (see the outline provided by its author, at <https://sasconfidential.com/2016/05/06/academicssay-pt1/>); in its posts, users find generally short and sharp comments, such as in the examples given below, on the often long and difficult path towards funding, publication, and access to research in expensive journals:

Science: The manuscript
Faith: Believing someone will read it

Information: Pursuit of knowledge
Knowledge: Pursuit of wisdom
Wisdom: Pursuit of funding

The best things in academic life are–
[See below for full text purchase options]

Finally, there are the numerous Facebook pages in the series “Trust me, I’m a(n) ...”, e.g. “a programmer” (www.facebook.com/TrustProgrammers/), “an engineer” (www.facebook.com/TrustMelmAEngineerr/), and “a linguist” (www.facebook.com/TrustMelmALinguist/), which derive their titles from the BBC Two programme “Trust me, I’m a doctor” (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04j9gny) and present both posts and merchandising featuring ironic captions often found in the homepage, e.g.:

Pro 'gram.mer (n.), an organism that converts caffeine into code
www.facebook.com/TrustProgrammers/photos/a.395086320558226.93092.395081540558704/439715862761938/?type=3&theater

Where there is a will there is a lawsuit
www.facebook.com/trust.me.lawyer/photos/a.180710912059650.39844.180707092060032/832442493553152/?type=3&theater

The kind of parody found in these pages is reminiscent of the Late Modern spoofs which, like the Swiftian prose employed by *Speculative Grammarian*, were also found in eighteenth-century popular culture. From the time of the *Commedia dell'Arte* pedants were making frequent appearances, and Molière’s medical satire, *Le Malade Imaginaire*, paved the way for much pseudo-scientific humour: according to a ballad circulating in London between 1700 and 1740, a “scolding wife” could allegedly be cured with a single pill (maybe poisonous, it is hinted), and of course all sorts of other ailments could also be treated (see <http://ballad.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V25561>). Among such “infallible doctors”, the most famous character is perhaps Dulcamara in Gaetano Donizetti’s opera *L’elisir d’amore* (1832). Similarly, quack doctors selling snake oil are a feature of many “Wild West” stories, in which the



representation of charlatans that actually existed in real life contributes to the definition of a 'wild' world, although in the US "medical shows" were even exploited by companies who also advertised their liniments in print, often evoking the exotic quality of Native American medicine (see <www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/ephemera/medshow.html>). By the turn of the twentieth century, the distance (and irony) that such materials could imply did not seem to be so obvious any longer, and it is therefore all the more interesting to come across a text like the one that I will now go on to consider.

2. 1066 AND ALL THAT: AN OVERVIEW

First published in 1930, Walter Carruthers Sellar and Robert Julian Yeatman's book is a parody of history texts of the Late Modern period; it presents a (predictably) very Anglo-centric view of British history through brief annotations, which in many cases had first appeared in the well-known satirical magazine *Punch*; the chapters are interspersed with elementary sketches of the protagonists, thus bringing the text closer to the cartoons that had also been popular throughout Late Modern times and which had of course been a characterizing feature of *Punch* (see for instance <<http://punch.photoshelter.com/gallery/Victorian-Era-Cartoons/G0000czGdMEOaVXY/>>).

The deliberate vagueness of the title, which may at first sound derogatory, is immediately signposted as humorous by the subtitle, in which precise numbers are given in relation to vague items like "good things" and "bad kings", and only two "genuine dates" are admitted:

A Memorable History of England, comprising all the parts you can remember,
including 103 Good Things, 5 Bad Kings and 2 Genuine Dates

The subtitle also appeals directly to the reading public, as the book is announced as "comprising all the parts you can remember", which implies a very subjective point of view; indeed, this subjectivity is candidly outlined in the "Compulsory Preface", in which the choice of contents is said to be

the result of years of research in golf clubs, gun-rooms, green-rooms, etc. For instance, two out of the four Dates originally included were eliminated at the last moment, a research done at the Eton and Harrow match having revealed that they are not memorable.

The reason for conducting research in non-canonical environments, i.e. "golf clubs, gun-rooms, green-rooms, etc.", instead of libraries and archives, is explained as follows at the beginning of the Preface:



Histories have previously been written with the object of exalting their authors.
The object of this History is to console the reader.

This means that only contents that readers can remember from their previous studies can be considered 'memorable', thus attributing a literal value and a mock-heroic connotation to an adjective that is generally used in a much more celebratory sense.

Throughout the 62 chapters in which the book is divided, *memorable* occurs 127 times, while *not memorable* occurs only twice. In addition, other qualifiers appear to be just as important: *good* and *bad* are quite striking in this respect, with 88 and 38 occurrences respectively: of these, a significant percentage occur with *thing* (49 occurrences of *good thing* and 14 of *bad thing*), suggesting the kind of oversimplification which may characterize how historical events are remembered. In a similar vein, monarchs are remembered mostly through some supposedly significant characteristic, and that is how they are listed in the text;³ for instance, we have:

Ethelread the Unready: A Weak King (ch. 8)
Canute, an Experimental King (ch. 9)
William I: A Conquering King (ch. 11)
Rufus: A Ruddy King (ch. 12)

Readers are thus involved in a constant game of recognition which becomes correction when items are misrepresented in the frequent spoonerisms and malapropisms scattered throughout the text:⁴ a game which flatters readers in the instances below, in which parodies of Anglo-Saxon poetry are included, thus presupposing the readers' familiarity with alliterative verse, though this may be twisted into a pseudo Old English version of a famous nursery rhyme:

CHAPTER 4 - Britain Conquered Again

THE conversion of Britain was followed by a Wave of Danes, accompanied by their sisters or Sagas, and led by such memorable warriors as Harold Falsetooth and Magnus the Great, who, landing correctly in Thanet, overran the country from right to left, with fire.*)

After this the Danes invented a law called the Danelaw, [...]. By this time the Saxons had all become very old like the Britons before them and were called ealdormen; when they had been defeated in a battle by the Danes they used to

³ The taste for interesting (and easy-to-remember) anecdotes seems to span centuries: it is not unusual for popularizing texts, such as tourist brochures or websites, to cite episodes recounted in medieval chronicles or indeed in folklore. It is the case, for instance, of the following page on King Cnut's speech on the waves or of the numerous sites on supposedly haunted palaces, like Glamis Castle (see <www.medievalists.net/2015/05/24/the-changing-story-of-cnut-and-the-waves/ and www.glamis-castle.co.uk/about-the-castle.cfm>, respectively).

⁴ These mechanisms clearly rely on Superiority Theory (see Morreall 2016), one of the many strategies employed throughout the text and a taxonomy of which could be outlined on the basis of Attardo (1994 and 2001) and Goatly (2012). However, the simultaneous occurrence of different techniques in the text under discussion place such a taxonomy outside the scope of the present paper.



sing little songs to themselves such as the memorable fragment discovered in the Bodleian Library at Oxford:

Old-Saxon Fragment

Syng a song of Saxons
In the Wapentake of Rye
Four and twenty eaoldormen
Too eaold to die....
Anon.

(*) And, according to certain obstinate historians, the Danes, on the other hand, wrote a very defiant kind of Epic poetry, e.g.:

Beoleopard, OR The Witan's Whail

Whan Cnut Cyng the Witan wold enfeoff
Of infangthief and outfangthief
onderlich were they enwraġed
And wordwar waged
Sware Cnut great scot and lot
Swinge wold ich this illbegotten lot. [...]

Indeed, misnomers and anachronisms occur in most chapters: in Ch. 3, in addition to the "Venomous Bead (author of the Rosary)", "the great St Bernard (originator of the clerical collar), [...], St Kit and St Kin", numerous "Egg-Kings" are mentioned:

Egg-Kings were found on the thrones of all these kingdoms, such as Eggberd, Eggbreth, Eggfroth, etc. None of them, however, succeeded in becoming memorable except in so far as it is difficult to forget such names as Eggbirth, Eggbred, Eggbeard, Eggfish, etc. Nor is it even remembered by what kind of Eggdeath they perished.

In a similar coalescence of literary and linguistic references, stories about King Alfred and King Arthur are conflated with hints at nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works; besides, in Chapters 5 and 7 the two names are used interchangeably, despite recommendations not to confuse them:

CHAPTER 5 - Alfred the Cake

KING ALFRED was the first Good king, with the exception of Good king Wenceslas, [...] (it is not known, however, what King Wenceslas was King of). Alfred ought never to be confused with King Arthur, equally memorable but probably non-existent and therefore perhaps less important historically (unless he did exist).

CHAPTER 7 - Lady Windermere. Age of Lake Dwellers



ALFRED had a very interesting wife called Lady Windermere (The Lady of the Lake), who was always clothed in the same white frock, and used to go bathing with Sir Launcelot (also of the Lake) and was thus a Bad queen. It was also in King Arthur's time that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was published: this was the first English newspaper and had all the news about his victories, and Lady Windermere, and the Cakes, etc.

The romanticization of history which may have actually been a feature of some nineteenth-century texts, in which the past was idealized for patriotic purposes,⁵ is thus satirized in the frequent (and often inappropriate) uses of the adjective *romantic* to characterize both people and events, as we see in the instances below:

the Barons built a surfeit of romantic castles, into which they lured everybody and then put them to the torture (Ch. 14)

RICHARD I was a hairy King with a Lion's Heart; he went roaring about the Desert making ferocious attacks on the Saladins and the Paladins, and was thus a very romantic King. (Ch. 17)

EDWARD III had a very romantic reign which he began by confining his mother in a stronghold for the rest of her life (Ch. 24)

Indeed, the qualifier may be adapted for humorous spelling purposes: in Ch. 35 the Cavaliers are said to be "Wrong but Wromantic", while Roundheads are "Right but Repulsive", thus introducing a linguistic strategy based on alliteration that is still found in Terry Deary's *Horrible Histories* series, the first volume of which appeared in 1993, and in which we find titles like *The Vicious Vikings*, *The Groovy Greeks*, or *The Terrible Tudors*.

As noted by a commentator in 1997, the flurry of incorrect, misremembered or partly unexplained events listed in the book reads like a disastrous lesson:

For those of us who spend weeks every year contemplating examination papers, the evidence of what students remember, Sellar's and Yeatman's [sic] satire is on one level an extended examination paper, a nightmare paper, brilliant in its awfulness. (www.timeshighereducation.com/books/speaking-volumes-wc-sellars-and-rj-yeatmans-1066-and-all-that/159911.article)

In this sense it is striking, though perhaps not unpredictable, that the book also includes five "test papers", where readers come across nonsensical questions and instructions like the following, found in Test IV:⁶

⁵ This attitude, which often resulted in magniloquent celebration, is also seen in nineteenth-century monuments to heroes of the past, such as the Wallace Monument in Stirling or the statue of Boadicea in London.

⁶ Test questions were actually included also in US textbooks – see for instance the following, taken from Goodrich (1822: 1a, 18a): "How does History incite to virtue, and warn against vice? [...] Into



4. What convinces you that Henry VIII had VIII wives? Was it worth it? [...]
 8. Which do you consider was the stronger swimmer, (a) The Spanish Armadillo, (b) The Great Seal?
 9. Who was in whose what, and how many miles away?
 10. Cap'n, art thou sleeping there below? (*) [...]
 15. Estimate the medical prowess of the period with clinical reference to (a) Pride's Purge, (b) The Diet of Worms, (c) The Topic of Capricorns.
- (*) N.B. Do not attempt to answer this question.

Instructions on what is forbidden and what is permitted when answering are also given elsewhere: in Test III we read that "Candidates should write on at least one side of the paper", but in Test V we find "Do not on any account attempt to write on both sides of the paper at once", while in Test I the authors state: "Do not attempt to answer more than one question at a time". Strict (and often contradictory) instructions may also be given in the questions themselves – in Test III, for instance, we read:

1. Contract, Expand, and Explode (a) The Charters and Garters of the Realm. (b) The Old Suspender. [...]
3. The end of the closing of the 2nd stage of the Treaty of Bretigny marks the opening of a new phase in the 1st stage of the termination of the Hundred Years' War.' (Confute.) [...]
6. Intone interminably (but inaudibly) i. The Pilgrims' Grace, ii. 'Cuccu'.
7. Do not draw a sketch-map of the Battle of Bannockburn, but write not more than three lines on the advantages and disadvantages of the inductive historical method with special relation to ecclesiastical litigation in the earlier Lancastrian epochs. [...]
10. Describe in excessive detail (a) The advantages of the Black Death. (b) The fate of the Duke of Clarence. (c) A Surfeit.

As a result, the book does not only satirize how learners may (mis)remember facts, but also how these same facts may be taught and tested.

In general, the whole book is a spoof of academic writing at various levels: linguistic, methodological, and in relation to textual organization. A language characterized by malapropisms underpins a methodological approach which appears to rely on an oversimplified method of linear narration. Finally, from the textual and paratextual point of view, the book leaves no aspect of academic writing untouched by its scathing humour. In the profiles of the contributors, typically used to summarize the author's status and research interests, one of the authors describes himself as "Failed M.A., etc., Oxon."; in addition to the "compulsory preface", which has already been discussed above, there is a "Preface to the Second Edition" which pokes fun at the valuable rarity of *de luxe* first editions saying that this unique and presumably very

how many periods may the history of the United States be divided? [...] What is said of the end of the year of 1812?"



expensive copy was actually sold by one editor to the other, only to be forgotten during a long, and presumably even more expensive, taxi ride:

A FIRST edition limited to one copy and printed on rice paper and bound in buckboards and signed by one of the editors was sold to the other editor, who left it in a taxi somewhere between Piccadilly Circus and the Bodleian.

Acknowledgements also sound standard in their formulaic structure, until readers realize that there is actually nothing for which to be grateful (especially in the more personalized move where “their wife” [sic!] is thanked) and indeed gratitude to journal editors is limited by the fact that “indebtedness” is said to be only “comparative”:

THE Editors acknowledge their comparative indebtedness to the Editors of the *Historical Review*, *Bradshaw*, *the Lancet*, *La Vie Parisienne*, etc., in which none of the following chapters has appeared. Their thanks are also due to their wife, for not preparing the index wrong. There is no index.

Finally, “press opinions” are listed where readers would normally expect endorsements, but again both the comments and the names of the journals in which they are said to have appeared prove a total anti-climax; indeed, the tautologically entitled *Review of Reviews of Reviews* says its commentators are looking forward to the editors’ “last” work, implying a sense of disappointment and maybe even impatience with the current one:

‘This slim volume...’ *Bookworm*
‘We look forward keenly to the appearance of their last work.’
Review of Reviews of Reviews
‘... vague...’ *Vague*

A new layer of meaning may thus be gleaned from the book’s approach both to contents and to structure: the constant attempt to shed a different light on familiar topics and standard ways of representing them appears to suggest an ideological undercurrent, the investigation of which may prove of interest.

3. ALL FUN AND GAMES?

The typology of errors and other forms of inaccurate usage found in *1066 and All That* may be seen to fall into four main categories:

- oversimplification (leading to vagueness): e.g. in Ch. 28, “a very clever plan, known as the Wars of the Roses (because the Barons all picked different coloured roses in order to see which side they were on)”;



- malapropisms (including misspellings and misnomers): e.g. in Ch. 28, “the Hundred Years' War was brought to an end by Joan of Ark, a French descendant of Noah”;
- non-sequiturs: e.g. in Ch. 16, “The Chapters between William I (1066) and the Tudors (Henry VIII, etc.) are always called the Middle Ages, on account of their coming at the beginning”;
- confusing summaries and test questions (see above).

Looking at this typology from a Gricean perspective (see Grice 1975), we see that we are in fact dealing with instances in which all the four Maxims of the Cooperative Principle are flouted: oversimplification creates problems from the point of view of Quantity, as an insufficient amount of information is given; malapropisms challenge the truth value of the predication, i.e. Quality; non-sequiturs question Relevance; and finally confusing and contradictory statements pose a threat to Manner, as readers are at a loss for the correct interpretation of the statement. However, these difficulties, which on the surface would hinder cooperation very seriously, establish a different kind of relationship between participants. Far from posing face threats (see Brown & Levinson 1987), they actually involve readers in a carnivalesque game in which meanings are turned upside down and words are in fact caricatures of the concepts which the text aims to satirize, much like in the intertextual games discussed by Norrick (1989).

In fact, social criticism has relied on the stigmatization of linguistic usage, i.e. of perceived ‘errors’, for centuries. Even today we come across books, sites, and social network pages in which what are jocularly called “the grammar police” encourage correct language and stigmatize common mistakes like the confusion of *they're*, *there*, *their* in spelling or incorrect apostrophe placement; the presupposition is that such uses, not infrequent even among native speakers, seem uneducated, but in the past stigmatizing labels were much fiercer, as shown in many studies of Late Modern prescriptivism. Over the last fifteen years, the bibliography on this topic has grown considerably: see for instance the chapters from 58 to 66 in Bergs and Brinton (2012); however, it was not only supposedly “rustic”, “provincial” or “vulgar” forms (whether in phonology, syntax or vocabulary) that were singled out and corrected, or “improved”, as contemporary terminology claimed, or parodied in dialect literature. Snobbery and affectation had equally been the object of sharp criticism, albeit in humorous forms, since Early Modern times: the character of Holofernes, in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labours Lost*, is the epitome of hard-word users, and indeed hard-word dictionaries were at the basis of modern lexicography when the so-called ink-horn controversy debated the greater or lesser value of Latinate terms as opposed to Anglo-Saxon ones. Similarly, Robert Fergusson twisted Augustan English into a parody of itself in one of his satires on Johnson’s tour of Scotland (Dossena 2005: 95). What is found in *1066 and All That*, however, is somewhat different and perhaps closer to the political satire found in broadside ballads (see Dossena 2011 and 2013).



While Shakespeare and, later, Fergusson satirized linguistic pompousness, Late Modern commentators introduced humorous anecdotes to illustrate the amusing quality of supposedly non-standard forms – see the following examples:

This is a gift that I have, simple, simple; a foolish extravagant spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions: these are begot in the ventricle of memory, nourished in the womb of pia mater, and delivered upon the mellowing of occasion.
(Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*, IV.2.1213)

Great Pedagogue, whose literarian lore,
With syllable and syllable conjoin'd,
To transmutate and varify, has learn'd
The whole revolving scientific names
That in the alphabetic columns lie,
Far from the knowledge of our mortal shapes;
As we, who never can peroculate
The miracles by thee miraculiz'd,
The Muse silential long, with mouth apert,
Would give vibration to stagnatic tongue,
And loud encomiate thy puissant name,
Eulogiated from the green decline
Of Thames's banks to Scoticanian shores,
Where Loch-lomondian liquids undulize. [...]
Fergusson (1773: 114)

The Highland expression for two gentlemen bowing to each other, amused us extremely on a late occasion, when a Scotchman said to his friend, "I saw your brother last week exchange hats with Lord Melbourne in Bond Street!"
(Sinclair 1859: 99)

In *1066 and All That* the relentless tour-de-force in which one error follows the other creates a sequence of images in which monarchs are represented as mostly inept, evil, or both; battles are pointless, because wars will only lead to more wars, and imperialism is in fact a cultural blanket which smothers all other voices. When we read about the "feutile system" or acts that are "dull and void", the lexical items are twisted in such a way that the new value they acquire contributes to the criticism which the authors seem to be eliciting from the audience:

WILLIAM next invented a system according to which everybody had to belong to somebody else, and everybody else to the King. This was called the Feutile System, [...]. (Ch. 11)

ON the death of Henry IV Part II, his son, Prince Hal, [...] decided on an immediate appearance in the Hundred Years' War, making a declaration that all the treaties with France were to be regarded as dull and void. (Ch. 27)



A similar take on the distance between history 'from above' and what actually concerns the lives of ordinary people is seen in how the Magna Charta is presented and summarized – a bullet-point list in which the provisions never safeguard the "Common People", though it is said to have been "a good thing":

THERE also happened in this reign the memorable Charta, known as Magna Charter on account of the Latin Magna (great) and Charter (a Charter); this [...] was invented by the Barons on a desert island in the Thames called Ganymede. By congregating there, armed to the teeth, the Barons compelled John to sign the Magna Charter, which said:

1. That no one was to be put to death, save for some reason (except the Common People).
2. That everyone should be free (except the Common People).
3. That everything should be of the same weight and measure throughout the Realm (except the Common People).
4. That the Courts should be stationary, instead of following a very tiresome medieval official known as the King's Person all over the country.
5. That 'no person should be fined to his utter ruin' (except the King's Person).
6. That the Barons should not be tried except by a special jury of other Barons who would understand.

Magna Charter was therefore the chief cause of Democracy in England, and thus a Good Thing for everyone (except the Common People). (Ch. 19)

As for the relationship between Britain and the rest of the world, and particularly with the USA, the parody of imperialistic nationalism is seen both in how the American War of Independence and the Indian Mutiny are summarized:

The War with the Americans is memorable as being the only war in which the English were ever defeated, and it was unfair because the Americans had the Allies on their side. In some ways the war was really a draw, since England remained top nation [...]. After this the Americans made Wittington President and gave up speaking English and became U.S.A. and Columbia and 100%, etc. This was a Good Thing in the end, as it was a cause of the British Empire, but it prevented America from having any more History (Ch. 44)

The Indian Mutiny

THIS was also inevitable on account of:

- (a) The Natives. These believed that the English were going to make them bite their greasy cartilages (Chuputti). This they treacherously believed to be contrary to their religion and therefore a Bad Thing.
- (b) The Anglo-Indians. The natives were unable to realize that these were a Good Thing. (Ch. 54)

Ch. 56, listing a "Wave of Justifiable Wars" and "Spheres of Interference", also pokes fun at the WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) ideology underpinning much historical narration centred on imperialism; in fact, this is extended to the US in Ch. 62,



when at the end of the book, after the First World War, “America” becomes “top nation” and “History came to a .”; Test V, therefore, comprises items “Up to the End of History”.

This kind of satire is seen both in Jacobite songs like “A wee, wee German lairdie” and “Hey, Johnnie Cope” and in the anti-Polaris campaign songs of the 1960s, but in those cases names and tunes were carnivalized with a clear agenda; in *1066 and All That* what political undertones may be at work have to be uncovered through an overview of its patterns, crazy and random though the text may seem.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The well-known Latin motto, *castigat ridendo mores*, is perhaps the best definition of what satire does; in the case of Sellar and Yeatman’s book, the cornucopia of errors it parades appears to be doing something very similar. It entertains with its hilarious malapropisms and illogical statements, but a deeper message may be gleaned beyond the humour. Although history may be made to sound all pomp and circumstance, at the end of the day it may also be made to sound, in Macbeth’s words, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”.

If history is just a long list of kings, queens, generals and battles, it implies a patronizing attitude to the people, and indeed to the rest of the world, which causes nothing but ruin. It is tragically prophetic that the book, published between two World Wars, closes with a chapter on “the peace to end peace”. Almost a century later, readers know how events were to unfold, and the paradox, suddenly but inevitably, seems much less amusing: as the proverb says, “many a true word is spoken in jest”, and Yorick is quite chop-fallen.

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Marina Dossena is Professor of English at the University of Bergamo. She previously taught at the Universities of Edinburgh and of Milan. Her main research interests focus on English historical dialectology, especially in relation to Scots and Scottish English, historical pragmatics, and Late Modern English. Among her most recent publications in this field is Marina Dossena (ed.), 2015, *Transatlantic Perspectives on Late Modern English*, Benjamins, Amsterdam.

marina.dossena@unibg.it