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# Macaroni

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"Macaronic verse" is defined in [The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms](#) (1990) as "poetry in which two or more languages are mixed together. Strictly, the term denotes a kind of comic verse in which words from a vernacular language are introduced into Latin (or other foreign-language) verses and given Latin inflections; such verse had a vogue among students in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, but is rare in English. More loosely, the term is applied to any verses in which phrases or lines in a foreign language are frequently introduced: several medieval English poems have Latin refrains or alternating Latin and English lines, and in modern times the poems of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot have been called macaronic for their use of lines in several languages."

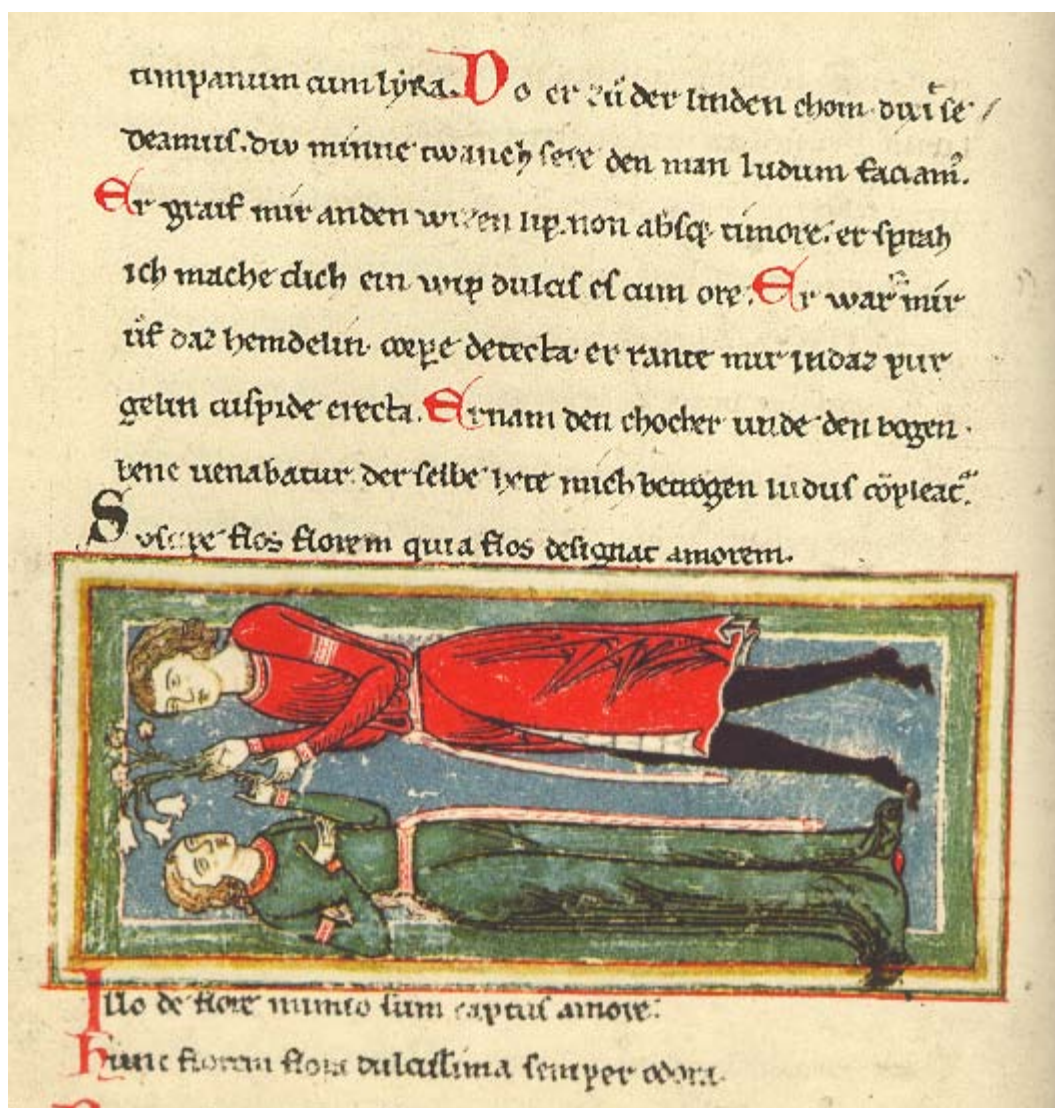
I want to share with you three specimens of macaroni, one from medieval Europe and two others, more recent, from America. The first is from the *Carmina burana*, that collection of about 250 often ribald songs of the 13th century that were discovered in a Bavarian monastery in 1803 and first published, heavily censored, by [Johannes Schmeller](#) in the 1840s. The song I've chosen is number 185, entitled "I was such an innocent child" and recounts, well, a rape along the road. I'll read three stanzas, also, of course, censoring heavily, each stanza first in my English translation, then in the original macaronic form:

I was such an innocent child  
back then, when I was deflowered  
everyone called me virtuous  
everyone I pleased  
Hoy and oe!  
Accursed be the linden trees  
that stand along the road

Ich was ein chint so wolgetan,  
virgo dum florebam  
do brist mich div werlt al,  
omnibus placebam.  
Hoy et oe  
maledicantur thylie  
iuxta viam posite.

I wanted to go to the meadow  
to pick flowers  
and there a rogue  
wanted to take my virginity  
Hoy and oe!  
Accursed be the linden trees  
that stand along the road

Da wolde ih an die wisen gan,  
flores adunare,  
do wolde mich ein ungetan  
ibi deflorare.  
Hoy et oe  
maledicantur thylie  
iuxta viam posite.



He took up his quiver and his bow,  
 the hunting had been good  
 He had deceived me  
 and the game was over.  
 Hoy and oe!  
 Accursed be the linden trees  
 that stand along the road

Er nam den chocher unde den bogen  
 bene uenabatur  
 der selbe hete mich betrogen  
 ludus compleatur.  
 Hoy et oe  
 maledicantur thylie  
 iuxta viam posite.

Let's jump now several centuries to Chicago in the 1920s. It is claimed that America is not a place where macaronic verse has ever flourished, but that is mainly because ethnic and immigrant literatures have been neglected by the composers of the literary canon—at least until very recently. In Chicago, you can find examples of macaroni in many languages, but for now, let's stick with German. In 1926, Kurt M. Stein began publishing German-American verses in the *Tribune*. In one of them, we find out how Shakespeare's *Hamlet* might have been rendered on some stage on Chicago's near Northwest side:

### [Hamlet, Part I](#)

"Ich hab a Hunch die Welt geht an die Bum,"

Sagt Hamlet zu Horatio, sei Chum.

"Da is was rotten hier in diesem State,

Und 's is kei use dass es so weiter geht."

"Well, business wird schon starteh aufzupickeh,"

Sagt Raish. "'S tut anyhow kei gut zu kickeh."

"Von business," answert Ham, "tu ich net talkeh.

Mich boddert nur der Ghost wo hier tut walkeh.

Iss das mei Pa sei Ghost und an die Level,

Or shust a fake, for fun geschickt vom Devil?"

"Das," sagt Horatio, "lässt sich hart decideh.

In mei opinion war er bona fide.

So proud herumzustalkeh wie das Ding

Kann nur a movieh-actor or a King."

"Ich wett'," mused Ham, "sie haben ihm geburied

Weil er a bunch Insurance hat gecarried.

Belief me, Raish, je mehr ich tu reflecteh,

Je mehr tu ich mei royal Ma suspecteh

Und meinen Ohm. Die haben Pa gemurdered -

Durch faule Means ins Jenseits ihn befördert!

Net accidentlich starb der Kind der Däne!

"S war diesen Weg - der Ghost tat mir's explaineh . . .

And so on.

My last specimen of macaronic *prose* (this time) is by none other than Mark Twain, who published it as "Tale of the Fishwife and Its Sad Fate," in *A Tramp Abroad* in 1880. For purists, this may or may not be "macaronic" at all: in fact it is a mixture of more or less normal English and at least one aspect of German grammar, namely grammatical gender that, as you will see, has absolutely nothing to do with natural gender. But regardless: here goes, and pay good attention to your p's, your q's, and especially to your pronouns:

It is a bleak Day. Hear the Rain, how he pours, and the Hail, how he rattles; and see the Snow, how he drifts along, and of the Mud, how deep he is! Ah the poor Fishwife, it is stuck fast in the Mire; it has dropped its Basket of Fishes; and its Hands have been cut by the Scales as it seized some of the falling Creatures; and one Scale has even got into its Eye. And it cannot get her out. It opens its Mouth to cry for Help; but if any Sound comes out of him, alas he is drowned by the raging of the Storm. And now a Tomcat has got one of the Fishes and she will surely escape with him. No, she bites off a Fin, she holds her in her Mouth--will she swallow her? No, the Fishwife's brave Mother-dog deserts his Puppies and rescues the Fin—which he eats, himself, as his Reward. O, horror, the Lightning has struck the Fish-basket; he sets him on Fire; see the Flame, how she licks the doomed Utensil with her red and angry Tongue; now she attacks the helpless Fishwife's Foot—she burns him up, all but the big Toe, and even SHE is partly consumed; and still she spreads, still she waves her fiery Tongues; she attacks the Fishwife's Leg and destroys IT; she attacks its Hand and destroys HER also; she attacks the Fishwife's Leg and destroys HER also; she attacks its Body and consumes HIM; she wreathes herself about its Heart and IT is consumed; next about its Breast, and in a Moment SHE is a Cinder; now she reaches its Neck—He goes; now its Chin—IT goes; now its Nose—SHE goes. In another Moment, except Help come, the Fishwife will be no more. Time presses--is there none to succor and save? Yes! Joy, joy, with flying Feet the she-Englishwoman comes! But alas, the generous she-Female is too late: where now is the fated Fishwife? It has ceased from its Sufferings, it has gone to a better Land; all that is left of it for its loved Ones to lament over, is this poor smoldering Ash-heap. Ah, woeful, woeful Ash-heap! Let us take him up tenderly, reverently, upon the lowly Shovel, and bear him to his long Rest, with the Prayer that when he rises again it will be a Realm where he will have one good square responsible Sex, and have it all to himself, instead of having a mangy lot of assorted Sexes scattered all over him in Spots.

By the way, most of what I've been reading to you can be found elsewhere on my website, by the way. Go to the library's home page, and type in the search box "Carmina burana" or "Fishwife," and you should be taken to the appropriate pages. Actually, my Carmina burana page appears to be one of my most popular—probably sought out for all the wrong, frivolous reasons.

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