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# Material for the study of macaroni ‘dandy’

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# MATERIAL FOR THE STUDY OF *MACARONI* 'DANDY'

Gerald Cohen

The term *macaroni* (type of English dandy, 2nd half of 18th century) has faded into obscurity with one notable exception: its appearance in the Yankee Doodle song. The song is known to have been written by an Englishman attempting to ridicule the American colonists; country bumpkin Yankee Doodle absurdly considered the modest addition of an ordinary feather to his cap as representative of the attire of the London dandies known as macaronis. To the British who had actually seen the often gaudily attired macaronis, this comparison must have seemed hilarious, although in one instance (see below, p. 26 parag. 2), a macaroni did in fact put a feather in his cap). And the chorus' combination of 'Yankee Doodle' + 'dandy' no doubt struck the British as an oxymoron.

The well-known first verse and chorus are:

Yankee Doodle went to town
A-riding on a pony,
Stuck a feather in his cap
And called it macaroni.

[*Chorus*]

Yankee Doodle keep it up,
Yankee Doodle dandy,
Mind the music and the step,
And with the girls be handy.

## *OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY*

*OED3* says of *macaroni*, n. (meaning #2; brackets in the quote below appear in the original):
'A dandy or fop; spec. (in the second half of the 18th cent.) a member of a set of young men who had travelled in Europe and extravagantly imitated Continental tastes and fashions. Also in extended use. Now *hist.*

[This use seems to be from the name of the Macaroni Club, a designation probably adopted to indicate the preference of the members for foreign cookery, macaroni being at that time little eaten in England. There appears to be no connection with the extended use of Italian *maccherone* in the senses 'blockhead, fool, mountebank' (compare *macaroon* n. 3), referred to in 1711 by Addison *Spectator* 24 Apr. 178/2: Those circumforaneous Wits whom every Nation calls by the name of that Dish of Meat which it loves best:..in Italy, *Maccaronies*.]

[1764 H. Walpole *Let. to Earl of Hertford* 6 Feb. (1857) IV. 178 The Maccaroni Club (which is composed of all the travelled young men who wear long curls and spying-glasses).]
1764 H. Walpole *Let. Earl Hertford* 27 May (1857) IV. 238 Lady Falkener's daughter is to be married to a young rich Mr. Crewe, a Macarone, and of our Loo.
1770 *Oxf. Mag.* June 228/2 There is indeed a kind of animal, neither male nor female, a thing of the neuter gender, lately started up amongst us. It is called a Macaroni. It talks without meaning, it smiles without pleasantry, it eats without appetite, it rides without exercise, it wenches without passion.
1773 R. Hitchcock *Macaroni* i. 5, I wanted you to be a man of spirit; your ambition was to appear a first-rate Macaroni; you are returned fully qualified, and determined, I see, to shew the world what a contemptible creature an English~man dwindles into, when he adopts the follies and vices of other nations.
1775 W. Marshall *Minutes Agric.* 3 Feb. (1778) Harnessed the old oxen in all their new finery..; the Pantheon never saw two more ridiculous Macaronies.
1783 F. Burney *Diary* 9 Dec. (1842) II. 293 It is the custom, you know, among the Macaronies, to wear two watches.
1785 J. Boswell *Jrnl. Tour Hebrides* 21 Aug. 1773, 84 You are a delicate Londoner—You are a maccaroni! You can't ride.
1823 C. Lamb *South-sea House* in *Elia* 6 He wore his hair..in the fashion which I remember to have seen in caricatures of what were termed, in my young days, Maccaronies.

1854 A. E. Baker *Gloss. Northamptonshire Words* II. 1 *Macaroni*, a fop. Equivalent to the modern *dandy*; now nearly, if not quite, obsolete.
1859 Thackeray *Virginians* (1879) I. 357 If he brags a little to-night..and talks about London and Lord March, and White's, and Almack's, with the air of a macaroni.
1881 *Athenæum* 5 Nov. 603/2 The weak chin,..resolute brow, and good forehead, portray Sheridan to the life, as he appeared, a macaroni and brilliant lounger in Carlton House.
1888 S. O. Addy *Gloss. Words Sheffield* *Mackerony*, an over~dressed, or gaudily-dressed person.
1933 H. Allen *Anthony Adverse* I. i. v. 54 The time he spent on shaving and the arrangement of his hair..would have satisfied a professional macaroni.
1974 *Amer. Bk. Collector* July–Aug. 30/2 The mezzotint ['What is this my Son Tom?']..produced..between 1765 and 1790, was a bit of satire directed towards the young 'moderns' of the time, known in the 18th Century as 'macaronies'.
1997 T. Pynchon *Mason & Dixon* 21 A small, noisy party of Fops, Macaronis, or Lunarians,—it is difficult quite to distinguish which,—has been working its way up the street.

## *SCOTS MAGAZINE*, 1772: EARLIEST EXPLANATION OF *MACARONI* 'DANDY'

Independent researcher Barry Popik once sent me a photocopy of the following very helpful item:

*The Scots Magazine*, 1772, vol. 34, p. 616:

'*Macaroni explained*

'MACARONI is, in the Italian language, a word made use of to express a compound dish made of vermicelli and other pastes : it is so universally used in Italy, that it is equally stationary at all polite entertainments, as soups are in France; and it will be equally impolite to omit the one as the other. – this dish was far from being universally known in this country till the commencement of the last peace : when like many foreign

fashions, it was imported by our *connoscienti* in eating, as an improvement to their subscription-table at Almack's. In time, the subscribers to those dinners became to be distinguished [G. Cohen: sic: 'became to be'] by the title of *Macaronies* ; and as the meeting was composed of the younger and gayer part of our nobility and gentry, who, at the same time that they gave into the luxuries of eating, went equally into the extravagances of dress, the word *Macaroni* then changed its meaning to that of a person who exceeded the ordinary bounds of fashion ; and is now justly used as a term of reproach to all ranks of people indifferently, who fall into this absurdity.'

## COMMENTS ON THE ABOVE 1772 ITEM IN *SCOTS MAGAZINE*

Note the mention of Almack's (a high-class social venue). This place (not the Macaroni Club) seems to be where the term *macaroni* 'type of dandy') originated,

Wikipedia provides general information on Almack's:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almack's
'Almack's Assembly Rooms was a social club in London from 1765 to 1871 and one of the first to admit both men and women. It was one of a limited number of upper class mixed-sex public social venues in the British capital in an era when the most important venues for the hectic social season were the grand houses of the aristocracy. From 1871 it was renamed "Willis's Rooms".'

## THORNSBURY 1868: MACARONI (FOOD) WAS INTRODUCED TO ENGLAND VIA ALMACK'S; ALSO: ATTIRE OF THE MILITARY 'MACCARONIES'

Thornsbury (1868: 289-290) writes:

'About 1770 some fashionable young exquisites immortalized themselves, conferred a blessing on the nation, and earned an undying name by introducing macaroni as an addition to the subscription-table at Almack's. It was about this time that even the folly of modern chignons and crinoline was outdone by the extravagant luxury of the Park dandies.

The military maccaronies appeared with red stocks, canes heavy with tassels, and small toy scimitars peeping from under the skirts of their lapelled coats. Their knee-breeches were [p. 290] of striped silk, and their wigs hung down behind in enormous clubs of plaited hair, bound together with black ribbon. A portrait of a fashionable nobleman of 1773 (George III.) shows us the sort of man who just before the commencement of the American war disported in Hyde Park. A vast cocked-hat looped up with a very small button, shows the tastes of the extreme fop. The hair of the wig is combed back from the smug empty features in a club as large as a ship's cable, which looks not unlike a dumb-bell. The collarless waistcoat—no longer square-flapped, as in Hogarth's time—is bound with gold lace, the cane is double-tasselled; the coat is not much larger than our own frock-coat, and evidently aims at smart airiness and lightness. The small watch-ribbon and pendent seals fall over a pair of silk knee-breeches adorned with coloured spots. A small sword, richly hilted, hangs by the side.'

## *PALL MALL MAGAZINE* 1893: MORE ABOUT THE MACARONIS

[*Pall Mall Magazine* (vol. 1, 1893, pp. 848-861) has an article with several pictures of the macaronis; the pictures are scattered throughout the article, but I will present them together after the excerpts below.]
p. 848: 'It must not be supposed, because hitherto we have occupied ourselves with the ladies, that during this period Folly in the guise of Fashion had laid no finger upon the men. On the contrary, the "fickle daughter of frivolity" counted among her most ardent votaries a large number of the "lords of creation," who as beaux, bucks, fribbles, macaronis, dandies, smarts, made themselves conspicuous figures in the gay world of their day. ...

> [G. Cohen: *fribble*, n. = 'a trifling, frivolous person, one not occupied in serious employment, a trifler' (*OED3*)]

p. 851: 'Notwithstanding the example of soberness and frugality given to the nation by George III. and Queen Charlotte, at no time was Fashion so extravagant and so eccentric as during the last half of the eighteenth century.

'A number of young "fribbles" recently returned from Italy--according to the Macaroni and Theatrical Magazine for 1772 – introduced macaroni, "a dish almost unknown in England till the commencement of the last peace," when "it was imported by our *connoscenti* in eating, as an improvement to their subscription-table at Almack's." In time the subscribers to those dinners became known as [p. 852] "Macaronis." A Macaroni Club was soon established, which Horace Walpole describes as "composed of all the travelled young men who wear long curls and spying-glasses"; and later on he adds that in popularity this club quite absorbed Arthur's : "for, you know, old fools hobble after young ones." As the company were the younger and gayer part of our nobility, who, extravagant in eating, were also extravagant in dress, the word Macaroni was applied to all persons who exceeded the bounds of fashion and made themselves conspicuous by eccentricity of costume.

[p. 853] 'In a very short time the Macaroni costume became the rage. To be fashionable, everything must be *à la Macaroni*, "from the colonel of the Train'd Bands down to the errand boy." Even the clergy had their wigs combed, their clothes cut, "their delivery refined," *à la Macaroni.* The shop windows were filled with caricatures and other prints of this new tribe. As the fashion at this time was to wear long waistcoats with wide and heavy skirts, the Macaronis wore theirs very short and the whole dress close cut. "Hats of an inch in the brim, that do not cover but lie upon the head, with about two pounds of fictitious hair, formed into what is called a club, hanging down their shoulders as white as a baker's sack; their breeches are either brown-striped or white, swords dangling at their heels, sticks with large tassels, and their hair elevated to an enormous height, with full curls at the sides, and in their buttonholes immense bouquets."

'The wearing of these exaggerated bunches of flowers was a distinguishing mark of both male and female Macaronis. Horace Walpole writes of a younger brother whom he knew who literally gave a flower-woman half a guinea every morning for the nosegay for his buttonhole; and we read that Lord Villiers, afterwards Erly Grandison, "The Nosegay Macaroni," "insisted on his chairmen wearing bouquets in their bosoms whenever they carried him or Lady Villiers." This is the same

nobleman of whom Mrs. Delaney writes : "The chief topick of conversation yesterday was Lord Villiers' appearance at Court in a pale-purple velvet coat, turned up with lemon-colour, and embroidered all over with S's of pearl as big as pease, and in all the spaces little medallions in beaten gold, *real solid*, in various figures of cupids and the like."

'Any eccentricity that drew on them public attention delighted these butterflies of fashion. We read that one of them, out of compliment to a mistress who had red hair, smothered his own fantastically arranged locks with red powder ; that another at the Epsom assembly "executed with consummate grace a minuet *à la Macaroni*," wearing a red feather in his hat and red heels to his shoes.

[p. 854] 'In a paper in the Westminster Magazine for 1773 on "The Abuse of Fashion in Speech, Dress, and Eating," the writer says : "Fashion is not confined to dress ; there is a mode of looking, speaking, bowing, etc.; there is also a mode of words peculiar to every season. The beaux and belles for a long time gave much countenance to the word *immense*. Everything was *immensely* small, and *immensely* large, *immensely* sweet, *immensely* dull. But when I thought his reign firmly established, he was dethroned by *monstrous* -- *monstrous* little, *monstrous* musical. To remove so monstrous an epithet was a *monstrous* shame ; but now it is an *ostensible* horse, an *ostensible* recluse, etc. Our very appetites, too are ruled by Mode, and our very manner of feeding ourselves. We once thought it decent to use a knife and fork; and then, because it was like the French, we added a prong to our forks and made it a convivial trident. And now the trident is a most necessary weapon ; for a man who eats in the *ton* never risks his delicate mouth against the edge of a sharp vulgar knife, but with his fork in one hand, and a bit of bread in the other, he sops away, to the admiration of the Town and Country."

'The stockings formed a very important item in the dress of Macaronis. It was *de rigeur* that they should be of silk, striped, cross-barred, or spotted, with wonderful clocks embroidered in gold or colours. A riband was passed around each knee, and ended in a huge rosette or a bunch of ends. This fashion became so widespread that a celebrated "knight of the road," Jack Rann, was known as "Sixteen-string Jack," from that

being the number of knee ribbons he wore. A good instance of the passion which then existed for finery is given in the description handed down by Mr. Smith, who, in 1774, at the age of eight, was taken by Nollekens, the sculptor, to see this highwayman Macaroni pass on his way to Tyburn. The criminal was dressed in a pea-green coat, with an immense nosegay in the buttonholes which had [p. 855] been presented to him at St. Sepulchre's Steps, and his nankeen small-clothes, we are told, were tied at each knee with sixteen strings."

"Five pounds of hair they wear behind,
The ladies to delight, O,
Their senses give into the wind
To make themselves a fright, O,
This fashion who does e'en pursue
I think a simple tony,
For he's a fool, say what you will,
Who is a Macaroni."

'About the year 1774 the Macaroni rage died out; but the taste for eccentricity remained as vigorous as ever. ...'

PICTURES FROM 1893 PALL MALL MAGAZINE ARTICLE

[See pp. 28ff. below.]

p. 850 (under picture): "How D'Ye Like Me?"



"How d'ye like me?"

p. 851 (under picture): “A Macaroni”



A Macaroni.

p. 852 (under picture): "Is It I or My Brother?"



"Is it I or my brother?"

p. 853 (under picture): "A Macaroni Dressing Room"



"A Macaroni Dressing-room."

p. 855 (under picture): "A Whalebone Macaroni."



PICTURE FROM WIKIPEDIA:
London's high society at Almack's



London's high society at Almack's.

## REFERENCES

Chancellor, Edwin Beresford 1922. Memorials of St. James's Street; Together With The Annals of Almack's. New York: Brentano's. --- I have not yet located mention of 'macaroni' in this book.

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