
A Coranto with a Diagram: A Note on the Text

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It was good to see attention drawn to the two diagrams illustrating corantos in the Bodleian MS Rawlinson D. 864, which Cunningham (1965) omitted from his transcription of the dances in the Inns of Court manuscripts (Frank 1983). Unfortunately Cunningham's transcription is marred by a number of misreadings, misunderstandings and simple careless errors, so the first duty of any subsequent editor must be to establish a credible text. It is sad, therefore, that Miss Frank did not take the opportunity of doing this: her edited version is neither one thing nor another, adding her own punctuation, sometimes following the original spelling and sometimes not, omitting some words, misreading others, and failing to note (or indeed understand) corrections made to the original text by another hand. Even the diagram to which she is drawing attention has been redrawn to different proportions from those in the original manuscript, and the relative positions of the start and finish of the dance have been somewhat rearranged. All of this is evident enough from the photograph of the relevant page which helpfully accompanies the article, but it is nevertheless disquieting.

Before venturing to present an improved text, I should comment on a number of specific points.

Corrections: There are three places where the text has been altered in some way.

- i. In the first line of the dance a caret in the form of an inverted v follows the word **mounts**. No word is written directly above. The word **last** appears in the left margin immediately below the diagram for the dance, but has no perceivable relevance to that. On the other hand, it does nothing for the sense of the main text if inserted there; so perhaps it means merely that this dance, despite its title, comes last in some conventional sequence. Then again, the word **forwards** has been added above the line at its right-hand end; but this has been placed deliberately as far to the right as it will go and makes good sense there (viz after **lene**). All these words are in the same hand as the main text. We conclude that the writer, seeing the need for some such word as **forwards** in the first line, planned initially to insert it after **mounts**, but thought better of this and actually added it at the end of the line.
- ii. In the last line but one the original writer put **2 hops and awind**. A second had proceeded to correct this by striking out the **2** and the final **s** of **hops**; he then saw that this was mistaken and inserted a second **hop** after the first using a caret, thereby restoring the sense to what it originally was.
- iii. More important is the correction in the last line. It was the convention that words underlined were to be regarded as deleted. (This is made very plain in another Bodleian MS, Douce 280, which Cunningham failed to understand). The original text here ended with the words **and a caper and so end**, like the coranto on the preceding page. The second hand corrected this by substituting the following: **& wth this close draw smothly your legg & do yr honour**. The text as printed by Cunningham, using both versions together, makes poor and contradictory sense; this is less obvious in Miss Frank's adaptation as some words are omitted.


It should be noted that there is a sign like an elaborately drawn bracket in the third line, following the words **a lene back**. The meaning of this is not clear, yet it would not have been added to the text without reason and must therefore have had some function. At the least it may be

supposed to punctuate the dance by dividing it into sections; more speculatively it might be taken to indicate a repeat, though this would be difficult to correlate with the diagram.

Here then is the text, as read from a photograph of the manuscript provided by the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The division into lines is that of the original, apart from the superscript corrections already mentioned.

The First Corant

last —

2 Fainned mounts a hop and a chase, a hop and a lene, forwards a winde an a Chace back to the left hand side waies, a hop and a lene back,  a hop to the right with a chace, then a hop and a lene to the left hand, a wind and a chase with a hop and a lene rownd with your face to the begining, then a hop and a chace forwards with a hop and aleane, a wind and a chace backe to the left hand, a hop and a pas backe, a hop and a chace and a hop and a leane rownd hop hop and awind a chace a halfe caper a clos & wth this close draw smothly your legg & do yr honour.

Some notes may be added on the terminology.

lene — there is no way that this can be read as 'bow' in the first line, as none of the letters resembles a **b**, **o** or **w**. The only alternative reading that appears possible (though not likely) is **leue**, presumably to be understood as 'leave', but this cannot be said to improve the sense.

chace — this term can be explained by reference to the game of Real Tennis, where 'chase' is the name given to the second bounce made by a tennis ball on the floor of the court, especially on the return of service. It is thus a small bounce following a larger one; in dancing it could describe a small light jump on the end of another step. In this dance the chace always follows a hop or a wind; it tends to alternate in this position with the lean, however that is to be understood. (The succession of steps in the other coranto is more complicated.)

Like Miss Frank, I shall be delighted if this note helps others to attempt a reconstruction, which certainly lies beyond me. I see nothing to suggest, however, either in the descriptions or the diagrams, that these two dances are not solos, like that performed by Prince Henry at a ball in Whitehall Palace in 1604 (Rye 1865, 123). Miss Frank objects that other known coranto choreographies from the period (viz. c. 1630) are for one man and one woman. That may be, but when so many other features of these examples are so individual (such as the names of the steps), we can hardly exclude the possibility that they are the sole survivors of their type. The date of the corantos is in any case uncertain: they are not part of Elias Ashmole's **copey of the oulde measures**, which is thought to date around 1630, being written in a different hand and bound into a different place in the manuscript; they are, however, likely to be later rather than earlier.

References

- Cunningham J. P. 1965 *Dancing in the Inns of Court*.
Frank, P. 1984 'A coranto with a diagram', *Historical Dance* vol 2, No. 3 (1983), 3-5.
Rye, W. B. 1865 *England as seen by Foreigners in the Days of Elizabeth and James the First*.

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