

# S K E N È

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“Well-Staged Syllables”:  
From Classical to Early Modern English Metres  
in Drama

Edited by Silvia Bigliuzzi

*Founded by Guido Avezù, Silvia Bigliuzzi, and Alessandro Serpieri*

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FABIO CIAMBELLA\*

# A Corpus Linguistic Analysis of Dance Lexis in Eight Early Modern Manuscripts: From the Inns of Court to Drama

Abstract

This article conducts a corpus linguistics analysis on a series of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscripts related to the practice of dance at the Inns of Court in London, in order to examine their possible influence on and relationship with terpsichorean lexis in early modern drama. Still considered one of the fewest – if not the only – extant indigenous proofs of the exercise of dance in early modern England before Playford's *The English Dancing Master* (1651), these eight MSS have never been analysed in a single dedicated study. Six of them were transcribed and commented on by some scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, while the seventh was discovered and transcribed in 1992 and the eighth only in 2017. In fact, no thorough discussion of their linguistic peculiarities has been carried out, treating them as a dataset to be investigated through corpus linguistics software. In this article, #Lancsbox software is used to carry out a corpus linguistics analysis primarily focused on the specialized lexis of dance as it emerges from the above-mentioned manuscripts. The eight texts considered have been transcribed as part of the *Skenè* digital open-access archives and then uploaded to #Lancsbox to facilitate analysis. Ultimately, this article aims to shed light on the circulation of the terpsichorean lexis in early modern drama.

KEYWORDS: dance; Inns of Court; corpus linguistics; manuscripts; specialized lexis; early modern theatre

## 1. Introduction: The Eight Manuscripts and the Old Measures of the Inns of Court

As most dance historians and scholars of early modern English theatre have noticed (see, among others, Brissenden 1981; Fallows 1996; Payne 2003; Winerock 2011), there exist no dance manuals in English compiled by British choreographers or dancing masters in the sixteenth and seventeenth century prior to the publication of John Playford's *The English Dancing Master* in 1651 (see Ciambella 2020). The only extant sources dealing with the practice of dance include intermittent mentions in municipal and parish registers of the time regarding folk dances, and a corpus of eight

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manuscripts compiled by personalities related to the four Inns of Court of London,<sup>1</sup> i.e., Lincoln's Inn, Gray's Inn, Inner Temple and Middle Temple. Until the creation of the OMIC archive (Old Measures of the Inns of Court, <http://clare.dlcs.univ.it/omic>) the eight MSS<sup>2</sup> had never been transcribed by a single scholar and published together.<sup>3</sup> Six manuscripts were transcribed for the first time by James P. Cunningham in 1965, and a seventh manuscript was discovered in 1992 in Taunton, Somerset, which Brissenden surprisingly does not include in the 2001 revised edition of his book. In addition, an eighth manuscript was transcribed in 2018 as a consequence of forensic evidence attesting that it was not a forgery by the well-known critic (and forger) John Payne Collier.

The transcription of the first six manuscripts by Cunningham, however, presented various inaccuracies; hence, in 1987 David R. Wilson published a new and more accurate transcription, while the seventh MS was transcribed by James Stokes and Ingrid Brainard in 1992, and the eighth by Anne Daye and Jennifer Thorpe in 2018. It is worth noting that five out of the eight extant manuscripts were certainly compiled by personalities who revolved around the Inns of Court in London.<sup>4</sup> It is legitimate to wonder why would-be lawyers or other personalities gravitating around the environment of the Inns of Court would write down lists of dances and their respective steps in detail. The eight MSS helped critics to identify a core of eight recurring dances (more or less in the same order) on dancing events organised within the four Schools. They were labelled the Old Measures: *Quadran Pavan*, *Turkeylone*, *Earl of Essex Measure*, *Tinternell*, *Old Almain*, *Queen's Almain*, *Madam Cecilia Almain*, and *Black Almain*. Nevertheless, most manuscripts among these eight contain other dances, thus establish-

<sup>1</sup> Established as schools of law at the beginning of the fourteenth century, London's four Inns of Court played a pivotal role in the development and fortune of early modern theatre. Many important playwrights of the time resided in the Inns of Court, such as Francis Beaumont, Thomas Campion, George Gascoigne, Thomas Lodge, and John Marston. Moreover, a great number of plays, interludes and masques were performed at the Inns during the seasonal revels. For further details, see Green 1931; Finkelpearl 1969; Watson 2015.

<sup>2</sup> This abbreviation stands for 'manuscripts'; MS stands for 'manuscript'.

<sup>3</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the only publication that lists and describes seven out of the eight MSS is Peter and Janelle Durham's 1997 open-access pamphlet *The Old Measures 1570-1675*, available at <http://www.peterdurham.com/pdf/old-measures.pdf>. Moreover, Daye and Thorp (2018, 37), when transcribing the Dulwich College MS, list the dances described in all eight manuscripts, yet without giving further details about choreographies.

<sup>4</sup> Specifically, they are numbers 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 in the list presented below, since number 2 is anonymous and number 3 was compiled by a personality only indirectly linked to the London schools for lawyers.

ing a corpus of 39 dances – if one includes choreographic variations – that will be considered and explored below.

Here follows a brief description of these eight MSS, in their probable chronological order of composition:

1. MS Rawlinson Poet. 108, ff. 10r-11r – Bodleian Library, Oxford. This manuscript is signed by Eliner Gunter, sister of Edward Gunter, a young man who entered Lincoln's Inn in February 1563. According to Cunningham and Wilson, the MS might have been compiled in the early 1570s and it includes poems, songs, orations, and various other writings. Fifteen dances are named and described. Since the text presents different calligraphies, the entire document cannot be attributed solely to Eliner: the list of dances and their description, however, may be attributed to Edward, as he might have been the only member of the family allowed to attend the Revels at the Inns of Court.
2. MS Dulwich College MSS, 2nd series XCIV, f. 28 – Dulwich College, Dulwich, London. This is the latest manuscript acknowledged as a reliable source for early modern dancing routines. However, Anne Daye and Jennifer Thorp (2018) have noted that its possible dating ranges from the early 1570s to the late 1590s (30-1). Unfortunately, its author is unknown, although it presents evident similarities with *The Mulliner Book* (1545-70), a musical commonplace book compiled by Thomas Mulliner. The first transcription of this MS is by John Payne Collier in 1844. Given Collier's inclination to forgery, the Dulwich manuscript had not received critical attention until 2004, when Arthur and Janet Ing Freeman proved its authenticity. Thus, Daye and Thorp emended Collier's interpolations and mistakes, and transcribed the MS in 2018. The Dulwich MS lists the eight Old Measures – like all the other manuscripts – plus five choreographies (or New Measures, as Daye and Thorp call them) also found in *The Mulliner Book*.
3. MS Harleian 367, ff. 178-79 – British Library, London. Unfortunately, even in this case, the author of this MS is unknown. Only eight dances are reported – the smallest number of dances listed in any manuscript – which correspond to the sequence of Old Measures. The dances reported and their choreographies are inserted in a collection of miscellaneous notes and writings compiled by John Stow, albeit the calligraphy listing the Old Measures is completely different from that of the rest of the manuscript. Stow died in 1605, but Cunningham and Wilson date the manuscript between 1575 and 1625.
4. DD/WO/55/7/36 – Somerset Record Office, Taunton. Item 36 is signed by John Willoughby and dated 1594, making it the only manuscript noting a precise date of composition. This text could not have been considered either by Cunningham or Wilson because it was discov-

ered in 1992 in Somerset and transcribed by James Stokes and Ingrid Brainard. Although Willoughby was never admitted to the Inns of Court, he had many close contacts with lawyers in those circles. According to Stokes and Brainard, “John Willoughby senior’s name does not appear in the registers of the Inns of Court, or of Oxford, but considerable circumstantial evidence links him with the law courts” (1992, 2). Since Willoughby was a lifelong resident of Devon, Stokes and Brainard conclude that the dances he listed could also have been performed at private dancing evenings in upper-class environments outside London (1-2).<sup>5</sup>

5. MS Douce 280, ff. 66a<sup>v</sup>-66b<sup>v</sup> – Bodleian Library, Oxford. The author of the manuscript is J. (John) Ramsey, who entered the Middle Temple on 23 March 1605/6. The sequence of twenty-one dances, the largest number of choreographies recorded in all eight manuscripts, is part of a miscellany of notes, essays, and translations aimed at educating a hypothetical child. Wilson (1986/7, 6) affirms that the manuscript dates from the period immediately after Ramsey’s admittance to the Middle Temple, in the first decade of the 1600s.
6. MS Rawlinson D. 864, 199<sup>r</sup>-199<sup>v</sup> – Bodleian Library, Oxford. This text is signed by Elias Ashmole, who compiled the list of dances when not yet admitted to the Middle Temple. In fact, he entered the School of Law in 1657 (when he was 40),<sup>6</sup> but Wilson dates the manuscript to c. 1630, given the “childish hand” (1986/7, 8) of the record of dances.<sup>7</sup> There are two important aspects to consider regarding this manuscript. First of all, the series of the Old Measures remained the same even though some twenty/thirty years separate this MS from the previous one: this suggests that the sequence of dances and their execution during the revels might not have been altered. Secondly, Ashmole’s is one of the rare manuscripts of the time to report the name

<sup>5</sup> According to Wilson and Calore (2005) and Mortimer (2012, 341-51), early modern dances were performed both in the royal residences – i.e., Greenwich, Whitehall and Hampton Court – and in aristocratic estates such as the Earl of Pembroke’s and Southampton’s country residences.

<sup>6</sup> According to Daye and Thorp, “Ashmole was studying law in London from 1633 at the age of sixteen and practiced from the age of twenty-one. The single sheet of paper listing the Old Measures is said to be in either a childish hand or roughly noted. As Wilson observes, the list is likely to date from c. 1630: on arriving in London from Lichfield, Ashmole sought to master dances common to the revels of the Inns” (2018, 33).

<sup>7</sup> “Between 1630 and 1633, Ashmole finished his studies at the Grammar School of Lichfield and studied law in London before becoming a lawyer 1638. The fact that the list of dances was compiled when Ashmole was probably still only approaching the Inns of Court could lead one to assume, as will be confirmed shortly, that there were places in England where dance was taught, i.e., dance schools” (Ciambella 2021, 14).

of the dancing master who actually taught him the choreographies he describes: Rowland Osborne.

7. *Revels, Foundlings and Unclassified, Miscellaneous, Undated, etc.*, vol. 27, ff. 3r-6v – Inner Temple, London. This manuscript, dated c. 1640-75, devotes ample space to the figure of the Master of the Revels, inasmuch as its compiler is Butler Buggins, Master of the Revels during Charles II's reign, from 1672 to 1675. This manuscript presents the eight Old Measures first, then the basic steps of the Sinkapace and the Argulius, and the correct ceremonial etiquette to be followed to open dancing events. That the Old Measures are still there even after the Stuart Restoration evinces a certain chronological continuity in the execution of the same order of dances when the Revels took place at the Inns of Court even after the Civil War.
8. MS 1119, ff. 1r-2v and ff. 23r-24v – Royal College of Music, London. As with the previous MS, this one is attributable to the Master of the Revels, Butler Buggins, even though the handwriting seems very different from that of MS n. 7. In this manuscript, however, Buggins affirms that he had reported the list of dances and steps as they had been taught him by his predecessor, Robert Holeman, Master of the Revels before 1640. This manuscript comprises a collection of songs, except for folios 1-2 and 23-4. Ff. 1-2 list the Old Measures along with the revel etiquette to be followed. The second folio closes with a short poem of nine verses entitled *An Holy Dance*. On the other hand, ff. 23 and 24 describe five extra choreographies that are not classified as Old Measures.

The above list clearly establishes a steady connection between the Inns of Court and terpsichorean practices in early modern England.

Moreover, as is well-known, the London Schools of Law also played a pivotal role in the development of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English theatre, inasmuch as a number of tragedies, comedies, etc. were staged in their inner courtyards (Green 1931; Hood Philips 2005, 23-36) – e.g., among others, Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* at the Inner Temple in 1561, Gascoigne's *Jocasta* at Gray's Inn in 1566, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* at the Middle Temple in 1602 – and because some of best-known early modern English playwrights were admitted to the Inns of Court (i.a., Francis Beaumont, John Ford and John Marston).<sup>8</sup> This connection between the Inns of Court, terpsichorean practices and early modern English drama will be explored in the final section of this article.

<sup>8</sup> For further details, see Finkelpearl 1969; Winston 2016.

## 2. The OMIC Archive and #Lancsbox: The Corpus and the Tool

As intimated above, the eight manuscripts were transcribed together for the first time in 2021, as part of the Skenè Digital open-access archive project (<https://skene.dlcs.univr.it/digitalarchives/>). The transcription was based on the MSS available<sup>9</sup> and previous partial or complete transcriptions (see Dolmetsch 1949; Cunningham 1965; Wilson 1986/7; Payne 2003; Daye and Thorp 2018), trying to correct any mistakes but above all homogenising transcription criteria. For this reason, three editions of each MS were realised: a PDF diplomatic edition corresponding to a facsimile of the original manuscript, a semidiplomatic edition whose original spelling was maintained, and a modernised edition which has been used in this article to carry out the corpus-based analysis, whose main purposes are two. On the one hand, most recurring keywords and collocations will be explored in order to shed light on the early modern English terpsichorean microlanguage through the analysis of a small, restricted dataset formed by the above-mentioned eight MSS; on the other, these keywords and collocations will be sought after in a larger reference corpus – i.e., early modern English plays from the 1560s to 1660 – with the aim of understanding whether and above all why some of these linguistic patterns occurred also in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theatrical texts, thus reinforcing the idea of an interdiscursive circulation of dance terminology in early modern England.<sup>10</sup>

The study, the results of which are shown in the following section, has been realised thanks to #Lancsbox software (see Brezina et al. 2015; Brezina et al. 2018; Brezina et al. 2020), designed at the University of Lancaster, UK, by Vaclav Brezina, William Platt and Tony McEnery, currently in its 6.0 version.<sup>11</sup> Given the focus of this research, the modernised editions of the eight manuscripts have been uploaded on #Lancsbox as a single corpus named OMIC\_mod. Its size, in terms of tokens, types and lemmas, is re-

<sup>9</sup> I would like to thank the many librarians who helped me gather together all the manuscripts during pandemic times, when English libraries were closed and travelling to the UK was impossible: the staff of the Bodleian Library (Oxford), the British Library (London), the Dulwich College (London), the Inner Temple Records archive (London), the Royal College of Music (London), and the Somerset Record Office (Taunton). Your assistance was invaluable.

<sup>10</sup> For further details about the circulation of dance discourse in the period see Eubanks Winkler 2020; Ciambella 2021.

<sup>11</sup> For further details, see <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/lancsbox/>.

spectively 5,095, 525 and 550, with a TTR<sup>12</sup> of about 0.1 attesting to the low degree of lexical richness of the corpus, an important datum to be considered when analysing recurrent linguistic patterns in corpora. Such TTR demonstrates that on a lexical level the texts investigated do not exhibit a high degree of diversity (see Section 3 for considerations about lexical diversity vs density); therefore, one expects to find recurring patterns to be analysed.

The OMIC\_mod corpus has been investigated by recurring to the various functions available on #Lancsbox, in particular:

- a) The Words tool lists the greatest number of recurring words in the corpus, thus providing important information on the 'aboutness' of a dataset (see, among others, Scott and Tribble 2006, 55-72). By right-clicking on a single type, tokens appear in a pop-up window showing the distribution in the corpus and in its single texts with absolute and relative frequency of occurrence.
- b) The GraphColl tool allows the users to visualise right and left collocations of a sought-after node/keyword. The left-hand table shows the collocates, their position in relation to the node and statistically significant features (e.g., number of co-occurrences of the node and its collocates/colligates). On the right hand-side, a lexical web diagram shows both position and proximity of the collocations of a keyword: the closer a collocate is to the centre of the diagram (i.e., the node), the higher the number of its co-occurrences with the keyword.
- c) The N-grams function automatically lists the most recurring strings of adjacent 'n' words in the corpus. This tool is extremely useful when recurrent formulaic expressions are sought after, as in the case presented in this article.

### 3. Results of the Analysis

The Words tool was the first to be considered when analysing the corpus. In addition to giving important information on the aboutness of the texts selected, this tool also proved useful for investigating lexical diversity (i.e.,

<sup>12</sup> Calculated by dividing the number of types (unique words) by that of tokens (total number of words), type/token ratio (TTR) provides important information about the lexical richness of a given text. The closer to 1, the richer and more varied the vocabulary of a corpus.

the TTR calculated above). In addition, lexical density (hereafter LD),<sup>13</sup> calculated by dividing the occurrences of lexical/content words by the total number of tokens, reaches high levels in terms of percentage. In the OMID\_mod corpus, LD is somewhat higher than 60%, hence quite high, if one considers that non-fictional texts have a range of LD from 40% to 65% (Stubbs 1996, 71-3).

Starting from Gustafsson's (1990; 1993) assertion that specialised texts have higher rates of repeated vocabulary items, we can consider that the manuscripts analysed in this article have a very low degree of lexical diversity. In fact, the dance directions considered show a high frequency in the occurrence of a restricted number of content/lexical words. A list of the top twenty most recurring lexical words is given below, with absolute and relative frequency:

	<b>Lexical word</b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>	<b>Relative frequency (per 10k tokens)</b>
1	DOUBLE <sup>14</sup>	317 (double) 28 (doubles)	677
2	SINGLE	143 (singles) 49 (single)	377
3	FORWARD	174 (forward) 5 (forwards)	351
4	Two	177	347
5	BACK	154 (back) 4 (backward) 4 (backwards)	318
6	SIDE	70 (side) 18 (sides)	173
7	HAND	42 (hand) 43 (hands)	167
8	ROUND	84	165
9	Four	79	155

<sup>13</sup> Lexical density was defined for the first time by the psycholinguist John B. Carroll (1938, 379) as "the relative amount of repetitiveness or the relative variety in vocabulary" and has been recently investigated through corpus linguistics software, especially in the field of Second Language Acquisition (see, for instance, Mazgutova and Kormos 2015; Treffers-Daller et al. 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Words in small caps have been considered as lemmas, since inflected forms are irrelevant in certain contexts, unless indicated otherwise.



10	HONOUR	69	135
11	One	60	118
12	Right	47	92
13	FACE	46 (face) 1 (faces)	92
14	TIME	42 (times) 3 (time)	88
15	Both	43	84
16	PLACE	25 (place) 17 (places)	82
17	REPRISE	42	82
18	END	41	80
19	Left	35	69
19	TURN	35	69
20	Three	33	65

Table 1. The twenty most recurring lexical words in the OMIC\_mod corpus.

In terms of information on the aboutness of the texts, the eight manuscripts clearly deal with numerals and counting steps (i.e., SINGLE, DOUBLE, once, twice, both, one, two, three, four), directions (i.e., FORWARD, BACK, right, left), circular movements (i.e., ROUND, TURN) and specific parts of the human body (i.e., FACE,<sup>15</sup> HAND).

As regards lexical diversity, the top twenty most recurring lexical words (i.e., not even 4% of the total amount of lexical words, that is, 386 types) cover more than 80% (1996/2451) of the occurrences of content words in the texts. This datum underlines the rate of repeated key lexical items in the texts, thus denoting the high level of lexical specialisation of the corpus. This is in line with the directive nature of these manuscripts, containing instructions to perform the Old Measures and other choreographies and can be considered “brain exercise[s] assigned to would-be lawyers or, more likely, notes taken during dance lessons” (Ciambella 2021, 15). Their textual genre and the circumstances that may have led to their composition justify both their low levels of lexical diversity – i.e., their insistence on a few recurring lexical items – and their evident focus on certain lexical and semantic fields.

The GraphColl tool offers an interesting perspective on the collocational

<sup>15</sup> Actually, the noun “face” is mainly used in the multiword “face to face”, which underlines a process of lexicalisation, where the noun loses its morphological function and becomes, in this case, an adjective or an adverb.

patterning of some of the content words extracted with the Words tool. Given the levels of lexical diversity and the terminological density of the corpus, GraphColl highlights close relationships among the most recurring lexical words, thus establishing a strong correlation between collocations and lexical cohesion, as extensively explored by recent collocation-based approaches to non-fictional texts (see, among others, Sinclair 1996; Stubbs 2015; Brookes and McEnergy 2020). For example, using the default settings of the GraphColl tool,<sup>16</sup> and searching for the collocations of the most recurring lexical word form (i.e., double), the results show close collocational patternings between the node sought for and some of the other most frequently recurring lexical words:

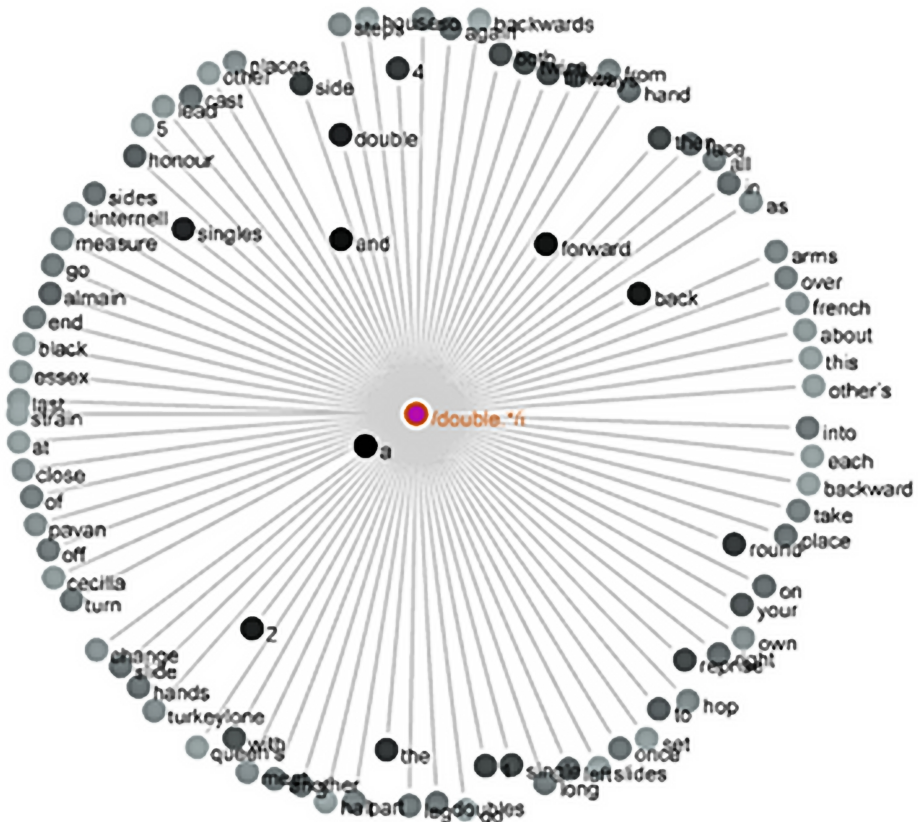


Fig. 1. Collocational patterning of the node DOUBLE.

<sup>16</sup> Span of 5 words to the left (5L) and 5 to the right (5R) and a threshold of 5 collocations.

Except for such function words as the indefinite article “a” and the coordinating conjunction “and”, the other closest collocations to the keyword analysed are mainly the same lexical words listed in Table 1, which create such collocations, multiword units and phrases as “double round twice”, “DOUBLE FORWARD”, “SINGLE and DOUBLE”, “cast off a double”, etc., that increase the degree of specialisation of the terpsichorean lexis used in the manuscripts.<sup>17</sup> In fact, although most of the content words included in the manuscripts belong (and belonged) to the general lexis of the English language, collocational patterns show a higher level of specificity. For instance, taking EEBO as a reference corpus, such common words as “double” and “forward” have respectively 48,666 and 46,433 hits (even disregarding inflected forms). However, if considered together in the collocation “DOUBLE forward”, only one occurrence appears and it is, not surprisingly (as will be seen in the next section) in John Marston’s *The Malcontent* (1604),<sup>18</sup> while it reaches 133 occurrences in the OMIC\_mod corpus. A similar example is the collocation “a/one single back”, which is found 23 times in the corpus under scrutiny here, but whose only occurrence on EEBO belongs to Joshua Sylvester’s 1611 translation of Du Bartas’s works.<sup>19</sup>

Certainly, the most interesting results have been obtained by employing the N-grams tool on #Lancsbox. As mentioned above, this function shows the most recurring strings of words that tend to co-occur in a selected corpus, thus shifting the attention from lexical and semantic considerations to syntactic observations. Since 2- and 3-grams can be easily detected by recurring to the GraphColl functions, 4- to 7-grams have been taken into account here.<sup>20</sup> The results provided by the #Lancsbox N-gram function are shown below (Tables 2-5):

<sup>17</sup> For further details about the relationship between collocations and specialised texts/corpora, see Williams 2001; Alonso Campos and Torner Castells 2010.

<sup>18</sup> “Three doubles forward” (4.2).

<sup>19</sup> The phrase “one single back” appears in Sylvester’s translation of *La sepmaine, ou creation du monde* (1578; English: *The Week, or Creation of the World*), day 4 (“The Heavens, Sun, Moon, etc.”), and it refers to the dance of the stars and planets, a widespread Medieval and Renaissance trope deriving from the concept of *musica universalis* (or music of the spheres). See also Sir Thomas Elyot’s *Governor* about the same concept.

<sup>20</sup> Sequences of words superior to 7-grams have proved to recur less than ten times in the corpus; hence they have not been considered, as they are statistically irrelevant.

▼ Corpus	OMIC_mod	▼ Frequency	▼ Dispersion	▼ Type	▼ Grams
Type		▼ Frequency: 01 - Freq	Dispersion: 01_CV		
a double forward and		55.000000	0.705685		
double forward and a		53.000000	0.752713		
and a double back		47.000000	0.732862		
forward and a double		44.000000	0.762801		
2 singles and a		36.000000	0.613703		
singles and a double		36.000000	0.572327		
a double forward reprise		27.000000	1.758270		
double forward reprise back		27.000000	1.758270		
and a double round		23.000000	0.556183		
2 singles a double		22.000000	1.342728		

Table 2. Ten most recurring 4-grams in the OMC\_mod corpus.

▼ Corpus	OMIC_mod	▼ Frequency	▼ Dispersion	▼ Type	▼ Grams
Type		▼ Frequency: 01 - Freq	Dispersion: 01_CV		
a double forward and a		53.000000	0.753146		
double forward and a double		41.000000	0.769303		
forward and a double back		40.000000	0.738877		
2 singles and a double		35.000000	0.602993		
a double forward reprise back		27.000000	1.758136		
singles and a double round		16.000000	0.694694		
double forward reprise back twice		16.000000	1.928597		
a double back 4 times		14.000000	0.931648		
a double round both ways		13.000000	1.218155		
and a double back 4		13.000000	0.830332		

Table 3. Ten most recurring 5-grams in the OMC\_mod corpus.

▼ Corpus	OMIC_mod	▼ Frequency	▼ Dispersion	▼ Type	▼ Grams
Type		▼ Frequency: 01 - Freq	Dispersion: 01_CV		
a double forward and a double		41.000000	0.769723		
double forward and a double back		38.000000	0.701454		
a double forward reprise back twice		16.000000	1.928308		
2 singles and a double round		16.000000	0.695024		
and a double back 4 times		13.000000	0.830714		
a double forward and a single		12.000000	0.738918		
double forward and a single back		11.000000	0.803689		
2 singles and a double forward		9.000000	1.010488		
and a double forward and a		9.000000	0.877444		
forward and a double back 4		9.000000	1.039401		

Table 4. Ten most recurring 6-grams in the OMC\_mod corpus.

▼ Corpus	OMIC_mod	▼ Frequency	▼ Dispersion	▼ Type	▼ Grams
Type		▼ Frequency: 01 - Freq	Dispersion: 01_CV		
a double forward and a double back		38.000000	0.701873		
a double forward and a single back		11.000000	0.804184		
forward and a double back 4 times		9.000000	1.039664		
double forward and a double back 4		9.000000	1.039664		
and a double round in arms both		8.000000	1.733862		
a double round in arms both ways		8.000000	1.733862		
singles side a double forward reprise...		8.000000	1.809459		
2 singles and a double round in		7.000000	1.387914		
2 singles and a double round both		7.000000	1.464129		
side a double forward reprise back tw...		6.000000	1.980646		

Table 5. Ten most recurring 7-grams in the OMC\_mod corpus.

First of all, from a semantic viewpoint, it is clear that n-grams in the corpus shed light on the primary focus of the eight MSS on steps (single and double) and directions (forward and backward). Moreover, as for morphology, it is in this period and thanks to such texts that the adjectives “single” and “double” (introduced into the English vocabulary at the beginning of the fourteenth century from Old French as adjectives, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*) went through a process of conversion and began to be used and, consequently, inflected as nouns (maybe to avoid an excessive use of the noun *STEP* that normally should follow). The first occurrence of “single” (*OED*, n.3a) and “double” (*OED*, n.3a) as nouns is in Elyot’s *Governor* (1531). Another aspect to take into consideration is the fact that all the tables above show a recurring syntactic pattern where the conjunction “and” is not used to coordinate two words, phrases, or clauses, but as a sequence connector (such as then, later, after, etc.).

Therefore, what the keyword extraction and collocational and n-gram analyses tell us about the terpsichorean microlanguage in the 1500s-1600s is that, although the majority of the most recurring lexical words belong to the core vocabulary of the English language and are not specialised per se, the directive texts investigated mainly concern steps and directions whose collocational-based description can rarely be found in other textual genres of the period – thus it is collocational patternings that give the lexis of such texts its specificity – and adopt an extensive use of nominalisation (by conversion) of the adjectives “single” and “double” (with consequent -s inflection to mark the plural).

The final section of the analysis carried out so far on a specific non-fictional genre questions whether the linguistic peculiarities highlighted above influenced dance scenes in the predominant literary genre of the early modern English period: drama.

#### **4. The Old Measures of the Inns of Court and Early Modern Theatre: A Collocational-based Perspective**

In order to determine the influence of dance instructions on early modern drama from a linguistic point of view, the VEP (Visualizing English Print) Early Modern Drama Collection (available at <https://graphics.cs.wisc.edu/WP/vep/vep-early-modern-drama-collection/>) has been used as reference corpus, in particular the Expanded Drama 1660 corpus, a collection of 666 digitised early modern plays from 1550s to 1660.<sup>21</sup> The entire corpus

<sup>21</sup> As the VEP website reads, “[m]etadata was prepared by Jonathan Hope and Beth Ralston. XML files were processed and curated by Deidre Stuffer for release as plain text files” (<https://graphics.cs.wisc.edu/WP/vep/vep-early-modern-drama-collection/>).

has been uploaded on #Lancsbox and key collocations have been searched.

The collocation “n. DOUBLE forward”, one of the most widespread in the OMIC\_mod corpus, occurs only twice in the entire Expanded Drama 1660, a datum which, albeit (or rather, since) not statistically significant, focuses on the terpsichorean language of early modern plays. The first occurrence is in Robert Greene’s *James IV* (1598):

SLIPPER. They are strangers, I see, they understand not my language: wee, wee.—Nay, but, my friends, one hornpipe further, a refluce back, and *two doubles forward*: what, not one cross-point against Sundays? What, ho, sirrah, you gome, you with the nose like an eagle, an you be a right Greek, one turn more. (4.3, my emphasis)

Bohan and brother of Nano, has entered the service of the villain Ateukin and erroneously steals a letter from his pocket. Another servant, Andrew, is accused of theft and beaten by Ateukin. Seeking vengeance, Andrew asks three antics to rob Slipper. Since the antics do not seem to speak Slipper’s language, as he affirms in the lines quoted above, he decides to dance with them.<sup>22</sup> The dance he chooses, the Hornpipe, was typical of Scotland (see Ciambella 2021, 109), but what is worth noting here is the description of some of the steps that characterise this dance: a refluce back, two doubles forward and a cross-point. This description is important from many perspectives. First of all, these are the only directions for the Hornpipe in the entire corpus of early modern plays<sup>23</sup> and, given that this choreography is definitely not a courtly one, they underline some similarities in the execution of courtly and folk dances. As seen above, the adverbs “back(wards)” and “forward(s)” can be found in collocations that are exclusively typical of dance steps, at least as far as it has been considered here by taking EEBO and the VEP as reference corpora. In fact, the collocation “refluc back”, which, according to the *OED*, is an extended use of the noun indicating “flowing back, reflux; an instance of this” (n.1a), can be found only in this play by Greene, probably with the meaning of going back – no matter how, given the folk and boisterous character of this dance. On the other hand, the cross-point, a step whose execution remains obscure, is also mentioned in *The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus* (1602) and in Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1607). “Two doubles forward” is the only collocation that this play seems to share with the eight manuscripts from the Inns of Court analysed

<sup>22</sup> Antics in this play were quite accustomed to dancing, as the play itself begins with the three characters who dance around a tomb where Bohan, Slipper’s father, is leaning.

<sup>23</sup> Other approximate directions can be found in Peele’s *The Arraignement of Paris* (1584), where the Hornpipe is described as a round dance to be performed by taking hands.

earlier, and because it is one of only two occurrences of this collocation in the Extended Drama 1660 corpus, it deserves attention.

To the best of my knowledge,<sup>24</sup> Robert Greene had no direct<sup>25</sup> connection with the Inns of Court (see Reynolds and Turner 2008, 75-6), being one of the so-called University Wits and having obtained an MA from Clare Hall College, Cambridge. Therefore, it is highly improbable that he may have encountered one of the extant manuscripts from the London Schools of Law (unlike Marston, as will be seen later). Nevertheless, Greene might have come to know the collocation “double forward” in Elyot’s *Governor* – where the string is attested for the first time, according to the *OED* – given the astonishing circulation of this book at that time: it was reprinted eight times before 1600. More probably, however, this step was quite a common one, judging by the hits it has in the manuscripts; thus it was part of the early modern English terpsichorean culture and dancing masters throughout England must have taught choreographies using such collocations.<sup>26</sup> After all, as scholars have noticed Greene’s attention to dance scenes, names and choreographies in his plays, and in *James IV* in particular, one may assume that he had received something of a choreutic education (see Melnikoff 2008; Gieskes 2008, among others).

The second occurrence of the noun phrase “n. DOUBLE forward” is in Marston’s *The Malcontent*:

GUERRINO. T’is but two singles on the left, two on the right, *three doubles forward*, a traverse of six round: do this twice, three singles side, Galliard trick of twenty, Coranto pace; a figure of eight, three singles broken down, come up, meet two doubles, fall back, and then honour. (4.2, my emphasis)

The intertextual and interlinguistic connections between the manuscripts of the Inns of Court and these lines uttered by the courtier Guerrino are evident and undeniable. Many of the lexical words and collocations that accompany the directions of this French Branle/Brawl can be found in the OMIC\_mod corpus. Although the Branle was not part of the eight Old Measures, it was certainly taught by dancing masters and Masters of the Revels at the Inns of Court. The Douce MS (n. 5 in the list in Section 1) is the only one that contains directions for this dance, which generally correspond to Guerrino’s choreography in *The Malcontent* (a parallelism apparently unnoticed by the critics):

<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to Darren Freebury-Jones, University of Cardiff, for his valuable advice on and references to Greene’s relationship with the Inns of Court.

<sup>25</sup> Some scholars believe that Greene would have had indirect connections to the Schools of Law through his associates and collaborators, e.g., Thomas Lodge, who apparently entered Lincoln’s Inn in 1578 (see Freebury-Jones 2020).

<sup>26</sup> For further details about the spread of dance schools in the English territory, see Eubanks Winkler 2020.

Honour, take hands and go round to the left hand, round again to the right hand, slip two together, afterwards three to the left hand, three more to the right hand, all a double round, the same again.

After all, the Douce MS was compiled by John Ramsey, admitted to the Middle Temple in 1605/6, while Marston had entered the same school of law in 1595 and would remain there until his marriage in 1606. Therefore, it is likely that both Ramsey and Marston attended the same dance lessons – or at least were taught by the same dancing masters – at the Middle Temple at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

As for linguistic patterns in Guerrino's lines, note the use of the adjectives "single"<sup>27</sup> and "double" as nouns, and content words, collocations and n-grams belonging to the terpsichorean specialised lexis, e.g., a traverse of six round, three doubles forward, Galliard trick, Coranto pace, a figure of eight, three singles broken down, meet two doubles, fall back, etc.

Marston's directions for the French Branle invoke another interlinguistic and interdiscursive reflection about the nominalisation of the adjectives "single" and "double" in the corpus of early modern plays; on that topic, it is worth analysing two occurrences (again, the only two) of the noun "singles" and "doubles" in Richard Brome's Caroline plays *The City Wit* (1629-32, published 1653) and *The Antipodes* (c. 1640).

CRASY. Have you not forgot your singles and your doubles, your fallings back, and your turnings up, wife? (*The City Wit*, 5.1)

LETOY. No, nor you, sir, in  
That over-action of the legs I told you of:  
Your singles and your doubles, look you, thus—  
Like one of the dancing master at the Bear-garden. (*The Antipodes*, 2.1)

First of all, it should be noticed that the string "your singles and your doubles" – actually a 5-gram comprising two symmetrical noun phrases (numeral "two" + noun) linked by the coordinating conjunction "and" – is identical in both the utterances by the London merchant Crasy and the nobleman Letoy, this aspect highlighting some kind of stylistic similarity between the two speeches. In the first case, as usually happens in early modern drama, dance steps refer to double entendres and sexual innuendoes. In the final de-

<sup>27</sup> The use of the nominalised adjective "single\*" is understood in the Douce MS, probably because the manuscript itself is a series of notes taken during dance lessons or because the Branle described by Ramsey is the last of eighteen dances dealt with and he can take the noun "single" for granted (compare, on the other hand, the repeated use of "single" in the first dance described in the same manuscript, i.e., the *Quadran Pavan*).



nouement of the *City Wit*, Crasy is alluding to his wife Josefina's adultery,<sup>28</sup> an act she actually did not commit and for this reason the couple is re-established, together with Crasy's fortune. In the second case, on the other hand, the aristocrat Letoy metonymically refers to "your singles and your doubles" while giving directions to his actors<sup>29</sup> who are incapable of dancing, in his opinion. Critics have long tried to understand if Richard Brome had contacts – direct or indirect – with the Inns of Court, given his knowledge of the English legal system and the settings of some of his plays, i.e., *The Damselle* (1637-38, published 1653), in the Temple Walks around Middle Temple (see, i.a., Steggle 2004, 130-36; Paravano 2013). Steggle affirms that paratextual matter – i.e., mainly frontispieces, commendatory poems and dedicatory epistles to his plays – may suggest Brome's "Inns-of-Court input and . . . patronage" (Steggle 2004, 151), some kind of acquaintance with members of the London Schools of Law. Nevertheless, too little is known about Brome's life (Steggle 2004, 13; Lowe 2007, 416) to affirm with any certainty that he may have encountered manuscripts describing the Old Measures. As seen above in dealing with Robert Greene, Brome's acquaintance with the terpsichorean lexis and morphology (not only in the two above-mentioned plays, but in the entire corpus of his works; see Ingram 1976) seems to be justified by an interlinguistic and interdiscursive circulation of the practice, and hence the pervasive microlanguage of dance.

## 5. Conclusion

The collocational-based analysis presented in the previous sections has highlighted recurring complex linguistic patterns shared by the corpus of the Inns of Court's eight manuscripts about dance directions and some early modern plays. Speculation about the direct connections between some playwrights and the London Schools of Law may justify the presence of these recurring patterns. Nevertheless, the most plausible reason for such intertextual echoes can be found in the interdiscursive network that gravitated around the art of dancing in early modern England and that permeated Renaissance culture and society from politics to religion.

The corpus-driven investigation carried out via #Lancbox software on both the OMIC\_mod corpus and the VEP Extended Drama 1660 corpus has highlighted interesting linguistic phenomena that advocate the development

<sup>28</sup> That is why the possessive "your" accompanies the nouns. "Singles" and "doubles" mean "dance steps in twos and fours" (Parr 1995, 250), thus hyperbolically hinting at the number of would-be lovers that courted Josefina.

<sup>29</sup> In *The Antipodes*, Letoy and the doctor hire a group of actors to cure individuals affected by psychological distress.

of a terpsichorean jargon in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, whose most peculiar characteristics can be traced more on a combinatory level (collocations and n-grams) than on a lexical one. Therefore, if on the one hand the names of dances and choreographies contributed to enriching the early modern English vocabulary with such terms as Pavan, Branle, Coranto, La Volta, etc., mainly borrowing them from Continental languages, steps and directions, on the other hand, seem to originate in the English language itself and bend it, adapting it through internal linguistic mechanisms such as nominalisation and exclusive combinations.

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