Grounding the Angels:
An attempt to harmonise science and spiritism in the celestial conferences of John Dee

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The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes for frequently cited works, after the first full citation. Full information on these titles can be found in the Select Bibliography.

Bagley, Practice P.J. Bagley, ‘On the Practice of Esotericism’

Clulee, Natural Philosophy N.H. Clulee, John Dee’s Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion

Deacon, John Dee R. Deacon, John Dee: Scientist, Geographer, Astrologer and Secret Agent to Elizabeth I

Dee, Mysteriorum Libri Quinti Dee, J., Mysteriorum Libri Quinti or, Five Books of Mystical Exercises of Dr. John Dee: An Angelic Revelation of Cabalistic Magic and other Mysteries Occult and Divine/ revealed to Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelly, ed. Joseph Peterson

Dee, T & FR J. Dee, A true & faithfull relation of what passed for many yeers between Dr. John Dee ... and some spirits, ed. Meric Casaubon

French, Elizabethan Magus P.J. French, John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus


Harkness, Conversations D.E. Harkness John Dee’s Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature

Josten, Unknown Chapter C.H. Josten (ed.), ‘An Unknown Chapter in the Life of John Dee’

Sherman, Reading and Writing W.H. Sherman, John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance


Yates, Giordano Bruno F.A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition

Yates, Occult Philosophy F.A. Yates, The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age

When quoting from primary sources that have not been ‘translated’, I have retained original spellings without appending the conventional Latin sic. The majority of these sources were penned before the mass standardisation of English spelling in the eighteenth century.
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“I do think that many mysteries ascribed to our own inventions have been the courteous revelations of spirits; for those noble essences in heaven bear a friendly regard unto their fellow-nature on earth”.

- Sir Thomas Browne,
  
  *Religio Medici*, 1643
An Introduction

Preliminary Remarks

The retrospective catechisation of largely bygone beliefs is a naturally difficult assignment. An even more slavish task attends those philosophies which are not merely antiquated but which belonged, during their time of eminence, to a tradition of deliberate secrecy. An attempt to crack the ‘oriphic’ codes of any such occult tradition will rely on a well-formed understanding of its position on the wider esoteric map as well as an appreciation of the clandestine nature of esoteric movements in general. Indeed, the seasoned esoteric historian will be closely familiar with the sentiment of Trithemius’s seventeenth-century caution to Agrippa: “... communicate vulgar secrets to vulgar friends, but higher and secret to higher, and secret friends only”. The would-be decrypter must therefore accept as inflexible the possibility that his or her quest might yield at best fragmentary fruits, for, as French warns in his biography of John Dee, the knotty complexity of old esoteric manuscripts “must necessarily elude modern readers”.

Whilst there is no shortage of secondary material relating to John Dee, the pervasive issue of bias demands that scholarly discretion be exercised. Since his death in 1608, clerical records of the Church of England have refereed Dee’s occult activities with unforgiving rancour. Labelled by William Godwin in *The Lives of The Necromancers* (1834) as “dead to all moral distinctions” and by F.R. Raines in 1885 as more degenerate than “the vampires of Eastern story”, the name of England’s most eminent Renaissance philosopher has been posthumously blackened. Despite a declared desire “to have help in [his] philosophical studies through the company and information of the blessed angels of God”, Dee’s reputation became a target of derision amongst ecclesial record-keepers in the pietistic era of Queen Victoria. (It is likely, of course, that the highly-codified transcripts of his conversations with angels so thoroughly bewildered and panicked the clerics that they impetuously adjudged them works of sorcery, and

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3 W. Godwin, *Lives of the Necromancers : or, An account of the most eminent persons in successive ages, who have claimed for themselves, or to whom has been imputed by others, the exercise of magical power*, London: Frederick J. Mason, 1834.
4 As cited in French, *Elizabethan Magus*, p. 16.

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their author an ally of the devil). With interests transgressing the discursive environs of religion and science, maintaining favour with successive clergy has proved, for John Dee, a chancy game.

But the accounts of Dee that dispute the legitimacy of his Christian faith belong almost exclusively to literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If one jettisons the unfavourable – and sublimely unfair – biographies of Dee that prevailed until Charlotte Fell Smith’s *John Dee* countenanced him more kindly in 1909, the man is consistently presented as an “intellectually honest, sincere and pious Christian”. Whatever notions of diabolism might have been retrofitted to his writings, it seems insensible and unjust to ignore the express declarations of Dee himself which repeatedly profess both his *ritual* and his *philosophical* commitments to God. In his “tyme of going to and being at divine service” as in his declaration that “the [Holy] Spirit, who is Almighty God ... proceeds eternally from God the Father and God the Son”, Dee’s Christian context is decisively exemplified.

However, as the title of this thesis suggests, an element of unease mars the marriage of Dee’s Christian and scientific ideals. In her chapters ‘Forbidden Magic: The Focal Points of Christian Disapproval’, and ‘The Discredited Practitioner: Charlatans’, Valerie Flint outlines the “very heavy freight of condemnation” carried by the magus into the Renaissance, and the Christian Church’s slippery standards of assessment for suspected necromancers. An understanding of magic as divisible into benevolent and malevolent types unquestionably informed the Church’s intelligentsia and accordingly its congregation, as Flint explains “Divination under the name of science or prophecy ... in pursuit of the triumph of good over evil can ... in Jewish and early Christian literature, be seen to allow for the making of distinctions between magic that is bad and magic that ... might be good”. The problem for Dee, however, was that the Church of his time set no benchmark for distinction, meaning that doubtful cases were adjudged in a manner that lacked consistency and welcomed bias. Thus,

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9 Ibid., p. 21.
10 Ibid., p. 31.
for those whose pursuits hovered in the wavering cleft between encouraged and forbidden magic, life was precarious enterprise.

Indeed, the perceived ‘cleft’ between John Dee’s scientific and spiritual pursuits has undoubtedly perplexed his biographers; many perpetuating the conceptual trend of “assuming there were two John Dees, (1) The utilitarian scientist interested in the practical application of speculative thought, and (2) the ... practitioner of occultism”\textsuperscript{12}. The majority of books and articles pertaining to Dee are divisible into one or other of these biographical categories, disseminating into the literary world something of a ‘schizophrenic’ story that misleads as much as it informs. There are, of course, a handful of texts that dutifully ally Dee’s spiritual and scientific selves; Nicholas Clulee’s \textit{John Dee’s Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion}, for example, conveys by its very title an intention to break with traditionally dichotomised portrayals. However, the preponderance of available material seems unable or unwilling to reconcile Dee the scientist with Dee the mystic, opting instead to polarise his identities and side, invariably, with one or the other.

Apropos the dangers of pigeonholing Dee, Clulee observes: “The difficulty in each case is that the unifying philosophy \textit{thought} to inform Dee’s writings is derived ... in an abstract and \textit{a priori} fashion and then applied to Dee’s particular works”\textsuperscript{13}. Here Clulee problematises the art of retrospection itself, imbuing the traditional ‘wisdom’ of hindsight with several inexorable flaws. Even if a scholar can successfully ignore his own philosophical leanings and approach an antiquated creed with pure, unprejudiced interest, his excursion into the past will also demand the rational ‘unlearning’ of certain terrestrial truths. To approach the early Renaissance equipped with the intellectual weaponry of advanced Newtonian science, for example, would constitute a gross abuse of the privilege that retrospection affords. Unless the specific goal of the exercise is to disprove, discredit, or disparage an historical figure or doctrine, there seems little fairness in deducing as ‘true’ or ‘untrue’ the philosophies being examined. Historians of the Renaissance must thus labour to defrock their minds of contemporary trimmings and refrain from passing the supercilious judgments that reckon Dee a ‘brute’, a ‘fraud’, or a “rather silly man”\textsuperscript{14}. Only once the scholar acknowledges what he

\textsuperscript{12} Trattner, \textit{God and Expansion}, p. 17.


\textsuperscript{14} W. Shumaker, cited in \textit{ibid.}, p. 632.
must *forsake* in his approach to bygone beliefs might he “appreciate at their true worth some of the more curious byways along which human thought has travelled”\(^\text{15}\).

This thesis will journey the ‘curious byway’ of Dee’s angel conversations, striving to locate a context within which they can be appropriately examined. Too often, the transcripts of his angelic exchanges have been siphoned from his wider corpus and archived as either incompatible with his other works, too complex to be interpreted, or evidence of his failing wits. One might suspect that the historical rejection of Dee’s angel conversations has been borne of expediency, where biographers attempting to present him as a purely scientific icon have deliberately ignored his more esoteric pursuits. Conversely, those few who have focused exclusively on the angel conversations in an attempt to ‘mystify’ Dee have largely neglected to acknowledge his identity as a rational thinker. What is required to remedy this shortcoming is a re-examination of the surviving angel transcripts, and an accompanying preparedness to forage within them for the scientific significance so often overlooked by dismissive biographers.

Part 1 will investigate the multifarious reasons why Dee’s celestial endeavours have been accidentally overlooked, intentionally dismissed, and generally deemed irrelevant to his scientific and political interests. Part 2 will demystify the angel conversations, hoping to represent them as “nothing more than an extrapolation of the beliefs [Dee] had held throughout his career.”\(^\text{16}\)

**Disambiguation and Definition of Terms and Concepts**

*The Renaissance*

The Renaissance was a time when the philosophical and practical distinctions between magic, science and religion were pliant and discretionary. Indeed, one encounters difficulty in constructing a rubric under which ‘the Renaissance’ itself rests comfortably. The schematic division of European history is a vague and approximate science; to cleanly sever one epoch from another in either the chronological or ideological sense is an impossible feat, although not


one entirely untried by historians and anthropologists alike. In preference to speaking of an age’s ‘end’ or ‘beginning’, it seems more sensible to observe a period of ‘exchange’ or ‘coalescence’ in which the winding down of one era gives way to the rising up of another and in which the moments of penetration and retraction are both geographically and discursively staggered. For the purposes of this thesis, I would like to emphasise the significance of the Reformation in my periodisation of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, for it is reciprocally the catalyst for and the consequence of the dissolution of the medieval epoch in England.

Both the theological crises that effected the Reformation and those crises that the Reformation in turn bequeathed to Renaissance posterity are of immense importance to the tale of John Dee. Paradoxically finding solace and hostility in the post-medieval swell of Humanism, Dee’s art trod the delicate boundary between “the passing old and rising new order” in an intellectual climate that was “half magic, half science”. Dominating his later pursuits, John Dee’s conversations with angels, subscribed to the characteristically-Catholic practice of celestial intercession which the Reformation theologians “had not yet embraced”. The tangled politics of the Renaissance thus shotgunned him into a position where any visionary experience or act of magical prowess “had to be authenticated by Protestants and Catholics with divergent beliefs concerning miracles”. Perhaps the most we can accurately assume is that the man of the early Renaissance lived, as it were, between two worlds. The world of the medieval Christian matrix – in which all facets of terrestrial action were invested with spiritual significance – no longer existed for him. On the other hand, society’s “gnawing fear” of science continued to impede a proper start to the revolution that would eventually see religion relinquish its sovereignty over the practical arts. In other words, Renaissance man may indeed have found himself suspended between faith and reason, tormented by the twin trends of secularism and humanism that rejected any appeal to divine ends in explaining natural phenomena.

It is likely that the foremost obstacle to a proper understanding of the Renaissance is the title

17 Trattner, God and Expansion, p. 18.
20 Ibid., p. 12.
21 Trattner, God and Expansion, p. 20.
itself; borrowed as a term from the Italian artistic revivals of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, ‘Renaissance’ comes heavily pre-loaded with notions of ‘rebirth’ and ‘regeneration’ that do not altogether chime with the salient philosophical currents of Elizabethan England. Certainly, the intensified interest in Neo-Platonism that filtered westward from the Continent in the sixteenth century typifies the very idea of ‘revival’, but to present the English Renaissance as an unambiguously-positive ‘revamping’ of the Middle Ages is to crudely disregard the sorry plights of those whose ideologies were the subject of supersession. There is, for example, an inelegant hauteur in C. S. Lewis’s claim that “Medieval man shared many ignorances with the savage”; a claim that declasses the convictions of Dee and his contemporaries to superstitious, suppositious, and “prelogical”. To paint the Renaissance as the benefic bearer of something “more ethical, more philosophical, even more scientific” is to impose upon the Middle Ages an insulting assumption of intellectual primitiveness that strips Dee of all but his ‘quaintness’.

I do not mean to suggest that the term ‘Renaissance’ should be discarded entirely, nor to espouse the opinion of C. S. Lewis and propose that the English Renaissance did not occur until the nineteenth century. In fact, if the disparate philosophies of the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment are placed side-by-side, the period between them can be instantly accepted as an era of substantial progression and change. Even if the changes perceivably hovered at embryonic stages of development and implementation for most of the seventeenth century, it behooves us to consider the English Renaissance as the infant of Modern thought, as Kristeller succinctly suggests: “Certainly without a knowledge of the major trends of Renaissance philosophy, the difference, say, between Aquinas and Descartes cannot be fully understood”.

Esotericism and the Occult


Loc. cit.

Lewis’s claim that “Only with the late nineteenth century and the Theosophists does ... the ‘wisdom of the East’ ... recover a foothold in Europe” adumbrates something of the opinion he propounded as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University, see C. S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 156. He is rumoured to have informed a colleague that he had ‘discovered’ that there had been no such thing as the English Renaissance.

It is difficult to discuss esotericism without becoming at some point nonplussed by the word’s uncertain semantics. Describing its lexical content as “slight”\textsuperscript{26}, Faivre prefigures the etymological ambiguities that see the word loosely associated with ideas of ‘withinness’, but also with ‘secrecy’ and ‘hiddenness’. With a typical remonstrance, Faivre disdains the word’s semantic ‘over-determination’, blaming its spillage into pop-culture discourses for the philological hurdles that now preclude its proper application. It seems scarcely necessary to rehearse the entire catalogue of possible meanings and potential usages, only to work within a reasonable etymological framework and select the definition most germane to the topic at hand. Accordingly, it befits this thesis to embrace Faivre’s understanding of esotericism as a “type of knowledge”, issuing forth from some spiritual centre and accessible only through prescribed channels\textsuperscript{27}. By regarding their knowledge as the exclusive property of the few, esotericists “knowingly cultivate mystery”\textsuperscript{28} and keenly perpetuate a tradition of concealment to protect and preserve their secrets.

To avoid a needless nomenclatural exercise, this thesis will not pursue the tricky differentiation of ‘esoteric’ and ‘occult’, preferring instead to employ the terms interchangeably in the sense outlined above\textsuperscript{29}. Conversely, other such related terms as ‘Hermetic’ and ‘Cabalistic’ will be relieved of their generic applications and reserved adjectivally for the concepts to which they natively pertain.

\textsuperscript{26} A. Faivre, \textit{Access to Western Esotericism}, Albany, 1994, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Loc. cit.}
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{29} An example of the very semantic over-determination I am wishing to avoid can be found in Edward Tiryakian’s disambiguation of ‘esoteric’ and ‘occult’: “esoteric knowledge is to occult practices as the corpus of theoretical physics is the engineering applications”, E. Tiryakian, cited in M. Eliade (ed.), \textit{The Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol. 11}, New York, 1987, p. 36. It is likely that the source of this over-determination can be traced to the variant etymologies of each term, where ‘esoteric’ is derived from the Greek adjective \textit{esoteros} (‘inner’), and ‘occult’ from the Latin verb \textit{occulere} (‘to conceal’). If ‘occult’ can be understood as the physical \textit{act} of concealing, and ‘esoteric’ as the subsequent \textit{nature} of those things concealed, then Tiryakian’s distinction is rendered acceptable. I would argue, however, that since both terms have adjectival applications in modern English, there is no great need to discern separate meanings for them based upon obsolete grammatical associations.
PART 1:  
*Methodological Mistakes and Ideological Misnomers*

1.1 Problematising the Project

“How shall I talk of life with the sage, if he is prisoner of his doctrine?”

— Chung Tsu, 4th Century B.C.

*The Issue of Secrecy*

For the Renaissance magus, the oath of secrecy served a syndicate of purposes. The magus’s art was an inimitably lofty one, fusing the time-honoured tenets of traditional piety with the promises of radical science in a titanic attempt to uncover the mysteries of God and the cosmos. The need to safeguard this information from the hands of the uninitiated dabbler was an anxious concern for the magus, who recognised in the potency of his craft a genuine potential for misuse and, correspondingly, a genuine capacity for harm and detriment. A preoccupation with the volatility of esoteric wisdom characterises the writings of John Dee, who repeatedly justifies the need to obfuscate or at least partly eclipse the true intendment of his visionary ruminations and multilayered formulae. Certainly, if the *integrity* of Dee was the subject of scrutiny, his reiterated dialogue on the jeopardous risks of dabbling ‘uninitiated’ in the crafts of the Occult would stand to defend his tenacious trust in the power of his art.

But Dee’s pedantic warnings and expressions of concern for potential misinterpreters may in truth obscure a *second* reason for the furtive manner he so doggedly employs: secrecy in esoteric currents, Faivre warns, serves not merely to protect the layman but to protect the Esoteric itself. If one accepts as *actual* the distinction between the sacred and the profane (and Dee’s division of ‘naturall’ and ‘supernaturall’ certainly suggests a sympathy with the dichotomy propounded centuries later by both Eliade and Durkheim), then it naturally follows that between the pair an exclusivity should resonate. Accordingly, esotericism embraces a desire to locate itself in the theatre of the arcane and “not to profane what is held dear”30 by

inelegantly leaking into public receptacles the sacred wisdom of mystical tracts. The tactic of deliberate secrecy, Urban explains, is “a discursive strategy that transforms a given piece of knowledge into a scarce and precious resource”\textsuperscript{31}.

A third reason for the deliberately inaccessible nature of Renaissance esotericism can be seen in the shifting religio-cultural bedrock of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Whilst the flourishing of artistic and scientific activities associated with the Renaissance welcomed the craft of the mechanician, the growing tradition of Humanism cleaved a fissure between the liberal arts and the logical sciences which proved inhospitable to the unifying philosophy of the alchemist, the astrologer, and the Cabalist. Further, as the wheels of the Reformation began to turn and the Christian Church loosened its grip on the sceptre of social authority, British society abided a widescale withdrawal of scientific concepts from the ‘religious’ sphere in general. With the universalist Church of the Middle Ages no longer ensconcing scientific knowledge in theological quarters, it followed that the field of science should relinquish its previously contemplative role and hone its focus on the practical conquest of nature.

Whilst the modern analyst may argue that science and religion should rightly occupy antipodal posts on the Western ideological continuum, in the world of the Renaissance magus the search for unity in multiplicity bonded science and religion in a common philosophical quest. Thus, the divorce of science from religion at the close of the Middle Ages wreaked ideological havoc on the quest of the magus, obsolescing his ideals and marking him an article of ridicule for the forward-thinking skippers of the Humanist movement. Clinging fiercely to an ebbing tide, John Dee staged an intrepid protest as Renaissance humanism systemically “rob[ed] certain materials of their association with magic and accordingly diminish[ed] the status and authority of the magus”\textsuperscript{32}. Naturally, his commitment to an unfavoured philosophy ushered both him and his disciples into a state of academic reclusion, still keen to share knowledge with kindred parties but evasive of England’s Humanist university circuit. Additionally, with the Middle Ages yet enjoying its twilight, the fear of magic and chthonic interference continued to exercise weight in both the Catholic and Protestant Churches, forcing ‘magicians’ such as Dee to exercise their proscribed art chiefly in secrecy. Clearly, in both the theoretical and practical


\textsuperscript{32} Flint, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 331.
sense, the Renaissance magus had reason to engage in the deliberate concealment of his art at a
time when the prescribed punishments for heresy and general dissidence were not yet fully
erased from the ledgers of England’s weakening theocracy.\footnote{Trattner attests to this practice of stealth in his claim that Dee requested of his printers “only a limited number of copies...to be judiciously distributed to the initiated”, Trattner, \textit{God and Expansions}, p. 24. Similarly, Turner asks: “was it a fear of persecution which caused Dee to hide his most cherished manuscripts during the later years? Or had Dee always concealed his papers ...?”, R. Turner (ed.), \textit{The Heptarchia Mystica of John Dee: A primer of hermetic science and magical procedures by the Elizabethan scholar-mage}, Wellingborough, 1986, p. 19.}

But secrecy adopted by occult or esoteric movements in response to social or religious
conservatism is purely a product of circumstance. The real \textit{epistemological} problem, remarks
Urban, is in the essence of occultism itself, for “how can one study or say anything intelligent
about a religious tradition that practices \textit{active dissimulation}?^\textsuperscript{34} As previously articulated, a
lodge that apprizes its own obscurity is a largely impenetrable entity. Add to that
impenetrability the problem of historical removedness, and any potential inquirer is left keyless
at the lodge’s gate. However, upon collating the various methodological propositions of Urban
and Faivre concerning the essential elements of esoteric movements\footnote{Urban, \textit{Torment of Secrecy}, p. 209.}, an understanding of their
unapproachability begins to form: the \textit{carte d’entree} for an occult lodge is conferred by
initiation.

\textit{Initiation and Admittance}

In that certain aspects of its internal workings are not divulged to outsiders, a tradition can be
said to ‘initiate’ its adherents. Generally effected from master to disciple, the transmission of
secret knowledge in esoteric currents is conducted privily, “following a preestablished channel,
respecting a previously-marked path”\footnote{See specifically the element of ‘Transmission’ in Faivre’s six-point explanation of esoteric tendencies in Faivre, \textit{Access}, pp. 10-15 \textit{et passim}; and the discussion of initiation in Urban, \textit{Torment of Secrecy}, pp. 209-217 \textit{et passim}.}. Contrary to notions of ‘tribal’ initiation in which the
mode of induction is heavily ritualised, initiation into esoteric assemblies confers not a wound
or a branding but the gradual disclosure of prized information. The applicant is neither
bastardised by crude violence nor catechised by a gruelling inquest, but rather gently and
incrementally inaugurated by exposure to the guarded secrets of esoteric wisdom. As a
condition of entry, the consummate initiate must undertake to maintain his lodge’s oath of secrecy, divulging the knowledge he encounters to none but the next committed apprentice.

Surely then, a scholar’s choicest hope of accessing the Esoteric lies in his own initiation. By insinuating himself into a tradition and forcing the revelation of occult doctrines, he may freely expose the lodge’s long-ensconced metaphysical secrets for the consumption of all. Yet in doing so he becomes something of a mole, actively seeking to “[do] violence to another culture” in desecrating the sacred barrier that divides learning and looting. The ethical bind, as Urban laconically explains it, is represented in the fact that “if one “knows”, one cannot speak; and if one speaks, one must not really “know””. If the cherished secrets of an esoteric lodge can be considered ‘cultural capital’, then by all measure of integrity their theft should render them valueless on the market of cultural exchange. To the indiscriminate pilferers of esoteric wisdom, Conze offers the following admonishment:

Esoteric knowledge can ... under no circumstances be transmitted to an indiscriminate multitude. There are only two alternatives. Either the author has not been initiated ... then what he says is not first hand knowledge. Or he has been initiated. Then if he were to divulge the secrets ... he has broken the trust placed in him and is morally so depraved he is not worth listening to.... There is something both indecent and ridiculous about the public discussion of the esoteric in words that can be generally understood.

To avoid Conze’s very real charge of moral depravity, a scholar must either withhold the wisdom his initiation uncovers (and thus suspend his scholarly output on the topic), or instead pursue a non-initiatory means of inquiry. If he opts for the latter, his mode of research will almost certainly fall within the scope of Urban’s “textual approach” which limits itself to the careful dissection of historical texts and makes “no effort to penetrate the esoteric tradition from within”. Whilst ethically preferable to “abominat[ing] the silent”, an approach to esoteric knowledge which is essentially exoteric in nature is inescapably subject to limitations on depth, accuracy, and legitimacy. If there is a ‘middle ground’ to be trod between violating the esoteric oath of secrecy and conducting an inadequate study of secondary sources, it is

37 Urban, Torment of Secrecy, p. 214.
38 Loc. cit.
40 Ibid., p. 215. Urban notes that this is the approach most frequently adopted by scholars of Western esotericism, in particular Antoine Faivre.
41 M. Griaule, as cited in J. Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art, Massachusetts, 1988, p. 74.

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propounded by Mircea Eliade in his “Noah’s Ark” approach to esoteric traditions. According to Eliade’s reasoning, a scholar may be absolved of the looting charge on the grounds that his intricate research is “in fact doing a service by preserving ancient traditions that are in many cases rapidly being lost in the face of the modern world”\textsuperscript{42}. Here, the murky distinction between exploitation and conservation is clarified in the scholar’s intent: with the permission of the esoteric tradition, he will actively seek the revelation of secret knowledge for the purposes of ensuring its endurance.

But where a tradition is so wholly antiquated that its initiatory channels remain forever closed, the task of gaining consent from its members is an evidently futile one. The question of how the modern scholar might ingratiate himself with John Dee’s Elizabethan clique, for example, is by all terrestrial standards ludicrous\textsuperscript{43}. Divested of authority to plunder Dee’s hermetic treasury, a scholar should rightly feel powerless to excavate the arcane messages behind the name of England’s most notable magus. However, this dilemma assumes that esoteric movements conceal their wisdom in a wholesale fashion, dispensing nothing at all into public domains and shunning involvement with vulgarian types altogether. The truth, in fact, belies this assumption, for esoteric doctrines almost invariably produce both esoteric and exoteric works, essentially “teaching an identical doctrine in non-identical ways”\textsuperscript{44}. Observed first by Aristotle, this literary division lends hope to historians attempting to access esoteric doctrines, for where a coded esoteric manuscript is indecipherable to modern interpreters, its exoteric counterpart is uncomplicated by the tricks of deliberate cryptography. Moreover, whilst esoteric knowledge is often confined to oral transmission (and thus generally trumped by the onslaught of time), exoteric accounts are conveyed in material formats which frequently outlive the tradition’s decline.

\textsuperscript{42} Urban, Torment of Secrecy, p. 216.
\textsuperscript{43} I use ‘terrestrial’ here as a foil for ‘celestial’, meaning to convey that whilst the literal time-frame of four hundred and fifty years makes a meeting with Dee impossible, those who subscribe to more transcendent modes of communication may aver that consciousness surpasses temporal constraints. Mystical doctrines which practice transpersonal psychology, for example, would keenly espouse the view that the human minds are free to engage with each other, unfettered by physicality, temporality, or geography. Indeed, esoteric movements themselves frequently extol the spiritual sagacities of persons or beings bygone, many claiming to have ‘received’ their ancient wisdom through a chiefly immaterial conduit.
The Aristotelian division of esoteric knowledge into private and public chambers is acutely relevant to the case of John Dee whose distinctive brand of esotericism interprets the dichotomy most curiously. In short, where Aristotle’s ‘segregation premise’ typically separates the Esoteric from the Exoteric in a material way, Dee’s work effects a union of the pair in each individual manuscript. “[S]peaking to both the vulgar and the wise in the same writing”\(^{45}\), Dee’s compositions confer esoteric instructions both openly and reservedly in accordance with the respective aptitudes of his “disparate audiences”\(^{46}\). Described by Paul Bagley as “exoteric/esoteric literature”\(^{47}\), this intricate mode of disclosure garbs esoteric messages in exoteric vestments which might only be removed by those possessing particular skills.

Remarking that esoteric/exoteric literature may not “be to the taste or capacity of all”\(^{48}\), Francis Bacon neatly elucidates the method’s very design which secures “the avoiding of abuse in the excluded and the strengthening of affection in the admitted”\(^{49}\). What transcends the understanding of the uninitiated – or escapes their notice entirely – plugs directly into the nuanced intelligence of the perspicacious initiate and imparts whatever instruction the author intends. By eclipsing rather than withholding esoteric wisdom, the author plays a more artful game of trickery which “hides in plain sight”\(^{50}\) the truths of his doctrine but by the same clever token does not bury them entirely. “[W]riting between the lines”\(^{51}\), composers of esoteric/exoteric literature should rightly be considered the least exclusionary of all esotericists, for their publically-disseminated manuscripts openly offer esoteric secrets to any person possessed of the philosophic capacity to construe them.

Notwithstanding, esoteric/exoteric manuscripts always ostracise some of their audience, and are as such not immune to problems of interpretation. Used in his angel-summoning sessions,

\(^{45}\) Bagley, ibid., p. 236.
\(^{46}\) Loc. cit.
\(^{47}\) Ibid., p. 235.
\(^{48}\) F. Bacon, as cited in ibid., p. 237.
\(^{49}\) Loc. cit.
\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 239.
\(^{51}\) L. Strauss, as cited in ibid., p. 240.
John Dee’s famous Sigillum Dei or Seal of God, for example (see figure 1 below), perfectly embodies the semiotic irony that renders a symbol simultaneously pregnant and vacant of meaning. The mathematician, numerologist, and scholar of Hebrew might each extract *something* significant from the pentagrams and puzzling word-numbers of Dee’s enigmatic seal, but without the holistic and highly-wrought knowledge of occult practice demanded by Dee’s creed, absolute understanding is near to impossible. Even the true Cabalist (whose doctrine *belongs* to the conjuration of angels) is insufficiently equipped to construe anything cogent from the hierarchically-placed angel names on Dee’s invocational seal. In fact, despite the seal’s apparent applicability to God, no knowledge of Judaeo-Christian theology, however profound, would singularly suffice as a means of ingress to the symbol’s inscrutable workings.

Figure 1. John Dee’s Sigillum Dei Ameth, recreated per Sloane MS. 3188, British Museum
Evidently, the routes of access to old esoteric factions such as Dee’s are paved with methodological encumbrances. Not only does the deliberate concealment of esoteric knowledge preclude its easy uncovering, but the few means by which it might be revealed are girt by ethical snags. Even if the scholar treads a purely politic path in his attempts to espy the secrets of history, he has then to contend with Faivre’s acerbic reproach to “serious students, indeed specialists of one discipline or another, who get involved speaking authoritatively on esotericism when they have no particular competence”\(^52\). With such poor odds attending his task and such dispraise defining his attempt, it seems truly absurd that any scholar should take on the “impassable frontier”\(^53\) that divides the modern and mediaeval worlds. Perhaps the unpreparedness with which Faivre suggests so many tackle the esoteric sphere explains why “even [Dee’s] most sympathetic commentators do not seem to have understood fully this enthusiastic sixteenth-century seeker of wisdom and lover of the secrets of God and nature”\(^54\).

However, whilst Faivre\(^55\) may be justified in chiding the mass dissemination of meagrely-researched data, his warnings are so severe that even the well-meaning and well-read scholar might be intimidated into reticence. I feel compelled to suggest that in spite of every hindrance detailed above – and notwithstanding Faivre’s express discouragement, – by far the greatest impediment to decent esoteric research is scholarly overcautiousness. There seems little logic in resigning from a task purely to eschew the risk of producing below-par results, and even less sense in pre-emptively apologising to the likes of Faivre for potentially ill-received outcomes. Whether student or seasoned ‘authority’, a scholar’s credibility should rightly be measured by his awareness of the limitations that beset him, and his willingness to concede the places in which his abilities are lacking. This thesis will thus adhere to a defined scope of interest, acknowledging where possible those aspects of research which are most disposed to further inquiry, and likewise those conclusions which are illustrative of related esoteric trends.

\(^{52}\) Faivre, *Access*, p. 18.
\(^{54}\) Trattner, *God and Expansion*, p. 17.
\(^{55}\) It must be noted that whilst Faivre’s remarks are particularly stern, he is by no means the only scholar of esotericism to take offence at the maltreatment of secret knowledge. Albeit couched in more merciful terms, Turner’s reference to “‘the blind leading the blind’, and the need for properly qualified research into the complex and confusing area of Elizabethan magic” concurs wholly with Faivre’s suggestion that the discourse of esoteric research is indoctrinated with methodological shortcomings, Turner (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 24. Curiously, Charlotte Fell Smith employs an identical analogy in her 1909 suggestion that since Thomas Smith’s original work, biographies of Dee have “followed the leaders blindly, and ... only cast another, and yet another, stone to the heap of obloquy piled upon his name”; C. Fell Smith, *John Dee (1527-1608)*, London, 1909, p. 2.
1.2 Some Biographical Notes

The name John Dee, writes Sherman, is “difficult to dissociate from the identity of the magus”\(^\text{56}\). Whether in the depraved sense of the cheating conjurer or in the loftier sense of the masterful philosopher, Dee’s metaphysical pursuits have been for the most part archived in the occultic confines of abstruse Elizabethan necromancy. Indeed, references to Dee in early modern English discourses rarely appear independently of the ‘magus’ tag, fashioning him into something of an ascetic recluse, hopelessly martyred by dark-art devotion and a desire to plumb “the depths of nature in ... shadowy secrecy”\(^\text{57}\). The chief distortion engendered by this portrayal is a simplification of John Dee’s religious purpose which was not merely magical but mathematically-acquainted, astrologically-infused and Cabalistically-saturated, borrowing not from the handbooks of sorcery but from the customs of mystical Christology that so heavily informed his spiritual pursuit. The single label of ‘magus’, then, however encyclopaedic, lacks the specificity to exhaustively describe the eclectic and eccentric practices of John Dee in his years of affiliation with the courts of the tudor monarch, and risks “sever[ing] Dee from his contacts and contexts”\(^\text{58}\).

In order to correct the inaccuracies that ‘magus’ invokes, it is inessential to furnish this thesis with an exhaustive account of Dee’s life\(^\text{59}\); only to relate those biographical details relevant to his identity as an occult practitioner. John Dee was born on July 13th, 1527 in London, England. His father, Roland Dee, of Welsh extraction, was a textile dealer and gentleman sewer\(^\text{60}\) at the court of Henry VIII, a lineage that afforded John a position of favour in the reign of Elizabeth I. Entering St John’s College, Cambridge in 1542, Dee “devoured knowledge at an incredible rate”\(^\text{61}\) and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1544. Apparently “not satisfied with the scientific education available in England”\(^\text{62}\), Dee embarked upon the first of many trips.


\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 14.

\(^{58}\) Loc. cit.

\(^{59}\) This task has been most wholistically accomplished, I believe, by Peter French in his book *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus*. See also Nicholas Clulee’s *John Dee’s Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* and Charlotte Fell Smith’s *John Dee (1527-1608)*.


to the Continent in 1547 to “speake and confer with some learned men, and chieflye mathematicians”\textsuperscript{63}, returning to England to complete his Masters degree in 1548. With a testamur touting proficiencies in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, philosophy, geometry, geography, mathematics, logic, rhetoric and astronomy, Dee assimilated effortlessly into erudite cliques and forged intimate intellectual friendships with such pre-eminent cartographers as Gerard Mercator, Abraham Ortelius and Pedro Nunez.

His return to England in 1548 saw him granted an annual patronage from Edward VI – a pension that continued under Elizabeth I who promised the magus “great security against any of her kingdome, that would by any reason of my rare studies and philosophicall exercises, unduly seek my overthrow”\textsuperscript{64}. Regarded by the Royals as a man of profound para-scientific talent, Dee’s navigational skills were indispensable to Britain’s imperial advance, and his antiquarian knowledge of critical value in the move to assert Elizabeth’s title to foreign lands. By 1570, his intellectual circle “constituted the scientific academy of Renaissance England”\textsuperscript{65} and his personal library at Mortlake, south of the Thames, – housing near to four thousand volumes – dwarfed the biblioteques of Cambridge and Oxford.

He had by 1578 encountered Edward Kelley, a man with whom posterity has dealt even less approvingly than Dee. Historically dismissed as a ‘charlatan’, a ‘diabolist’, and a ‘rogue’, even Frances Yates offers nothing salvific to the memory of Kelley in her 1964 claim that he “was a fraud who deluded his pious master”\textsuperscript{66}. His master, of course, was Dee; the pair cultivating a complex co-dependency whereby Kelley was engaged as the medium or ‘scryer’ for Dee’s celestial conferences: Dee would quiz the angels, and Kelley would interpret their responses in an obsidian ball. At the height of Dee’s secondment to the British navigational movement in 1583, the pair left abruptly for the Continent – families and sundry manuscripts in tow. Six years were to be spent in the ‘Low Countries’, attempting the transmutation of gold under the patronage of Emperor Rudolf whilst fervently pursuing contact with the angels. But the relationship between Dee and Kelley proved at times as fluctuant as their successes with alchemy; Dee’s crystal-gazer eventually proposing activities so preposterous that the pious

\textsuperscript{63} Dee, as cited in \textit{ibid.}, pp. 24-25.
\textsuperscript{64} C. Fell Smith, \textit{John Dee (1527-1608)}, London, 1909, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{65} Sherman, \textit{Politics}, p. 29.
peacemaker and “mender of quarrels” could no longer abide their alliance.

After a long residence on the Continent, Dee dissolved his partnership with Kelley and finally returned to England in 1589 at the behest of Queen Elizabeth. (Elizabeth, like many in the court, had found Dee’s sudden departure and subsequent peripatetic jaunting from Poland to Prague for the most part mysterious). Whilst highly celebrated, his homecoming was marred by the finding that in his Continental absence, his voluminous library at Mortlake had been mercilessly vandalised and nearly one-third of its manuscripts either torched or thieved. Believed culpable were those neighbours who “had long feared him as a conjuror” – a problematic appellation that returned soon to vex him in the years following Elizabeth’s death and the immediate succession of James I. James evidently considered Dee, then seventy-six years old, something of a doddering fool; an Elizabethan ‘hanger on’ whose dealings with the celestial world constituted the very brand of conjuring scorned by James in his 1603 anti-occult publication, *Daemonologie*.

Despite a desperate plea to the new King – and the urging of Parliament to pass “An Act Generall Against sclaunder” such that his name might be permanently freed from malignment – John Dee died in poverty in 1608. Unendorsed by the “narrow-minded Scotsman” whose puritanical ‘Act Against Witchcraft’ was passed in the House of Lords in 1604, Dee had no recourse for protection, solace, or sponsorship. With his former patrons now dead and King James shrewdly surveilling all known ‘sorcerers’, the ageing philosopher endured his waning

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69 Formerly James IV of Scotland.

70 This beseechment was contained in a letter To the Kings most excellent Majestie, which accompanied a reworked version of Dee’s 1599 *Letter...Apologeticall*, originally dispatched to Elizabeth. In his *Letter...Apologeticall*, Dee attempts to obtain redress from the Crown for his many dispossessions and grievances, resulting largely from the damage to his library and home at Mortlake. To clarify his worthiness, he pedantically recalls his “labors and paines bestowed at divers times”, specifically the details of his services to the Crown and a catalogue of his commissioned and uncommissioned publications. Dee’s most drastic entreaty, however, is contained in his accompanying epistle To the Kings most excellent Majestie, where he “offereth himselfe willingly to the punishment of Death; (yea eyther to be stoned to death; or to be buried quicke; or to be burned unmercifully) If by any due, true and just meanes, the said name of conjurer, or caller or invocator of Divels or damned Spirites can be proved to have beene or to be duely or justly reported”. Either the King felt that a case against Dee was evidentially lacking, or he chose not to dignify Dee’s supplication with a trial, for there is nothing to suggest that the letter was met with a reply. Notwithstanding, the letter stands as a beau ideal of Dee’s perennial battle to prove his honourable intentions at any cost.


years in abject silence, dispossessed of health, wealth, and so many of the precious manuscripts
he had throughout his life onerously procured.

On November 24th, 1583, Dee recorded in his diary a nightmare that would cruelly and eerily
prefigure his waiting doom. The entry reads: “Saterday night I dremed that I was deade, and
afterward my bowels wer taken out I walked and talked with diverse, and among other with the
Lord Thresorer who was com to my howse to burn my bokes ...” 73.

1.3 The Question of Delusion

“Much madness is divinest sense
   To a discerning eye;
   Much sense the starkest
   madness.”

   - Emily Dickinson, ‘Life’, Part XI, 1924

It is interesting to discover that Dee “never personally saw” 74 or heard the angels with whom
he intercessionally communicated. More curious still is the ensuing determination, touted
widely in the scholarly world, that Kelley’s “mental illness” 75 and the intellectual “instability”
that plagued the “latter years of [Dec’s] life” 76 are collectively to blame for the fanciful and
entirely falsified claims of angel-communication that proceeded from the pair’s sessions.
Many writers, keen to absolve themselves of any duty to decipher Dee’s angelic transcripts,
have rashly dismissed the conversations as a product of delusion, or of “uncontrolled
indulgence in private effusions of prayer” 77. The common assumption that Dee induced his

73 Dee, The private diary of Dr. John Dee, and the catalogue of his library of manuscripts: from the original
manuscripts in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, and Trinity College Library, Cambridge, ed. J.O. Halliwell,
London, 1842, p. 18.
74 French, Elizabethan Magus, p. 114. See also Fell Smith, op. cit., p. 63, and Yates, Giordano Bruno, p. 149
75 Josten, Unknown Chapter, p. 255.
76 D.E Harkness, ‘Shows in the Showstone: A Theatre of Alchemy and Apocalypse in the Angel Conversations
77 M. Casaubon, as cited in R. Deacon, John Dee, p. 143.
own derangement, for example, is echoed in Charles Mackay’s explanation that “By dint of continually brooding upon the subject [Dee’s] imagination became so diseased, that he at last persuaded himself that an angel appeared to him, and promised to be his friend and companion as long as he lived”\textsuperscript{78}.

Another common conspiracy shifts the source of delusion to Kelley, rendering Dee a victim of chicanery. Such claims are grounded in Dee’s candid confession, “You know I cannot see nor scry”\textsuperscript{79}; an admission that emphasises the vulnerable trust he issued to Kelley in the course of their celestial conferences. Noting the “sordid reputations”\textsuperscript{80} of Kelley and others involved in scrying for Dee, Harkness underscores the tendency for scholars to ‘forgive’ Dee’s flirtations with spirit-magic on the grounds that he was hoodwinked by frauds and pretenders. The image of a gullible Dee, “[d]eluded by devils and Edward Kelley”\textsuperscript{81}, is clearly implied by Kelley’s chief biographer, Arthur Edward Waite, in his assessment of the scryer’s “extraordinary capacity for misdeeds”\textsuperscript{82}. Similarly, Dame Edith Sitwell challenges the authenticity of the Kelley’s visions when she depicts him as “a terrible zombie-like figure, a medium inhabited by an evil spirit, [who] came into this good, old man’s life”\textsuperscript{83}.

Certainly, Edward Kelley was a character of some delinquency, forever side-stepping criminal charges of forgery, counterfeiture, and fraud. But what many scholars neglect to discuss in any depth is the reality that Kelley was merely one of Dee’s scrying assistants, second in line after Barnabas Saul and succeeded by Arthur Dee (John Dee’s son) and Bartholomew Hickman. If Kelley had fabricated the visions entirely, one would expect that the transcripts from his sessions with Dee might evidence this influence with distinctive, ‘Kelley-like’ style or content. But such a dissemblance simply cannot be gleaned; the dialogue between Dee and angels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel continues without stylistic fluctuation across his sessions.

\textsuperscript{79} Dee, as cited in Deacon, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{80} Harkness, Conversations, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{81} French, Elizabethan Magus, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{83} Dame Edith Sitwell, as cited in Deacon, John Dee, p. 125.
with all four scryers, particularly the final three. On the methodological and thematic parallels detectable across the entirety of Dee’s celestial sessions, Harkness explains: “That the angelic conversations changed little from one scryer to another confirms that it was Dee – the central participant – who lent coherence to the enterprise.”

Surely, then, regardless of his roguish reputation, Edward Kelley can not be conclusively attributed the accomplishment of cheating or ‘cozening’ his master by contriving visions in the obsidian show-stone.

And as for the question of Dee’s insanity (whether he cozened himself into believing there were angels in the mirror), there is simply nothing in his behaviour to support an allegation that he was mentally ailing. His approach to all aspects of the sessions was “singularly free from deluded fanaticism”, demonstrated in his careful cross-examination of the transcripts, his keenness to authenticate each angel’s identity, and his willingness to admit his failures as a scryer. To be fair, there can be no such charge of ‘brainsickness’ levelled legitimately at either Dee or Kelley in consideration of available evidence. Accordingly, theories that discredit the angel conversations on the basis of alleged insanity carry little persuasive clout and deserve to be dealt with dismissively.

1.4 The Suggestion of Devilry

One of the thorniest issues besetting the angel conversations relates to the Church’s edict on celestial communication. Rather than arguing that Dee’s conversations were fraudulent or borne of derangement, the Catholic Church was convinced that the supernatural activities of Dee and Kelley were “all too real”. Their concern, it seems, was related to the essence of the supernatural beings themselves. Trattner explains:

To Dee the spirits he called upon were angels; he could not believe that he had broken the ideas of Christianity. But by the popular verdict of Elizabethan Christianity they must be devils; angels would have no such commerce with men.

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14 Since only one angel conversation involving Barnabas Saul as scryer survives, it is difficult to speak definitively about its stylistic congruence with the amassment of extant transcripts from Kelley’s and Hickman’s sessions. Nonetheless, there is nothing within the dialogue or in the scryer’s approach to the angels that conclusively suggests the Saul/Dee sessions followed a discrepant method of conjury.


16 Deacon, John Dee, p. 143.

17 Harkness, Conversations, p. 57.

18 Trattner, God and Expansion, p. 32
Indeed, if communication with angels was possible, the Catholic Church held preconceived ideas as to who might enjoy their acquaintance. “[R]eluctant to endorse those who claimed to have received direct revelations,” Catholic authorities of the Renaissance generally sanctioned intercessional communicators only from within the Holy orders, ie Popes, bishops, priests, and deacons. Whilst Dee considered himself a man of commensurate holiness who lead a “virtually monastic life,” and despite his unshakeable faith in the wisdom of the angels, Catholic authorities in Prague insisted that Dee – a married man – was an unlikely candidate for genuine intercessional commerce. Even less inclined to approve Dee’s claims were the Protestants, who rejected any need to summon angels or celestial ‘brokers’ in the quest to speak with God, and generally “deplor[ed] the prophecies of contemporary Catholic mystics.”

If it were not angels appearing in the obsidian mirror, then, it must have been demons; reprobate spirits ripe for conjuring by any unfitted caller. It was on this very premise that Dr Thomas Smith, Dee’s first biographer, lent his orthodox ‘expertise’ to the angel conversations in tagging Dee “famosus iste Daemonum Legatus” – the famed Ambassador of Demons. But Dee was fastidiously mindful of the need to exercise the extremest of caution when summoning spirits lest a “very foolish devil” foist its way into his show-stone. The following transcript of a session with Kelley evidences Dee’s methods of interrogating and ousting suspected demons. ‘D’ denotes Dee, ‘EK’ Edward Kelley, and the ellipsis an unknown spirit:

E.K. Now is one come in very brave, like a Preacher; I take him to be an evil one.
D. Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.

E.K. He saith nothing. Not so much as, Amen.

.... Are you so foolish to think that the power of God will descend into so base a place?

E.K. The power of God descending, descendeth to beautifie the place; And whatsoever he beautifieth, he doth it mercifullly. And so through his mercy he descendeth among us, that put our trust in his mercies.

.... It is true: But, unto those that are righteous.

D. Christ: his coming hath been to save sinners. His conversation was among sinners, halt, lame, blinde, and diseased. So likewise: Now our frailty, or impurity will not exclude his presence, or the Ministry of his faithfull Angels.

.... What, in this base manner?

D. Do you mislike the manner?

.... Can any that hath any drop of wisdom like it?

D. Are you wise?

.... Or else I could not see thy imperfections.

D. Which be they? Accuse me.

.... What greater imperfection, then so imagine much more believe, that the Angels of God, will, or may descend into so filthie a place, as this corruptible stone is? Considering the clearnesse, and bignesse of the aire, or the places that are prepared in mans bodie, for such entrances.

D. Who causeth thee to come here?

.... Thy folly.

D. Art thou good, or bad?

.... I am good, or else could not see the bad.

D. Ergo, thou art a lyar, for thou say'dst, No good Angel, would, or might come here into this stone.

D. Thus will God be glorified against wicked Satan, and his Ministers. His fetch was very subtile: As, To bring in doubt all the Actions performed in this stone. What canst thou answer?

E.K. He sayeth nothing. Neither can he say any thing. He seemeth to be a very foolish Devil.

D. Mendacem oportet esse memorem. Now be packing hence⁹.

⁹ Dee, T & FR, pp. 53-54.
That Dee would so doggedly interrogate suspected ‘impostors’ hardly suggests that he lacked the spiritual sagacity to distinguish between angelic and demonic presences, regardless of the Catholic Church’s scepticism. Too, that the nature of the celestial discussions varied so dramatically between those beings Dee identified as angels and those he suspected were demons weakens the accusation that every spirit which appeared in the show-stone was necessarily a creature of the devil. Clearly, Dee put himself at grave risk in admitting he met with not only angels but on rare occasion with impudent demons as well. The fact that he so unreservedly took this risk in publishing the angel diaries evinces the transparency of his motives and also the surety with which he proclaimed himself a prophet of heavenly wisdom. In an extreme gesture intended to substantiate his integrity, Dee proposed the following test to an incredulous priest in Prague: “[I]f our angelic protectors be good and from God, fire from heaven shall consume and destroy you, Father; but that if they be bad angels of the infernal regions, the fire from heaven may most rapidly destroy me and wipe me from the face of the earth.”

But an element of doubt also vexed the issue of whether Dee’s supernatural activities should rightly be considered a variety of religious experience, or, more problematically, a type of magic. As previously intimated, the distinction between religion and magic was, for the Church of Dee’s time, a mercurial issue. Any “marvellous effect” wrought by man that fell outside the normal course of nature could be considered a threat to the orthodoxy of official liturgy and a subversion of the natural order. But owing to the fact that the Catholic Church’s Mass was itself highly ritualised and invocative, the task of distinguishing religious ritual from magical ritual (and similarly magical ritual from simple scientific acts) proved delicate. The threat of demonic interference as implicit in all types of magic had been vigorously peddled in the Middle Ages – particularly in the writings of such theologians as Thomas Aquinas – and continued to exercise currency in the Church of the Renaissance. At the same time, Roger Bacon argued in the thirteenth century that so many useful and innocuous sciences had been condemned into illegitimacy because of the confusion engendered by the Thomisian ideal.

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96 Dee in Josten, *Unknown Chapter*, p. 236. The priest, of course, declined the deal, wishing not to test or tempt God in such a manner. He did not suggest an alternative means of verifying the angel conversations.

97 Clulee, *Natural Philosophy*, p. 133.

98 See *loc. cit.*
Certainly, Dee’s library reflected an interest in the ‘magical’ arts, and the writings of Trithemius, Pliny, Agrippa, and Pico on natural philosophy heavily influenced his ideas. But to claim, as Aquinas might have, that Dee’s celestial affairs were in any way satanic is utterly without foundation, for, as Deacon explains, his angelic sessions were “simple and devoid of any of those elaborate, sacrificial rituals which are so marked a feature of the black magicians”\(^9\). Each conference was opened and closed with a classical Christian prayer, employing common liturgical styles and beseeching guidance from God. The following prayer

\(^9\) Deacon, John Dee, p. 145.
is taken from a session in Prague in 1586: “Almighty, Sempiternal, True and Living God, send out Thy light and Thy truth which may guide us safely to Holy Mount Sion and to Thy celestial tabernacles where we may praise and glorify you eternally and for ever and ever. Amen”.100

Repudiating any understanding of Dee’s celestial sessions as ‘magical’, ‘demonic’, or ‘dangerous’, Clulee explains: “The practice of the actions ... takes place in the simple religious atmosphere of Dee’s oratory, following a period of silent prayer and ending with a short prayer of praise and thanksgiving. There is no element of invoking angels and compelling their services; rather it is a question of humbly petitioning God to send his angels”101. Dee subscribed wholeheartedly to the notion of prayer as propounded by the prolific litanist Bishop John Fisher, Chancellor of Cambridge in the years preceding Dee’s admission to St John’s College. Defining the power of prayer as a “rope of golden chaine lett downe from heaven, by which we endeavour to draw God to us”102, Fisher’s understanding of a ‘laddered’ cosmos leant Dee, the aspirant climber, a sense of celestial hope.

Despite the Catholic Church’s efforts to annul Dee’s claims of angel communication, there still exists a common understanding that his varied pursuits can not easily be detached from the scaffold of Christology that supports them. Even his fiercest critic – eighteenth-century biographer Dr Thomas Smith – seems unable to uproot Dee from his Christian foundations or conceive of his actions in anything other than purely Christian terms. Surely, if the harshest indictment Smith can inflict renders Dee “the laughing stock and prey of daemons”103 (where ‘daemons’ are not exclusively malevolent), then the biographer has done very little to malign Dee’s intentions or challenge his allegiance to the scriptures. In fact, it is ironically Smith himself who relays perhaps the most guileless account of Dee’s religious ambitions:

For he was wont to God with most fervent and often repeated prayers, that being gifted with wisdom, he might attain to the faculty of understanding the secrets of Nature, not yet revealed to men; nor did he abstain from declaring openly that from his youth upwards God had implanted in his heart a zealous and insatiable desire of arriving at the truth; that this was the scope and end of his studies104.

100 Dee, as cited in Josten Unknown Chapter, pp. 240-241.
101 Clulee, Natural Philosophy, p. 206.
102 J. Fisher, as cited in Harkness, Conversations, p. 119.
104 T. Smith, op. cit., page number unavailable.
For the purpose of this thesis, no attempt will be made to establish ‘truth’ in Dee’s celestial exchanges; such a philosophically-toilsome task remains the sole calling of the ontologist. Instead, an attempt will be made to locate those “cultural and intellectual contexts” that Harkness suggests will render transparent the opacities of Dee’s activities and “help to make [the conversations] less obscure”\textsuperscript{105}. And whilst it can not be proved that archangels Michael, Gabriel, and others appeared to Kelley in an obsidian mirror, it can neither be disproved; indeed, French flicks a subtle affront to Kelley’s incredulous critics in his declaration that “It is very difficult to believe that he saw nothing at all”\textsuperscript{106}. Thus, in order to bypass any epistemological or ontological debate, and to ensure that the transcripts of Dee’s sacred sessions are handled with appropriate reverence, this thesis will launch itself from Harkness’s matter-of-fact, \textit{a priori} premise that “Between 1581 and 1586 ... John Dee ... talked with angels about the natural world and its apocalyptic end”\textsuperscript{107}.

\begin{quotation}
“Avoiding the angels’ importance to Dee’s inquiries into the natural world”, remarks Harkness, has unfortunately “become a historiographic tradition”\textsuperscript{108}. It is the ambition of this thesis that tradition be broken with, such that Dee’s idea of ‘progress’ be understood as a true conglomerate of social and spiritual interests. His scientific purpose was to manipulate the effluvia of celestial bodies such that ‘magical’ feats might be wrought on earth. His religious purpose – as avowed in his \textit{Letter...Apologeticall} – was to “finde, follow, use, & haunt the true, straight, and most narrow path, leading all true, devout, zealous, faithfull, and constant Christian students”\textsuperscript{109}. The next chapter will map the enactment of these mission statements across Dee’s varying pursuits and as evidenced in his extant works, such that the dual voices of science and faith might be heard in unison tones. The angel conversations will form a platform for this study, for in them is played out a grand crescendo of Dee’s desires for political, social, scientific, and cosmological restoration.
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{105} Harkness, \textit{Shows}, p. 709.
\textsuperscript{107} Harkness, \textit{Conversations}, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{108} Harkness, \textit{Shows}, p. 712.
\textsuperscript{109} Dee, \textit{A letter, containing a most briefe discourse apologeticall, with a plaine demonstration, and fervent protestation, for the lawfull, sincere, very faithfull and Christian course, of the philosophical studies and exercises, of a certaine studious gentleman, an ancient seruaunt to her most excellent Maiesty Royall}, London, 1599, p. 2.
PART 2:
The Meaning of Celestial Communication

“For now we see in a mirror, darkly”
– 1 Corinthians 13:12

2.1 Angels in the Architecture

Perhaps the greatest exegetical tool one can bring to Dee’s celestial conferences is an understanding of angelology and its place in sixteenth-century folklore. That secured, Dee’s decision to inquire heavenward for assistance on matters of philosophy should no longer command that element of incredulous surprise conveyed by so many scholars in their writings on the man. If one is to cast one’s eye over the ecclesiastical architecture of Dee’s time, God’s cosmic helpers can be seen customarily adorning the eaves, gables, archways, altars, pillars, beams and ceilings of both stately Cathedrals and humble parish chapels. A similar ‘heavenly’ presence attends the artistic spheres, for the Italian Renaissance had, by the time of Dee’s birth, cultivated an intensified interest in angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim. Emanating from the Florentine School in the works of Da Vinci, Raphael, and Botticelli, the depiction of celestial scenes continued to prevail in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the works Michaelangelo, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and Rubens. In fact, even the most cursory survey of Renaissance stylistics – both in England and on the Continent – reveals the inescapable fact that “angels were everywhere”!

And where England’s artistic response to the Continental Renaissance may have been lacking, the literary output of Milton, Spenser, and Donne can be seen to have compensated. Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’ (c1660), Spenser’s ‘Faerie Queene’ (1596) and Donne’s profusion of metaphysical verse at the turn of the sixteenth century each provide something of a poetic answer to Italy’s obsession with celestial art. To illustrate: Milton’s grandiose “Thither came Uriel, gliding through the even/On a sunbeam”, and Spenser’s poignant “those little Angels

109 Harkness, Conversations, p. 102.
did uphold/The cloth of state”¹¹² both concur with Donne’s suspicion that “Angells affect us oft”¹¹³. Similarly, the dramatic works of William Shakespeare (Dee’s contemporary and probable acquaintance¹¹⁴) are replete with instances of celestial interaction and angelic convocation. “That angel of the world, doth make distinction/Of place ’tween high and low”, Belarius explains of the cosmos in Cymbeline. “Consideration, like an angel, came/And whipp’d the offending Adam out of him”, the Archbishop of Canterbury relays to the Archbishop of Ely in King Henry IV. And of course, no reference to Shakespeare’s preternatural themes would be complete without a nod to Hamlet and the protagonist’s terrified plea: “Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!”

Figure 3. Rembrandt, The Archangel Leaving the Family of Tobias, 1637

¹¹² E. Spenser, The Faerie Queene, Book 5, Canto IX.
¹¹⁴ It has been widely speculated that Shakespeare’s character of Prospero, the wizened magician in The Tempest, was chiefly modelled on John Dee. If so, it is likely the two were acquainted, if not in the flesh than certainly by mutual reputation. Either way, Dee and Shakespeare moved in abutting artistic circles, and in Queen Elizabeth shared a friend, patron, and confidante.
Figure 4. Caravaggio, *Amor Vincit Omnia*, 1602-1603

Figure 5. 14th-century angel bosses at the springing of two arches
Lincoln Cathedral – Lincolnshire, UK
Figure 6. Minstrel angel in the Nave, Manchester Cathedral (late 15th Century - early 16th Century), Manchester, UK

Figure 7. Angels Ithuriel and Zephon attend Adam and Eve in William Blake’s 1808 water-colour illustration of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Canto V)
Whilst these architectural, artistic, literary, and dramatic examples are not directly pertinent to John Dee, they are, like Dee’s philosophy, a product of Elizabethan cosmology. Remarking that the sixteenth-century cosmos was “hierarchical and stretched in a chain of influences from God through the angels ... to the sublunar world of human beings”115, Harkness illuminates a world in which the wisdom of God might be sought through an appeal to the celestial strata. Calder concurs: “The doctrine of the hierarchy, or of the omnipresence, of various kinds of spirits and angels, considered either as mediators between God and man, guides and assistants of mortals, or as independent natural creatures, was relatively frequent in the sixteenth century”116. In fact, God’s messengers have since the penning of Genesis been a permanent fixture of Heaven’s architecture, spilling into each subsequent epoch with escalating prevalence. In her study on medieval religious magic, for example, Valerie Flint laconically reports of God’s angels that “[i]t is hardly .. possible to move far into the Middle Ages without falling over one”117.

2.2 Intellectual Impetus

By the time Dee began conversing with angels, he had cultivated the largest personal (or indeed institutional) library in England. The catalogue, still in existence today, discloses a variety and richness of holdings that elude an easy synopsis but present perhaps the greatest intellectual framework within which to interpret Dee. Beginning by collecting unwanted medieval manuscripts and theological texts ousted from Catholic churches by Henry VIII, Dee amassed a trove of titles that would soon attract the visits of eminent of theologians, antiquarians, mathematicians, architects, scientists, physicians, artists, and mystics. In fact, so overwhelmed was Dee by the constant stream of callers to Mortlake that in 1592 he wrote and requested of Queen Elizabeth the living of Saint Cross’s in Hampshire, citing “the multitude and haunt of my common friends, and other, who visit me”118.

Featuring pre-eminently on his shelves were the works of contemporary Continental authors

115 Harkness, Conversations, p. 103.
117 Flint, op. cit., pp. 158-159.
Giordano Bruno, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Paracelsus, Johannes Trithemius, and Henry Cornelius Agrippa, some of whom Dee was fortunate enough to acquaint with during his sojourns to Europe. Such medieval thinkers as St Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon, Boethius, Albertus Magnus, and Ramon Lull featured prominently, as did patristic writers Augustine, Clement, and Philo. Well-represented were the pre-Christian philosophers Plato and Aristotle, as well as ‘inspired’ writers Zoroaster, Pythagorus, and Hermes Trismegistus. Of course, Dee’s interests were not purely philosophical; his library also housed generous theatrical titles, British genealogical records, the mathematical and architectural writings of Vitruvius, innumerable works of Classical poetry, several Hebrew language texts, and myriad alchemical manuscripts. In fact, it would not be extravagant to side with Frances Yates in observing that “the whole Renaissance is in this library”119.

There is, however, one particular author in Dee’s collection worthy of exceptional mention, and that is Marsilio Ficino. Sometime near to 1471, Ficino – whose fifteenth-century Florentine academy encouraged a return to Platonic thought – translated from Greek into Latin the Corpus Hermeticum. Believed to have been authored by Hermes Trismegistus “long before the sages of Greece”120 and “[i]n that time in which Moses was born”121, the Corpus traced a genealogy of wisdom from Zoroaster in Egypt through to Plato in Greece, and established Hermes as an instrument of divine truth. Whilst a proper exegesis of the Corpus owes itself to a second thesis entirely, the diffuse story could be acceptably summarised as an ‘Egyptianisation’ of the book of Genesis. Wishing to “know about beings, to understand their nature, to know God”122, Hermes is instructed in a gnostic philosophy that reveals God’s presence in everything, including humanity. Through nurturing a mystical rapport with the world and mankind, Hermes might discover the divine within himself and accordingly exert God’s supernatural strength over the terrestrial sphere. Dee likens this inspired mastery to that conferred by God unto Moses, who, like Hermes, “was instructed in all maner of wisdome of the Aegyptians: and he was of power both in his wordes and workes”123.

If any sentence or sentiment in the Corpus might be extracted as a flagship phrase – summary

120 Augustine, as cited in Yates, Giordano Bruno, p. 11.
121 Ficino, as cited in ibid., p. 14.
122 as cited in French, Elizabethan Magus, p. 74.
123 Dee, from ‘Mathematical Preface’, as cited in ibid., p. 85.
and representative – it is the following: “If in any event you do not make yourself equal to
God, you cannot know God: because like is intelligible only to like”124. Herein is perfectly
embodied Dee’s understanding of the universe which, French neatly explains, advocated a
cosmological paradigm not of “man under God, but [of] man and God”125. It has been posited
that the “arrogant self-esteem”126 with which Dee boasted his marvellous feats and pedalled his
desires for a universal religion clashes markedly with his identity as a humble and pious
Christian. Indeed, there is a distressing suggestion of ‘usurpation’ involved in rivalling God’s
mastery, and an equally undesirable essence of blasphemy connected to he who masquerades
as a demiurge. However, the Hermetic ideal of man as a ‘mini-God’ is not entirely untried in
the Bible, as the following verses from Psalms evidence:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars,
which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the
son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than
the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to
have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his
feet127.

Here, Hermes’ revelation is not altogether out of place, nor John Dee’s plan to ascend the
celestial hierarchy effectively challenged. In fact, the above Psalm concurs fully with the
message of the Corpus in inspiring man to compel natural forces – even to the point of
manipulating God’s angels – to an extent he might never had contemplated128.

It was on first-class authority that the great minds of the Renaissance accepted as bona fide the
Corpus Hermeticum. Augustine, for example, whilst condemning the element of idolatry in the
writings, had accepted Hermes as an historical figure and commented that he “says much of
God according to the truth”129. Similarly, Lactantius, an esteemed Christian author of the early
fourth century AD, had penned the following favourable account:

And even though [Hermes] was a man, he was most ancient and well
instructed in every kind of learning – to such a degree that his knowledge of
the arts and of all other things gave him the cognomen or epithet
Trismegistus. He wrote books – many, indeed, pertaining to the knowledge of
divine things – in which he vouches for the majesty of the supreme and single
God and he calls Him by the same names which we use: Lord and Father.130

124 as cited in ibid., p. 75.
125 Ibid., p. 76.
126 Loc. cit.
127 Psalm 8:3-6.
128 French, Elizabethan Magus, p. 87.
129 as cited in Yates, Giordano Bruno, p. 10.

34
It seems not to have mattered greatly that in 1614, Isaac Casaubon – son of Meric Casaubon who so incredulously adjudged the angel diaries in 1659 – accurately dated the Corpus to the beginning of the Christian era (100 - 300 AD), and effectively relieved Hermes of any Mosaic association. Ficino’s translation, having propagated Renaissance circles for around a hundred and forty years, had already unleashed its influence and emboldened the philosophies of Pico, Agrippa, Bruno, and Dee. The universe had been modified, the hierarchy unhinged, and man was no longer confined to a simple, sublunary role.

2.3 Biblical Impetus

“And he dreamed. And behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it.”

– Genesis 28:12

Whilst Dee drew upon a plethora of esoteric sources in his attempts to access the wisdom of God, his understanding of the angels was, essentially, grounded in one singular text: the Bible. Desirous to be counted amongst the holy men to whom God’s messengers had delivered secret wisdom, Dee supplicated God to be chosen as a prophet in the Abrahamic tradition. One such appeal is published at the beginning of Mysteriorum Libri Quinti, a record of Dee’s early activity with the angels:

And, seing, I have red in thy bokes, & records, how Enoch enjoyed thy favor and conversation, with Myses thow wast familier: And allso that to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Josue, Gedeon, Esdres, Daniel, Tobias, and sundry other, thy good angels were sent, by thy disposition, to instruct them, informe them, help them, yea in wordly and domesticall affaire, yea and sometimes to satisfy theyr desyres, dowtes & questions of thy Secrets131.

Here Dee, almost protesting, provides a comprehensive catalogue of angel visitation in the Bible and Old Testament Apocrypha. It was in these instances of divine interaction that Dee perceived a means of repossessing the ‘lost’ knowledge of God for which he so intently yearned, and of which he believed he was deserved. In Gabriel’s explanation to Daniel: “Son

131 Dee, Mysteriorum Libri Quinti or, Five Books of Mystical Exercises of Dr. John Dee: An Angelic Revelation of Cabalistic Magic and other Mysteries Occult and Divine / revealed to Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelly, ed. Joseph Peterson, Wales, 1985, p. 7.
of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end”\(^{132}\) as in his prophesying John the Baptist’s birth to Zacharias: “Do not be afraid ... for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John”\(^{133}\), Dee deciphered a potential for divine communication that inspired and excited him greatly.

In his free verse manuscript ‘Jubilate Agno’, Christopher Smart surmised in 1759: “For Jacob’s ladder are the steps of the earth graduated hence to Paradise, and thence to the throne of God”\(^{134}\). It was this very image – as construed from the Genesis passage above – that appealed so exactly to Dee in his efforts to commune with the divine. Both Christianity and Hermeticism justified his belief in the governance of the world by angels and the accessibility of those beings to learned men, and Jacob’s ladder presented a perfect mode of access to the celestial echelons. What he endeavoured to attain in this quest was a restoration of man’s harmonious relationship with God, enjoyed by Adam and Eve in their prelapsarian days. The Book of Nature\(^{135}\) had been destabilised by the Fall of Man, and widespread decay – both moral and material – had henceforth prevailed. Man’s rebellion against his creator was widely held culpable for natural disasters, social upheaval, and, topically for Dee, the ferment in the Holy Church. On the topic of such cosmic disruptions, Dee’s contemporary, Francis Shakelton can be quoted: “[D]oe we not see the yeartth to be changed and corrupted? Sometymes by the inundation of waters? Sometimes by fiers? And by the heate of the Sunne?”\(^{136}\).

The cosmos was for Dee but “a lyre tuned by some excellent artificer, whose strings are separate pieces of a universal whole”\(^{137}\). So systematically-strung was the universe for Dee that it could be conceived of mathematically, “maryed with the most simple, easie, and short way of the noble rule of Algiebar”\(^{138}\). Dee’s successes in ‘geometrie vulgar’ (that is, the practical

\(^{132}\) Daniel 8:17.  
\(^{135}\) In the aftermath of the Reformation and the great religious schisms it engendered, several schemes and paradigms were advanced, most reconciliatory, regarding the possible relationship between religion and science. One such scheme propounded the metaphor of two books, God’s works (the ‘Book of Nature’) and God’s word (the ‘Book of Scripture’) as analogous sources of Christian truth.  
\(^{136}\) F. Shakelton as cited in Harkness, Conversations, p. 68.  
\(^{138}\) Dee, from Mathematical Preface, as cited in ibid., p. 22.
application of mathematics in navigation, cartography, surveying, aerodynamics, and astronomy) had proved that a system of interrelated, reliable principles governed the four elements of the terrestrial world. Dee foresaw no logical reason why God, who “in the beginning ... created the heavens and the earth”⁴¹³, might have applied discrepant patterns of order to the natural and supernatural spheres. Therefore,

[b]y the joining of such natural things that exist separately in the universe, in their differing fashions, and by the activating of other things placed somewhat higher, seminally, in nature, more wonderful things can be performed truly and naturally, without violence to faith in God or injury to the Christian religion, than any mortal might be able to believe⁴¹⁰.

With Edward Kelley’s co-operation and God’s approval, Dee committed in 1581 to accomplishing ‘wonderful things’ by climbing the incremental and mathematically-ordered rungs of Jacob’s ladder to meet with the angels of heaven.

2.3 Mathematical and Linguistic Impetus

Why Dee should have devoted himself to his angelic pursuits with increasing single-mindedness at this precise period has stumped a number of scholars. As Calder explains, “[i]t has been usual to see an abrupt discontinuity in the type and manner of Dee’s investigations at this period in his life, i.e., from about 1582, when he commenced his angelic intercourse”⁴¹¹. There seems, however, little sense in puzzling over the apparent unaccountable ‘breach’ in John Dee’s method when the philosopher himself explained matter-of-factly his reasons for consulting the angels: “I found (at length) that neither any man living, nor any Book I could yet meet withal, was able to teach me those truths I desired, and longed for: And therefore I concluded with myself, to make intercession and prayer to the giver of wisdom and all good things”⁴¹². Further, Yates explains: “His studies in number, so successful in what he would think of as the lower spheres, were, for him, primarily important because he believed they could be extended with even more powerful results into the celestial world”⁴¹³. Armed with a burning desire for heavenly knowledge and a calculated system by which to access it, there is little wonder Dee sought to mobilise the superhuman powers in the manner that he did.

⁴¹³ Genesis 1:1.
⁴¹⁰ Dee, Propaedumata Aphoristica, pp. 126-127.
⁴¹² Dee, T & FR, p. 231.
But here we begin to traverse the cumbersome terrain of esotericism as discussed at the start of this thesis. Whilst it is easily stated that Dee’s ‘ascent’ into the celestial spheres was attained mathematically, a detailed understanding of this statement, with all its implications, is much more difficult to effect. Put simply, Dee believed that ‘number’ existed in a trinitarian state: “One, in the Creator: another in every creature ... and the third, in Spirituall and Angelicall Myndes, and in the Soule of man”\textsuperscript{144}. Every being could be conceived of in numbers; the unique mathematical formulae applied to them during their creation by God. This belief was highly Hermetic, but also deeply Cabalistic, drawing on the doctrine of the ten Sephiroth and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In ruminating over the infinite subtleties of the characters in the ‘alefbet’ and their configurations as constituents of the holy Hebrew name of God, the Cabalist, remarks Yates, “is contemplating both God himself and his works through the Power of the Name”\textsuperscript{145}. It is likely that by the time Dee graduated a fellow from Cambridge he had been furtively pondering the secrets of the Cabala for several years.

Stemming from his fondness for the workings of mathematics, Dee developed a strong interest in ‘number’ as associated with the Hebrew names of angels and spirits largely unknown to traditional Christian Scripture. Embracing the Cabala as a class of operative magic, he assayed to invoke the angels of the Judaeo-Christian deific firmament through intricately-calculated mathematical formulae, read-off in terms of Hebrew ‘word-numbers’. It was on Agrippa’s famed \textit{De Occulta Philosophia} that Dee most heavily relied, for in this text was contained an elaborate series of number-tables pertinent to the summoning of angels. But far more elaborate and bewildering than any Cabalistic chart was the system of language ‘transmitted’ to Dee and Kelley by the angels with which they spoke. Likely to confuse even “the most erudite scholar of any age”\textsuperscript{146}, the angelic dialect, ‘Enochian’, was the language in which the angels revealed their identity and other fragments of information to the terrestrial callers.

\textsuperscript{144} Dee, as cited in French, \textit{Elizabethan Magus}, p. 105.

\textsuperscript{145} Yates, \textit{Giordano Bruno}, p. 92.

\textsuperscript{146} Deacon, \textit{John Dee}, p. 149.
A number of ‘books’ were revealed to the pair in this language, the first and most significant of which being *The Book of Enoch*\(^\text{147}\). Containing forty-nine tables (each consisting of forty-nine rows of forty-nine Enochian letters each), the *Book of Enoch* – along with various angelic accoutrements such as the *Sigillum Dei* – was to be employed in the majority of Dee’s celestial conferences. “Briefly”, Deacon explains, the sessions involved Kelley seating himself in front of the crystal, noting the appearance of the angel Gabriel with a wand and a board containing letters and figures. Kelley would then tell Dee to which figures or letters Gabriel pointed and Dee, who had a copy of these figures and letters in front of him, would write

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\(^{147}\) The name of this angelic text is not to be confused with the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, mentioned in the book of *Jude* but canonical only in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The text of the apocryphal *Book of Enoch* was considered lost until the beginning of the 17th century, when it was confidently asserted that the story was found in an Ethiopic translation. The book describes the nature of celestial bodies as observed by Enoch during his visit to Heaven, not entirely dissimilar to the visions in *Ezekiel*. Dee believed that Enoch, having communicated directly with God, would have been instructed in the divine tongue. His angelically-revealed language was named accordingly.
down the sign [that was] in the square indicated.\textsuperscript{148}

When the angel had finished, the cipher sequence would be re-written backwards and a message would be rendered intelligible in Dee’s translation.

Whether the sequence had been \textit{dictated} backwards by the angels so as to eschew interception by unwise or unholy eavesdroppers, or whether perhaps Kelley’s scrying mirror effected an optical \textit{inversion} of the language is an issue of some uncertainty. What cannot be argued, however, is the fact that a large component of Dee’s Enochian language remains, quite simply, “\textit{pure cryptography}”\textsuperscript{149}. In the truest sense of esoteric/exoteric literature, to fully decipher Dee’s angelic texts would require not only “\textit{I.Q. ... of an extraordinarily high level}”\textsuperscript{150}, as Deacon puts it, but also an acute familiarity with the occult currents of numerology, the Cabala, and astrology. Without these proficiencies, the Enochian tables will appear to the inquirer as nothing other than “\textit{meaningless gibberish}”\textsuperscript{151}, or, as Meric Casaubon so carpingly deduced in his appraisal of the angel conferences: “\textit{superstitious, foolish, fabulous writing}”\textsuperscript{152}. The fact that so few historians even mention the Enochian language in their biographies of Dee – most preferring to quote the English translations only – is further testament to its standing as a truly esoteric phenomenon; inaccessible and inhospitable to the uninitiated.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{enochian_alphabet.png}
\caption{The Enochian Alphabet in Dee’s hand}
\end{figure}

Of the Enochian material that has survived to the present day, much is on display in the British Museum and other made available in facsimile copies at rare book libraries. The Enochian language has, consequently, attracted the inquisitive interest of linguists, many hoping to

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Deacon} Deacon, \textit{John Dee}, p. 149.
\bibitem{Ibid.} Ibid., 150.
\bibitem{Loc. cit.} \textit{Loc. cit.}
\bibitem{M. Casaubon} M. Casaubon, as cited in Calder, \textit{op. cit.}, at http://www.johndee.org.
\end{thebibliography}
uncover within its terminology or principles a clue to its philological source. Enochian was not the only purported ‘angel language’ known in the sixteenth century; thus it has been widely speculated that either Dee or more likely Kelley ‘cribbed’ it from an already extant secret dialect and accordingly fabricated, either partly or fully, (either individually or in cahoots), the angelic conferences. But when subjected to linguistic interrogation, the Enochian language has been found to possess its own grammar and syntax, with a vocabulary – small though it is – able to invoke the most august of parlance. In fact, of the sentences Dee translated from Enochian into English, the predominance are both grand and eloquent, and “on the whole more coherent than James Joyce’s *Ulysses*”. Those sceptics hoping to prove unequivocally that the secret Enochian language is either plagiarised from another linguistic source or wholly contrived by an imaginative mind is set for a fruitless exercise, for as the various studies reveal, Enochian simply does not lend itself favourably to such conclusions. By the same token, it is impossible to say with any surety that the language is of divine origin, for such a statement requires proof of the epistemological kind unavailable to the discourse of ontology. Perhaps it is most fitting to borrow the judgment of Donald Laycock who concludes frankly in his *Complete Enochian Dictionary* that “we still do not know whether it is a natural or an invented language”.

But the intricacy of the Enochian language and the abstruse application of the Enochian tables are not altogether a problem for scholarship. In fact, the mind-boggling complexity of the whole process reveals something very curious about Edward Kelley; something that jumps to his immediate defence and remains his staunchest advocate. Each of the tables used in the sessions contained two-thousand, four-hundred and one (492) Enochian characters, and there were forty-nine tables to choose from. The Enochian characters indicated by the angel were relayed by Kelley to Dee, who eventually reversed them and translated them into English. Quite simply, it is impossible to believe that Kelley could have ‘faked’ the process, for doing so

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153 If one is to investigate the theory that Enochian is a ‘plagiarised’ language, then “[a] ... likely source for the angels’ divine alphabet is Giovanni Pantheus’s *Voarchadumia contra alchimiam*, which Dee owned and annotated. Pantheus’s work contained an alphabet labelled ‘Enochian’ that strongly resembles Dee’s divine script. Dee’s seventeenth-century editor, Meric Casaubon, believed that the characters ... derived from Theseus Ambrosius’s *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam etc* ... Agrippa’s own *De Occulta Philosophia* also contained ancient-looking alphabets derived from Hebrew that would have supported the purported antiquity of the angelic alphabet revealed to Dee”, Harkness, *Conversations*, p. 167.

154 Deacon, *John Dee*, p. 150.

necessitates that he not only memorised the position of one hundred and seventeen-thousand, six hundred and forty-nine characters, but that he could speak Enochian backwards. By his own admission, Kelley had enough difficulty speaking Enochian forwards, complaining on several occasions to Dee that he could not understand the “lerned tongues”\textsuperscript{156} in which the angels spoke! There can therefore be no question of Kelley having stolen and studied an existing language so intensely that he committed it to memory in order to trick Dee. We are consequently forced to conclude, it seems, that “something [which] escapes normal explanation was occurring”\textsuperscript{157}.

But Kelley was not the only one to experience difficulty in grasping the Enochian language; Dee too expended a great deal of energy attempting to learn its convoluted pronunciation rules, its grammar, and its syntax. He oftentimes expressed exasperation at the tortuous task of translation and the delays it imposed on the revelation of divine wisdom, but was ever chided by the angels for seeming both impetuous and ungracious. Ultimately, Dee appreciated that the divine language promised to reconnect parts of the cosmic system estranged since The Fall, and restore the broken communicative yokes between man, the angels, and God. Coulder elaborates: “The parallel that Christians constantly drew between Scripture and The Book of Nature also encouraged the belief that there was an intimate connection between language and things and that it was therefore entirely plausible to approach things linguistically”\textsuperscript{158}. The power of Enochian for Dee, was in its ability to bridge the interpretative gap between God’s Word and human understanding, for it was the divine language, according to Genesis\textsuperscript{159}, “which lent coherence and structure to the entire creative act”\textsuperscript{160}. Both Dee and Agrippa believed that fallen Man was deaf to the language of the divine. A knowledge of the true names of the angels, however, enabled the natural philosopher to transcend the corruption of the sublunary world and communicate direct with divinity.

\textsuperscript{156} Kelley, as cited in Deacon, \textit{John Dee}, p. 154.
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{158} A. Coudert, \textit{Leibniz and the Kabbalah}, Boston, 1995, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{159} In the Bible, divine language and divine speaking precede human language and human speaking. See specifically Genesis 1:3 – “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light”.
\textsuperscript{160} Harkness, \textit{Conversations}, p. 171.
2.5 Prophecy and Apocalypse

“We were expressly instructed, from the very beginning of that our vocation and function, and we have known ever since, that it was in accordance with our duty ... to show these mysteries in passing, to relate them compendiously, or to give a very brief account of an action”

- John Dee

Dee’s unyielding quest for divine knowledge may seem a somewhat self-serving one. It certainly appeared this way to the Bishop of Vercelli, who suspected that Dee and Kelley desired of the angels not spiritual guidance but aid in their alchemical experiments. “I am indeed of the opinion”, remarked the Bishop in a letter to Queen Elizabeth, “that they prefer one philosophers’ stone to ten visions of angels”\(^{162}\). Certainly, at the same time Dee and Kelley were conducting their celestial conferences, they were also under the patronage of Emperor Rudolph II in Prague, keenly pursuing the transmutation of metals in the hope of fructifying gold. For some, this duality has denoted a massive conflict of interest; indeed, a megalomaniac in pursuit of Adamic restoration is quite the repugnant paradox! But Dee aligned himself less with the mundane quest for gold than with the anagogical and metaphorical facets of his quicksilver science, directing his alchemical hypotheses in *Monas Hieroglyphica* to “those who wish to effect a healing of the soul and a deliverance from all distress”\(^{163}\). It was in fact on this very point that Dee and Kelley eventually severed their alliance, for Dee believed that his partner’s preoccupation with uttering gold was ultimately retarding his efficacy as a celestial medium.

Any would-be critic who had properly understood Dee’s grand alchemical metaphors might have dropped the accusation of self-servitude. Further, when it is acknowledged, as quoted above, that Dee’s avowed purpose was not to greedily *withhold* the truths as disclosed by the angels but rather to publicly *communicate* them, no such charge can be made to convincingly stick. In fact, Dee’s role as a revealer of divine wisdom or foreknowledge has impressive prophetical overtones. In the true tradition of Judaeo-Christian prophecy, Dee stated and

\(^{161}\) In Josten, *Unknown Chapter*, p. 226.
\(^{163}\) As cited in French, *Elizabethan Magus*, pp. 77-78.
steadfastly believed of his purpose: “This my commission is from God. I feign nothing, neither am I a hypocrite, an ambitious man, or doting or dreaming in this cause”\textsuperscript{164}. And whilst Dee never specifically proclaimed himself a ‘prophet’, the fact that much of what the angels portended physically came to pass, makes the title hard to dismiss. The following conversation between Dee and the angel Uriel from \textit{Mysteriorum Libri Quinti}, for example, curiously betokens both the assault of the Spanish Armada and the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots:

Dee: As concerning the vision which yester night was presented (unloked for,) to the sight of EK\textsuperscript{165} as he sat at supper with me, in my hall, I mean the appering of the very sea and many ships thereon, and the Cutting-of the hed of a woman, by a tall black man, What are we to imagin thereof?

Uriel: The one, did signify the prouision of forrayn powres against the Welfare of this land: which they shall shortly put into practice: The othere, the death of the Quene of Scotts. It is not long unto it.

(In the margin: The Quene of Scotts to be beheaded. So she was A. 1587 at Fodringham Castell. And also the same yere a great preparation of ships against England by the King of Spayn, the Pope and other Princis called Cathlik)\textsuperscript{166}.

Spurred by the word of the angels and persuaded by his own meteorological reckonings, Dee urged Elizabeth and her Admiral, Sir Francis Drake, to mobilise the British navy and to prepare for devastating weather. As the one-hundred and twenty-eight-strong Armada skirted the Isle of Wight, Britain bit-by-bit withdrew its maritime pursuit and the Spaniards sailed unbeknownst into a decimating squall off the west coast of Ireland. Having heeded Dee’s prophecy, the British navy escaped with negligible loss whilst “a bedraggled, impotent rabble of ships ... limped sadly back to Spain”\textsuperscript{167}. (So heralded was Dee’s prognostic success that history remembers him folklorically as the man who ‘hexed’ the Armada!)\textsuperscript{168}.

The Anglo-Spanish war and the execution of Queen Mary I of Scotland were both symptomatic of the discord between the Protestant and Catholic Churches – a division that troubled Dee greatly. Citing this very decay (along with a plethora of bizarre meteorological occurrences he had been diligently documenting), Dee ardently believed that the ‘end of days’, as prophesied in Revelation, was looming. The fact that he had achieved success in his attempts

\textsuperscript{164} As cited in Fell Smith, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{165} Ie, Edward Kelley.
\textsuperscript{166} Dee, \textit{Mysteriorum Libri Quinti}, p. 226.
\textsuperscript{167} Deacon, \textit{John Dee}, p. 246
\textsuperscript{168} See such pop-culture websites as http://www.johndee.org/DEE.htm.
to converse with angels also whet his apocalyptic hypothesis, as Harkness explains: “one eagerly awaited eschatological sign was increased communication between the celestial and terrestrial levels of the cosmos”\textsuperscript{169}. Since angelic messages had historically preceded events of cosmic proportion (such as the birth of Christ as prophesied by Gabriel to Mary), it naturally followed that God would dispense his angelic messengers to alert select individuals when the end of days was nigh.

The angel conversations thus excited Dee greatly, for with them came the promise of cosmic restoration. When the “voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder”\textsuperscript{170} proclaimed the end of days, the ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ would descend upon the earth and the secrets of the Book of Nature would be revealed. Dee was also intensely interested in the promise of religious unity, having found spiritual solace in neither the Catholic nor the Protestant Church. The angels’ predictions countenanced Dee’s vision for a universal faith, instructing him that “[w]hosoever wishes to be wise may look neither to the right nor left; neither towards this man who is called a catholic nor towards that one who is called a heretic ... but may he look up to the God of heaven and earth and to his son Jesus Christ ... ”\textsuperscript{171}. Neither Elizabeth of Britain nor Philip of Spain showed any interest in embracing Dee’s plan for a single world faith, which encompassed not only Christians but Muslims, and, daringly, “the widely despised Jews”\textsuperscript{172}. The simple fact remained that the Reformation had given birth to a pair of willfully-opposed ecclesial superpowers, and Dee’s altruistic plans for reconciliation pleased no-one.

Nonetheless, Dee was adamant that “a great and conspicuous reformation of the Christian religion would be brought about most speedily”\textsuperscript{173} if his message of unification was applied. Emphasising faith over reason, prophecy over preachment, and individual piety over ritual, the angels instructed Dee to “lay ... religion aside” and “simply and markedly follow the steps of the true Faith”\textsuperscript{174}. This angelic religion was the creed of the world to come; a paradisic, pious, Zionic world that would follow the end of days. The part Dee would play in ushering forth the

\begin{footnotes}
\item Harkness, \textit{Conversations}, p. 5.
\item Revelation 14:2.
\item Harkness, \textit{Conversations}, p. 152.
\item French, \textit{Elizabethan Magus}, p. 124.
\item Dee in Josten, \textit{Unknown Chapter}, p. 233.
\item Dee, \textit{T & FR}, p. 372.
\end{footnotes}
newly-restored world would depend upon his ability to master the ‘celestial speech’ of God as privately and pedantically relayed by the angels upon which he called.

### 2.5 Science, Politics, and Celestial Instruction

“The case ... for Dee’s contemporaries was one in which the scientist abandoned his profession to resort to the supernatural. For Dee, however, that distinction was meaningless, for as he repeatedly said throughout all his life, *all* knowledge served God”\(^{175}\).

A number of scholars have dismissed Dee’s celestial discussions as utter illusory drivel, unreconcilable with the rational facets of his work. But in truth, Dee’s dialogue with the angels was heavily politicised and deeply pertinent to Britain’s imperial identity. The conversations – laden with alchemical symbolism – embody a marriage of Dee’s spiritual and scientific ideals, a nexus intimated by Yates’s description of his style as “a Cabalist alchemy, or an alchemical Cabala”\(^{176}\). But whilst this evaluation cleverly nutshells the esoteric activities of Dee’s later years, it is symptomatic of a larger methodological problem: stylistic assessments of Dee habitually focus so intently on his relationship with the Occult that his more civic interests are erased from the picture. “Believing to be of ancient British descent”, Yates explains, “[Dee] identified completely with the British imperial myth around Elizabeth I and did all in his power to support it”\(^{177}\). Laying monarchical claim to shores and islands conquered by former Kings, and with a dream to induct Britain as the “mistress of a Northern empire”\(^{178}\), Dee urged the establishment of a Pety Navy Royall – “three score tall ships or more”\(^{179}\) – to safeguard the realm. Too, Dee deeply resented the fissure that ruptured Protestantism from Catholicism, and zealously sought “a counsel or remedy that might bring about a reformation in the whole Church”\(^{180}\).

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\(^{175}\) Trattner, *God and Expansion*, pp. 32-33.

\(^{176}\) Yates, *Occult Philosophy*, p. 83.

\(^{177}\) Ibid., p. 85.

\(^{178}\) Trattner, *God and Expansion*, p. 25.

\(^{179}\) Dee, as cited in loc. cit.

\(^{180}\) Dee, as cited in Josten, *Unknown Chapter*, p. 233.
Williams foreshadows Dee’s ambitions for English Imperial expansion and Church reunification as quasi-mystical, quasi-scientific, and quasi-religious, ruled by the “British-Protestant fraternity of chivalry...[and] the Hermetic, Platonic and Cabalistic tradition”\(^\text{181}\).

Likewise, Yates explains that “Dee was not only an enthusiast for scientific and mathematical studies ... He wished to use such studies for the advantage of his countrymen and for the expansion of Elizabethan England”\(^\text{182}\). Sherman warns, however, that Williams’s and Yates’s positions (together with that submitted by French) may present Dee’s British imperialistic tendencies with too mystical a colouring and that in fact his political and magical agendas deserve to be *separately* eulogised. Zetterberg’s article “The Mistaking of “the Mathematicks” for Magic in Tudor and Stuart England’ concurs wholly with Sherman’s proposal in suggesting that Dee’s navigational and aeronautical expertise are sometimes misguidedy conceived in mystical terms. The architect of this misconstrual, Zetterberg suggests, was Dee himself, for in “play[ing] upon the general infatuation with seemingly magical effects”\(^\text{183}\) he intentionally varnished his scientific feats with an exaggerated veneer of mysticism. The goal of this apparent fabrication, Zetterberg opines, was to pique societal interest in cartography, aerodynamics, triangulation, navigation, and astronomy – each inextricably tied to Britain’s imperial quest. Quite simply, “Causeless wonders and seemingly magical effects were fascinating and of interest; rarities deprived of their curiosity by scientific explanation were not”\(^\text{184}\).

Certainly, John Dee’s varied and recondite scholastic endeavours invite an intriguing study into the eclecticism of Renaissance philosophy. However, to stage a deliberate desacralisation of his scientific interests (as Sherman suggests is appropriate) is to ignore their very real connectedness to his conversations with the angels. In order to render this connection patent, it is not enough to be aware merely that John Dee conversed with celestial beings, but rather to be acquainted with the particular content of these dialogues. As has been established by Harkness: “Between 1581 and 1586 ... John Dee ... talked with angels”\(^\text{185}\). What demands to qualify this premise is the knowledge that “Instead of choosing between Catholic and Protestant faiths the angels told Dee than an alternative course was open to him: the establishment of a new,

\(^{181}\) as cited in Sherman, *Politics*, p. 149.
\(^{182}\) Yates, *Occult Philosophy*, p. 84.
\(^{183}\) Zetterberg, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
\(^{184}\) *Loc. cit.*
\(^{185}\) Harkness, *Conversations*, p. 1.
angelically revealed universal religion”. It was as a prophet of this universal faith that John Dee “proclaimed his readiness to serve Britain as a Christian Aristotle” and extended his scientific skills for the empire’s betterment.

Dee was not alone in conceiving of progress as religiously-grounded; indeed, to conquer the natural world with marvels of maths or mechanics in the Middle Ages or Renaissance was to ‘meet the maker’ at work in His terrene. Regarding the relationship between science and ‘the ruling Providence’ in the sixteenth century, Strathmann explains:

Writers against atheism, attempting to meet nonbelievers on their own ground without recourse to scriptural authority, appealed to the “Demonstration of God in his works”; and navigators, astronomers, and other natural scientists found a religious justification for their studies in this approach to the knowledge of God.

If even the nonbeliever might perceive God at work in the terrestrial arts, what folly it is to suggest that Dee – the “sincere and pious Christian” – would feign the religious significance of his scientific feats! Imputed with coining the ‘British Empire’ both as a term and as an ideology, Dee was in favour of settling those lands “in the eye of envy of other great conquerers Christian”, and of wringing all manner of available technology to do so.

Long distressed by the vivisection of the Holy Church and energised by the messages of religious optimism that issued from his intercessional meetings, he attacked every challenge of political and geographical advancement with a mind to mend the ecclesial dissidence that ravaged his precious Britain.

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186 Ibid., p. 149.
188 “The love of marvels was also encouraged from another quarter, in the cause not of science but of religion. In the seventeenth century the common apologia for natural philosophy, outlined by Bacon, was, of course, the study of nature as the second book of God, where man could read in the creature the power and wisdom of the creator. In theory the attributes of God could be found among his ordinary works, and the proper reaction of wonder could be had by men of no special learning. But in practice the apologists for science tended to stress the extraordinary works of God, that is to say, the unfamiliar, either in the sense of uncommon, found rarely and in distant corners of the globe, or in the sense of unknown, unrecognized by men without special learning or special apparatus”, W.B. Houghton, ‘The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century, Part II’, Journal of the History of Ideas, 3 (2): April 1942, p. 194.
189 Strathmann, op. cit., 234.
190 Trattner, God and Expansion, pp. 17-18.
192 Dee, as cited in loc. cit.
What answers Dee could not glean from nature he sought directly from the divine. Deeming it his crucial responsibility to be instrumental in the moral regeneration of humanity, he prayed “that at length, God inspiring him, he being fully instructed, might attain to the true Philosophy, the treasure of heavenly wisdom, and the science of pure truth”\textsuperscript{193}. Unfortunately, we have come to study Dee through a much more caliginous glass than his activities ever warranted. The inevitable consequence of this has seen his celestial conferences reckoned enigmatic, problematic, or borne of fraud and charade. In actuality, John Dee’s angel conversations commenced at a particular time and for a particular reason, and “blended into a unique, but comprehensible, attempt to practice natural philosophy at the end of the world”\textsuperscript{194}.

\textsuperscript{193} T. Smith, \textit{op. cit.}, page number unavailable.
\textsuperscript{194} Harkness, \textit{Conversations}, p. 225.
Anyone attempting to marshall together under one philosophical marquee the entire spectrum of John Dee’s work is set for a frustrating exercise, for as the writings of his various biographers indicate, Dee’s undertakings were highly variegated. Not only does his corpus comprise a conglomerate of apparently contradictory ideas, but his interest in each of them veers and vacillates over the course of his lifetime. The mathematics that epitomises his natural philosophy in 1548 has been relegated to a philosophical footnote by 1568, and conversely the Cabalism that dominates his later interests is largely untried before 1570. “Orientating oneself in the complex, multivalenced, and densely populated world of John Dee”, remarks Harkness, “is not easy, and no one moment ... can serve as a guide to the entire body of evidence now at our disposal”195. Given that no single aspect of his work adequately typifies the others, it thus seems wise for the scholar to impose enough distance between Dee and himself for the entire gamut of works to be visible. Lest a spotlight on the trees should leave the forest in shadow, one must “approach the problem of Dee as a question of dynamics and development and not of the static elaboration of a single philosophy”196.

Certainly, there are elements of Christianity and elements of Dee’s esoteric endeavours which seem largely irreconcilable. In fact, whilst Dee emphatically averred that “Whatever is in the universe possesses order, agreement and similar form with something else”197, amongst his own eclectic interests, order and harmony seem difficult to establish. Further, the esoteric creed of cryptography ensures that the Enochian language confounds even the most committed of decoders and shrouds his celestial dealings in a blanket of mystery. But beneath this blanket rests a very simple and unfeigned objective: to restore the crippled world to Adamic innocency and rehabilitate the ruined paths of communion between God and Humanity. In his early scientific endeavours as in his later celestial conferences, Dee’s master prayer is unchanging: “May God grant to us that blessed condition”198.

195 Harkness, Conversations, p. 11.
197 Dee, Propaediumata Aphoristica, p. 125.
198 Dee in Josten, Unknown Chapter, p. 245.
I do not presume to suggest that those who have interpreted Dee within the framework of a scientific revolutionary have without exception neglected his mystical activities entirely. Likewise, literature that approaches Dee from an *esoteric* perspective recognises by-and-large “that he was not only a devotee of the occult but also accomplished in the fields considered more legitimate by modern standards, particularly in mathematics, navigation, and astronomy”\(^{199}\). The problem, however, is that excepting a handful of works, neither type of inquiry has historically pursued a keen enough *collation* of Dee’s scientific and mystical endeavours. The regrettable consequence of this omission is that Dee’s involvement with Britain’s imperial quest has mistakenly been interpreted as an ostentatious stab at fortune and glory, and not as the realisation of a more selfless, ecumenical dream. For instance, despite well-documented evidence to suggest that Dee had little interest in money\(^{200}\) and was more of a recluse than a braggart, Shumaker’s opening chapter in *Renaissance Curiosa* candidly broadcasts that as a favoured subject of the queen Dee “yearned for fame and influence”\(^{201}\). In reality, the services Dee offered to Elizabeth were compelled not by ego but by humble reverence to the Divine, as Clulee states of Dee’s angelically-revealed philosophy that it “enhanced and expanded his conception of his social role”\(^{202}\).

In his *Mathematicall Preface* – constructed decades before his flirtations with Cabalism – Dee palpably insinuated the possibility of celestial communication with his declaration that man “participateth with Spirites, and Angels”\(^{203}\). In fact, as early as “this yeare of 1547”, Dee claims he “began to make observations (very many to the houre and minute) of the heavenly influences and operations actull in this elementall portion of the world”\(^{204}\). The angel conversations of the 1580s, then, can easily be accepted as a consummation of Dee’s enduring religious objective, demonstrated across his multifarious interests as a constancy “of intellectual intent and method, and ... intellectual ambition”\(^{205}\). There can be no ‘hiving off’ from Dee’s wider corpus his involvement with the angels, despite whatever “weirdness of ...

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200 Calder explains “There is no record of Dee’s obtaining any direct profit from any of the enterprises with which he was associated, ... it is to be suspected that in a number of cases ... he emerged a financial loser”, Calder, *op. cit.*, at http://www.johndee.org.
201 Shumaker, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
202 Clulee, *Natural Philosophy*, p. 16.
204 Dee, *Autobiographical Tracts*, p. 5.
205 Clulee, *Natural Philosophy*, p. 15.
proceedings” might be described by his biographers. The conversations are neither an anachronistic nor anomalistic moment along the continuum of Dee’s endeavours, thus a dismissal of their critical relatedness to his overarching modus invites serious biographical blunders.

What must be reoriented is the misapprehension that in 1581 John Dee’s life ‘swerved onto an entirely new path’. For Dee does not swerve nor fall, “[d]oes not lose control, does not rave”207, but rather composedly opens a dialogue with God’s intermediaries in the hope of securing philosophical and political guidance. If any dichotomy exists between Dee’s celestial and sublunary activities, it abides exclusively in the eye of the partisan critic and neither in the motives nor the labours of Dee himself.

206 Shumaker, op. cit., p. 22.
207 Loc. cit.
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