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**Citation for published version:**

Bowd, S 2010, 'John Dee and the Seven in Lancashire: Possession, Exorcism, and Apocalypse in Elizabethan Engand', *Northern History*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 233-46.  
<https://doi.org/10.1179/007817210X12738429860743>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1179/007817210X12738429860743](https://doi.org/10.1179/007817210X12738429860743)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Northern History

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JOHN DEE AND THE SEVEN IN LANCASHIRE:  
POSSESSION, EXORCISM, AND APOCALYPSE IN  
ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND\*

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As I have noted elsewhere the experience of the natural philosopher or ‘magus’ John Dee as warden of Christ’s College of Manchester between 1595 and 1609 was far from happy.<sup>i</sup> This northern posting was by no means Dee’s first choice as he sought to augment his income and pursue his studies; indeed, as Glyn Parry has argued, the wardenship may have been awarded to Dee as a form of punishment.<sup>ii</sup> In a letter of 1597 addressed to a friend at Court Dee presented himself writing from a ‘Mancunian labyrinth’ (‘EX MANCESTRIANO LABYRINTHO’) and trying to negotiate his way through an array of local difficulties: Dee’s collegiate stipend was insufficient to feed his household adequately and he found his usual studies hindered.<sup>iii</sup> Dee was also severely tested by the fellows of the college who were largely ‘Puritan’ and active in their resistance to some elements of Elizabethan religious conformity including the wearing of the surplice and the use of the Book of Common Prayer. As the Mancunian minister Richard Hollinworth commented of Dee and this clerical labyrinth in *c.* 1652-6: ‘hee had the unhappinesse to bee much vexed with the turbulent fellowes of that colledge.’<sup>iv</sup>

Dee’s path through the Mancunian labyrinth was given an extra twist by his involvement in a case of possession, exorcism, and bewitchment in Lancashire at around the time he wrote to his friend at Court. In December 1596, a rather

desperate Nicholas Starkey of Cleworth Hall near Tyldesley in Lancashire, sought the help of Dee. Since February 1595 Starkey's children had regularly fallen into fits and shouting – demonstrating some alarming behaviour which included a violent reaction to prayer, as well as some unusual accomplishments including the ability to speak in Latin. Dee's actions and words on this occasion are worth examining in detail because they give some indication of the difficulties he faced when he strayed once more into hotly disputed confessional territory. A number of cases of possession by demons or bewitchment received widespread attention in late Elizabethan England and these were described in a number of printed accounts. These cases provoked some controversy within the Church of England and leading churchmen sought to control or suppress the activities of Catholic and Protestant exorcists; as a representative of the Church Dee found himself caught up in the acrid politics of possession.

Dee's involvement with the case of the Lancashire Seven, which was greater than hitherto supposed, is also interesting when examined in the light of his contemporaneous protests in print against the accusation that he was dabbling in diabolical matters. These protestations can be related to libels and slanders directed against him dating back many decades but I would argue that Dee's appearance in printed accounts of the Lancashire case also contributed to his decision to issue denials of conjuring or consorting with demons during this period. Finally, Dee's involvement in the Lancashire case should be placed in the context of his long-standing interest in possession and exorcism; an interest which can be linked closely with his spiritual and occult interests more broadly understood. By examining each of these areas new light can be thrown both on Dee's troubled and obscure last years and on the nature of the politics of possession in Elizabethan Lancashire.

*A case of possession*

Our knowledge of Dee's involvement in the Lancastrian possession case is almost entirely based on the printed accounts of John Darrell and his colleague George More who were the ministers acting as exorcists in this case. When in February 1595 the children of Nicholas Starkey fell into fits and shouting Starkey consulted a seminary priest (who, it was reported, could do nothing without his books) and possibly a doctor before turning to the 'witch' Edmund Hartley. At first the children seemed to recover from the effects of possession as Hartley applied 'certain popish charms and herbs'.<sup>v</sup> However, Starkey grew fearful and suspicious as Hartley demanded money and property and used symbols and words to curse his enemies. In December 1596 Starkey took

his sonnes water to a phisition in *Manchester*, who sawe no signe of sicknes. after he went to *Doctor Dee* the warden of *Manchester*, whose helpe he requested, but he utterly refused, sayinge he would not meddle: and advised him that settinge aside all other helpe, he should call for some godlye preachers, with whom he should consult concerning a Publicke or Privat fast. he also procured *Hartlay* to come before him, whom he so sharply reprovved, and straitly examined, that the children had more ease for 3. weekes space after. and this was upon the 8 of December.

The children then went with Hartley to Manchester about New Year's Day 1597 to stay with a relation. Interestingly, on returning home they said they wished to see Dee. Hartley refused their request, but they visited the warden in any case, for which Hartley admonished them.<sup>vi</sup>

Around the end of January 1597 Matthew Palmer, Dee's recently appointed curate, met Hartley in Salford where he had come with Starkey to pray over the possessed Margaret Byrom who was a relative of the Starkey family. Palmer soon detected Hartley as a fraud by his failure to say the Lord's Prayer, and he was examined by two justices of the peace. However, when Byrom was examined she was unable to speak because of intimidation from Hartley. In a similar way, when the justice of the peace Edmund Hopwood came to take the testimony of Starkey's children for the trial of Hartley at the Lancaster assizes he found them initially unable to speak although they eventually 'complayned that *Edmonde* [Hartley] would not suffer them to speake against hym.' Starkey consulted several preachers 'but they knew not well what to say to their affliction'.<sup>vii</sup>

Dee's butler then informed Starkey of his cousin the possessed child Thomas Darling of Burton upon Trent who had recovered through the ministrations of John Darrell in May 1596. Starkey wrote to Darrell to request his services, and he asked Dee to do the same.<sup>viii</sup> Dee agreed to write to Darrell who very reluctantly acceded to the requests for help. In March 1597, soon after Hartley was hanged for conjuring, Darrell succeeded in exorcising the possessed members of the Starkey household.<sup>ix</sup> The JP who took the testimony of the possessed children in the case also consulted Dee about this matter and Dee's personal records reveal that he borrowed demonological works including Johann Weyer's *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1563) on 19 March 1597 (until 15 April),<sup>x</sup> the *Flagellum Daemonum* and *Fustis Daemonum* (1589) by Girolamo Menghi on 15 April until midsummer, and finally the famous *Malleus maleficarum* (1487) by Heinrich Krämer and Jacob Sprenger on 6 August until the New Year.<sup>xi</sup>

The case of the Lancashire Seven conforms to the typical profile of possession and exorcism in Elizabethan England.<sup>xii</sup> As was usual in cases of suspected possession like that of Thomas Darling Nicholas Starkey called in medical experts to ascertain natural or supernatural causes. Elizabethan doctors might argue that hysteria or melancholy were the natural explanations for such unusual behaviour. However, divine displeasure might also lie at the root of the problem since possession could be a punishment inflicted by God upon a sinning individual or community. The symptoms of possession included swellings, insensibility, speaking Latin or foreign languages, bestial behaviour, and violent reaction to prayer. In the Lancashire case the symptoms were diagnosed by a ‘witch’ or cunning man, ministers and clergy including Dee, and even by the justices of the peace who wrote to Darrell requesting his help. A justice of the peace interviewed the victims and studied the phenomenon: for example, the *Malleus maleficarum* provided guidance on fraudulent possessions, while Johann Weyer was inclined to regard possession predominantly as a form of melancholic humour or senile dementia. There was, then, some variety of opinion about the causes of possession and the incidence of fraud. There was also some disagreement about the cure; indeed, the power to exorcise demonic spirits was a point of sharp dispute in sixteenth-century England.<sup>xiii</sup>

Prayer and fasting had been enjoined by Christ (Matt. 17.21) as a means of casting out evil spirits, and it was argued that in this way pious men could influence God, if not actually work miracles themselves. The Protestants, who questioned the frequency of miracles in their own age, were hostile to much of the Catholic ritual and paraphernalia involved in exorcism, but even the quasi-magical powers attributed to Protestant ministers like Darrell and More aroused hostility. The theatricality of communal fasting and prayer as well as exorcism conjured up the old ‘superstitious’

Catholic world – a suspicion probably confirmed when one of the Lancashire Seven subsequently converted and became a cause célèbre of Catholic exorcism.<sup>xiv</sup> However, the Puritans generally promoted communal prayer and fasting led by ministers as an energizing religious experience, and they particularly recommended it as a means of driving out diabolic spirits. Puritan fasting was not tied in an orthodox way to specific days in the liturgical calendar but organised for specific spiritual or physical crises. All of the faithful who took part benefited from prayer and hearing the word of God rather than from abstinence per se and in some ways, as Thomas Freeman has argued, prayer and fasting days may have formed a bridge between the clerical hierarchy and the rest of the people.<sup>xv</sup>

In addition, the power of exorcism was a manifest sign of God's favour and a useful weapon to use against Catholics. As George More commented in his account of the Lancashire case:

[I]n respect of the papists who do more malign this particular of Lancashire than any of the rest, labouring mightily and by many means both to discredit and abolish it, whereupon some of them have given it out, that those seven were not possessed. Others say that they were all seven possessed, but never yet dispossessed. And some others of them affirm that they were all dispossessed, yet not by preachers of the Gospel, but by their seminary and mass priests.<sup>xvi</sup>

By contrast, many members of the Church of England were hostile to such enthusiastic meetings which seemed to challenge established hierarchies and to contain the potential for conspiracy. In fact, John Darrell and his colleague George More were subsequently imprisoned as frauds and attacked in print by the chaplain of

the Bishop of London who in 1604 succeeded in banning all unauthorised exorcisms and forbidding unauthorised fasts – both public and private.

### *Superstitious Lancashire*

During the sixteenth century many of the northern English counties were regarded as ‘dark corners of the land’ where ignorance and Catholicism survived or grew.<sup>xvii</sup> Efforts to impose political control and religious conformity on the North-West of England were impeded by a number of factors including history and geography.<sup>xviii</sup> The county was large, poor, thinly populated, and badly served by roads or other methods of communication, with very few towns of any significance. Political authority was divided, absent, or ineffective. The Council in the North never held any authority over the county because it was a county palatine and a part of the Duchy of Lancaster. In turn, the Duchy administration based in London never provided leadership in religious or political matters and its local officers were primarily concerned with raising revenues from the land. The palatinate organisation was similarly ineffective. In practice the Earl of Derby guided local government with the aid of a handful of county clients.<sup>xix</sup>

The religious life of the county was focused on chapels rather than parish churches which, given the size of parishes, were often distant from the communities they were supposed to serve. These large rural parishes provided lucrative benefices for pluralists who were usually non-resident, and to make matters worse the educational standard of resident clergy was generally considered inferior to that of the rest of the country. Episcopal control over much of the county was also ineffective due to the size and topography of the diocese, conflicting and competing ecclesiastical



jurisdictions, and a series of indolent or conservative bishops of Chester. The cumulative result of all of this was to keep Lancashire fairly isolated from the mainstream of religious change in Reformation England and to maintain traditional patterns of belief which were elsewhere being challenged or overturned. This meant, for example, that there was a high level of charitable bequests to religious causes, and a high number of chantry foundations even in the 1540s.<sup>xx</sup>

Lancashire was notorious for the ‘superstition’ prevalent among its natives: both lay and spiritual. The curate of Harwood was bound in 1571 not to ‘use any predictions, divinations, sorcerings, charmings or enchantments’, while the curate of Kirkby was revealed as ‘a sorcerer, a hawker and a hunter’.<sup>xxi</sup> Christopher Haigh has even detected ‘a minor witch-craze in Lancashire’ in the late 1590s, with concern over witchcraft, strictly speaking, as opposed to charming or blessing, especially common in the south-east of the county – three accusations were made at Rochdale in 1597 and 1598. However, since later accusations were made in more ‘conservative’ areas, especially the deanery of Blackburn, it may be correct to say that belief in witchcraft, charming and sorcery was spread fairly evenly across the region at a popular level.<sup>xxii</sup> On the evidence of the indictments made at the Court of Great Sessions at Chester between 1589 and 1675, James Sharpe has argued that Lancashire ‘was clearly peculiar in its region for the frequency with which witches were prosecuted before its courts’.<sup>xxiii</sup> In other words, the unusual cases of ‘mass’ witch persecution in the county in 1612 and 1634 were only the most sensational (and sensationalised) manifestations of a wider phenomenon.<sup>xxiv</sup>

It is more than likely that the apparent persistence of ‘popish’ superstitions in the region heightened local fears about the spread of witchcraft. Several contemporaries thought that the sudden death of Ferdinando Stanley, the fifth Earl of

Derby, at Knowsley in April 1594 was the result of bewitching or poison administered by Catholics who were infuriated by his failure to cooperate with their plots, especially Richard Hesketh's plan to usurp the throne.<sup>xxv</sup> Religious divisions certainly help to explain some of the outbreaks of witch-hunting or prosecution of malefic activity but religion was by no means the only causal factor in witchcraft accusations and the formation of factions and family feuds also exacerbated the situation.<sup>xxvi</sup> Catholics and Protestants in the region were sometimes tied by marriage and, as in the case of the Stanleys, confessional allegiance could vary across the generations. In this way it seems as if many Catholic gentry were not averse to making accusations of witchcraft themselves, perhaps with the added incentive that it would distance them from the 'excesses' of continental Catholicism.<sup>xxvii</sup> While it may be true that Calvinism offered few 'mechanisms for tolerance', and was active, 'dynamic and intensely reformist' where Catholicism was passive and more permissive, nevertheless the accusations made by Catholics offer a strong indication that the drawing up of the battle lines between good and evil could also be shaped by internal feuds predicated on personal or political motives, as well as religious allegiances.<sup>xxviii</sup> Moreover, many of the criticisms made about popular customs and morality were far from the monopoly of those who have been called 'Puritans.'<sup>xxix</sup>

Protestant attacks on the persistence of Catholic 'superstition' in Lancashire may partly be based on the actual survival of conservative beliefs and practices. However, as Alexandra Walsham has argued, the construction of popular superstition here and elsewhere in England as diabolical and sinful was also polemical in intent as writers sought to promote Protestantism as the purest and most correct form of worship.<sup>xxx</sup> When it came to possession this polemic was complicated by the fact that both Catholics and Protestants accepted its reality and claimed the ability to exorcise.

As Helen Parish and William G. Naphy have noted, it could be difficult to determine whether exorcism was indeed a form of superstition which must be suppressed.<sup>xxxix</sup> Stuart Clark has moreover suggested that possession should not be understood simply as the result of inter-confessional or inter-jurisdictional disputes but also as an important facet of contemporary eschatology, and especially the battle between good and evil which was expected to form the prelude to the Apocalypse and the second advent of Christ.<sup>xxxix</sup> It is in this apocalyptic sense that Dee may have understood the case of the Seven in Lancashire as well as some other cases of possession and exorcism with which it can be shown he was closely involved.

#### *Dee and possession*

Dee may have had a long-standing interest in cases of possession. In March 1565, John Fisher of Chester wrote to a certain ‘Maister J. D.’ enclosing a ‘true discourse’ he had written about the possession of Anne Mylner. Anne had recently been cured by prayer and other holy actions or words ministered by John Lane ‘late fellow’ of Christ’s College, Cambridge and Fisher wrote ‘least the same should be mysreported, or the wicked suffred to wrest them to abuse gods preachers; and for that the thinge is so rare and notable, that it should not be kept from posteritie’.<sup>xxxix</sup> Fisher asked his friend ‘to put the same in printe’ – which he clearly did very rapidly. The helpful recipient of this letter in London may have been Dee and it is interesting to note that in April 1565 he made an astrological casting for a ‘Mr Lane’.<sup>xxxix</sup>

John Fisher described how Anne Mylner, returning to Chester one day, was suddenly ‘taken wyth great feare, and thoughte that she saw a whyte thing compassing her round about’.<sup>xxxix</sup> Anne, who was eighteen years old, immediately

stopped eating and nothing passed her lips for five days except a little bread and cheese. At the same time she developed a swollen belly and began having convulsions every hour or so. Anne's alarming case drew curious persons from all parts of the city including the cathedral canon and 'divers persons of reputacion'.<sup>xxxvi</sup> John Lane heard about Anne's case four months later when he came to preach in a town nearby and encountered some of her neighbours. Lane soon visited the city and in the company of local gentry he went to Anne's bedside and found her with a distorted face and with a belly that was swollen and disturbingly mobile. After Anne had contorted herself like a 'hoope' and Lane had tested her strength by sitting on her legs holding her hands and feet he declared her to be possessed and asked the crowd around her bed to pray. As they fell to prayer Lane secretly recited the fiftieth Psalm (the *Miserere*). Over several hours Anne's belly was compressed by the onlookers and on one occasion Lane put vinegar into her mouth and blew it up her nostrils. The exorcism reached a successful conclusion when Anne sharply rejected Lane's call for more vinegar and the assembled company joined in saying the Lord's Prayer and a *Te Deum*. Anne was immediately dressed and fed and the next day she attended Lane's sermon in St Mary's parish church, Chester. As John Fisher noted in his letter to Dee, this cure was to the 'advancement of God's glory' and in a prefatory verse in honour of Lane the case was said to show how God providentially 'beginnes to stretche his Hand' to an impious England.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Dee certainly had direct personal experience of possession or hysteria before the Lancashire case. In 1590, Ann Frank *alias* Leke, a nurse in the Dee household by the Thames at Mortlake, was 'long tempted by a wicked spirit' and Dee privately noted that she was finally 'possessed of him'. Dee piously declared that God would protect and deliver her from this spirit and on two occasions he anointed her with holy

oil in the name of Jesus. Dee then prepared himself ‘devoutly’ and he prayed ‘for virtue and power and Christ his blessing of the oil to the expulsion of the wicked ... And then coming to be anointed, the wicked one did resist a while’. Dee may have used a specific prayer or exorcism in this case and he seems to have acquired a copy of a prayer for dispossession some time before 1584.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Unfortunately Frank, having tried to drown herself by jumping down a well (Dee jumped in and saved her) cut her own throat and was found by ‘the maiden her keeper’ when she heard ‘her rattle in her own blood’.<sup>xxxix</sup> Two years later Dee was consulted by Winifred Goose who had been ‘evilly tempted’ after the death of her son, but whatever remedy Dee tried or suggested she eventually succumbed to ‘her old melancholic pangs’ and killed herself.<sup>xl</sup> Finally, it was ‘the common report’ in London in 1602 (at precisely the moment when the case of the possessed Mary Glover held the capital’s attention) that ‘Dr Dee hath delivered the Lady Sandes of a devill or of some other straunge possession’.<sup>xli</sup>

Dee’s interest in possession should be understood in relation to his broader occult interests and spiritual concerns. Dee spent a lifetime searching for the keys with which he might unlock the secrets of the universe in the past, the present and the future. After 1542, when he went to Cambridge, Dee devoted himself to study and writing, experimentation, prayer and contemplation, and the promotion of his ambitious intellectual and political schemes at various European courts. Dee believed in his capacity to grasp the wonders and secrets of the world and to arrange them in some meaningful and useful way. He concluded that some men could lift their eyes up from the distractions of a busy and corrupted world and perceive some of the order and harmony of a universe that had been breathed into life by God. By comprehending much of this harmony using mathematics, and later in his career the

cabalistic, alchemical, or scriptural keys given to him by the angels, Dee expected to understand the hidden connections between the earth and the heavens and between all natural things. God would reveal to Dee the divine language that he had used to create the universe. Using this immensely powerful language Dee would then help to usher in the Last Days, which the angels told him were due in 1588.<sup>xlii</sup>

These conversations with angels drew on the ‘spiritual magic’ of earlier continental neo-Platonists and also bore a family resemblance to the millenarian, providential or apocalyptic interpretations of world history that were prevalent in sixteenth-century England.<sup>xliii</sup> It is important to recognize that prayer and divine revelation were fundamental to Dee’s understanding of these conversations. Unlike *magi* or magicians such as the infamous Dr Faustus, known to Elizabethan playgoers in Christopher Marlowe’s stage version of 1594, Dee did not use spells to summon up, invoke and bind demons and spirits who would do his bidding. On the contrary the whole ritual of calling up the angels involved prayers, and Dee accepted that these angels would only appear to him if God decided they should do so.

Angels were a good medium of communication between men and God: in the celestial hierarchy they held an intermediate place, and of course they featured prominently bringing messages to men in the Revelation of St John.<sup>xliv</sup> They were even credited with moving the spheres of the heavens. Angels had extraordinary intelligence, and for this reason Dee was fascinated by the information they gave him. At first, Dee merely interpreted the signs of the coming apocalypse that they described. In this way, and in line with eschatological interpretations of scripture comets and supernovas could be understood as symptoms of decline, decay and the end of human history. However, Dee went even further than mere observation and eventually saw himself as a prophet who needed to bring about the conversion of the

Jews, help inaugurate a universal religion, and ensure the gathering of the chosen or elect of the Lost tribes of Israel to be sealed and saved at the Last Judgment. Dee himself rejected the Protestant view that in the present age ‘all revelation by divine communication has ceased’ and he claimed to know the dates for the deaths of Elizabeth I, King Philip II of Spain, and Rudolf II.<sup>xlv</sup>

Dee would therefore have viewed possession as an example of the interaction of spiritual and natural worlds with which he was very familiar, and he might even have regarded the proliferation of cases of possession as signs of the apocalypse. However, as I have already noted, many leading churchmen were sceptical about the activities of exorcists and in particular their use of prayer and fasting. In fact, the exorcists in the Lancashire case were in trouble. In April 1598, the Archbishop of Canterbury imprisoned John Darrell, along with George More, for his part in the exorcism of a Nottingham man who had subsequently confessed to fraud. In May 1599, Darrell and More were convicted of fraud and imprisoned although they were released during the summer and their accounts of the Lancashire and Nottingham cases began to appear by the end of the year.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Dee was therefore sailing against the institutional wind in advising Starkey to ‘crave the helpe and assistance of some godlie preachers, with whom he should ioyne in *prayer and fasting* for the helpe of his children’. Moreover, by the end of 1599 his involvement in the case was being publicised in the pamphlet war which had broken out. Therefore, it may be no coincidence that it was in January or February 1599, after the arrest of Darrell and More, that Dee published in London a book (in fact, a reprint of his 1594/5 letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury with some later marginal additions) in which he sought to demonstrate that he was a devout, zealous, and faithful Christian philosopher and not a necromancer.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Dee's position was also precarious locally and he was under attack from the Bishop of Chester, Richard Vaughan, for his clerical failings as warden of Christ's College in Manchester. Dee noted on 11 September 1600 that: 'Commissioners from the Bishop of Chester authorised by the Bishop of Chester did call me before them in the church about 3 of the clock after noon, and did deliver to me certain petitions put up by the Fellows against me to answer – before the 18 of this month. I answered them all *ex tempore*, and yet they gave me leave to write at leisure'.<sup>xlviii</sup> He was reported by the Chester visitation court as 'noe preacher' in October 1601 and again in November 1604.<sup>xlix</sup>

Dee reissued his defensive letter in 1603/4 with the addition of a petition addressed to the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup> This verse petition dated 8 June 1604 is connected with the passing of an act in that year which made the conjuring of spirits a capital offence.<sup>li</sup> Dee describes himself as 'Servant and Mathematician to his most royall Maiestie', and he complains of 'this Sclaunder great, / (Of *Coniurer*)' which has done the rounds for half a century. He therefore requests an 'Act generall against Sclaunder, and a speciall penal Order for *John Dee* his case'.<sup>lii</sup> On 5 June he apparently offered another petition to the new King at Greenwich calling for a trial which would clear him of the accusations made for many years past 'by report, and Print' that he is, or has been 'a *Coniurer*, or *Caller*, or *Invocator* of divels'. Dee said that he was alleged to be the conjurer 'belonging to' Elizabeth's Privy Council in print on 7 January 1592 by 'some impudent and malicious forraine enemie, or English traytor to the flourishing State and Honor of this Kingdome' who was as yet unpunished.<sup>liii</sup> Dee asks to be tried 'in the premisses', and describes himself as one

Who 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 iust meanes, the said name of *Coniurer*, or *Caller*, or *Invoker* of Divels, or damned Spirites, can be proved, to have beene, or to be, duely or iustly reported of him, or attributed unto him: Yea, (good, and gracious King) If any one, of all the great number, of the very strange and frivolous fables, or histories reported and told of him (as to have beene of his doing) were True: as they have beene told, or reasonably caused any wondring among, or to, the many headed Multitude, or to any other, whosoever els.<sup>liv</sup>

As these works show during the final decade of his life Dee was clearly concerned with his reputation for dealing with spirits, and he was probably keen to clear his name and regain favour at Court in order to address the troubles which plagued him in Manchester. His involvement in the Lancashire case was greater than has traditionally been supposed and while it might have helped him to win favour with local Puritans it would certainly have aroused the suspicions of the Church hierarchy – notably the Archbishop of Canterbury and others who prosecuted John Darrell and George More and moved in 1604 to ban public and private fasts and unauthorised exorcisms.

Dee's involvement with exorcism suggests how fluid religious identities could be in Elizabethan England, especially in an area distant from, or lacking effective authority like Lancashire. Dee was outwardly an agent of conformity in the North but also instrumental in exorcism, as well as a private practitioner of alchemy and 'cunning man' consulted to recover stolen property and identify a thief.<sup>lv</sup> His perceived failings were the subject of rebuke from episcopal commissioners and the diocesan visitation court, but it was his involvement with the Lancashire Seven which both reflected the interests closest to his heart and represented a threat to his reputation and position. In the end Dee's name was not cleared before his death in

1609 and his reputation as a conjurer was was firmly entrenched in posthumous publications and popular culture.<sup>lvi</sup>

### *Coda*

As a coda or postscript to this article I would like to mention a note that lies among Dee manuscripts in Oxford. At 5am on 11 November 1597 Dee recorded a dream in which a man of advanced years came to him and Dee greeted him with the words: ‘Sir, you are hartly welcome to these parties as I may say’. The man answered: ‘In what state are we now? &c.’. Then, in Latin, Dee records that the man drew Dee towards him and kissed him on the mouth breathing into Dee’s mouth a hot ‘breath of life’ (‘spiraculum vitae’).<sup>lvii</sup> This dream was recorded among Dee’s alchemical notes and it seems to have arisen out of his alchemical investigations which he was undertaking in the difficult conditions of Manchester where there was little space for his equipment and he faced hostility from the college fellows.<sup>lviii</sup> The kiss is reminiscent of the ‘chemical wedding’ crucial to the creation of the fabled philosopher’s stone by which spirit and body, hot and cold qualities, were united and purified as the practitioner acquired wisdom.<sup>lix</sup> However, it may also be significant that Dee wrote this dream down some months after the conclusion of the Lancashire possession case and it may be possible to detect some recollection of Hartley (note the unconscious pun) who had transferred the evil spirits into the bodies of the possessed by kissing them and breathing into their mouths in a variation on the ‘kiss of shame’ by which witches made contact with the Devil’s anus and formed a symbolic devil-brotherhood<sup>lx</sup> Did Dee too fear that he was possessed? His fortunes certainly seemed to be in terminal decline and the angel Raphael told Dee in July 1607 that the King

and his leading counsellor Robert Cecil, the Earl of Salisbury, were against him and: *‘That he and his Devils do seek thy overthrow in all good things, and doth and shall, so far forth as God will suffer them, seek all malice and hindrance in all good causes to be done to thy good’*.<sup>lxi</sup> In this way, Dee may have been the victim of the politics of possession – if not of demonic possession itself – at the very end of his life.

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\* The Manchester European Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University generously supported the cost of research trips to London, Oxford and Cambridge. I am very grateful for the guidance I have received from Glyn Parry, Alex Walsham and Tom Webster. I am also grateful to Jenny Rampling for the invitation to present an earlier version of my arguments at ‘John Dee: a quartercentenary conference’, held at St John’s College, Cambridge, 21-22 September 2009. The School of History, Classics, and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh generously supported my participation at that event.

<sup>i</sup> Stephen Bowd, ‘In the Labyrinth: John Dee and Reformation Manchester’, in *Early Modern Manchester*, a special edition of the *Manchester Region History Review*, ed. Craig Horner, XIX (2008): 17-43.

<sup>ii</sup> Oral communication, ‘John Dee: a quartercentenary conference’, St John’s College, Cambridge, 21 September 2009. See also Glyn Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England: John Dee and Magic at the Courts of Renaissance Europe* (New Haven, forthcoming in 2010).

<sup>iii</sup> British Library, Harley, MS 249, fols. 104v, 105r, Dee to Sir Edward Dyer, Manchester, 8 Sept. 1597.

<sup>iv</sup> See ‘Mancuniensis or An history of the towne of Manchester & w[ha]t is most memorable’, Manchester, Chetham’s Library, Manchester, Mun. A. 6. 51, fols. 21r-22r. This has been published (omitting some explanatory notes in various hands on the verso of some folios) as *Mancuniensis; or, an history of the town of Manchester, and what is most memorable concerning it* (Manchester, 1839), pp. 96, 98-100.

<sup>v</sup> *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England: Contemporary Texts and their Cultural Contexts*, ed. Philip C. Almond (Cambridge, 2004), ch. 5.

<sup>vi</sup> John Darrell, *A True Narration of the Strange and Grevous Vexation by the Devil, of 7. persons in Lancashire, and William Somers of Nottingham* (n. p., 1600), p. 2. Also note: Dee ‘procured also the saide Hartley the Witch to come before him, whom he so sharplie reprooved, that the children had better rest for some 3 weekes after.’ George More, *A True Discourse concerning the certaine possession and dispossession of 7 persons in one familie in Lancashire which also may serve as part of an answer to a fayned and false discoverie which speaketh very much evill, aswell of this, as of the rest of those great and mightie workes of God which be of the like excellent nature* ([Middelburg],

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1600), p. 15. See also D. P. Walker, *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries* (1981), pp. 57-59.

<sup>vii</sup> Darrell, *True Narration*, pp. 4, 6-7.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.* It is possible that Darrell's declared reluctance to get involved was simply an attempt to deflect suspicions that he was keen to exploit the affair. With reference to another case he explains that he did not wish 'the common people to be readie to attribute unto me some speciall and I know not what rare gifte of castinge out divells ... wheras myselfe being absent, there was great hope they would turne both theyre eyes to the Lorde and his ordinance, which is all in all.' John Darrell, *An Apologie, or defence of the possession of William Sommers, a young man of the towne of Nottingham* (Amsterdam?, 1599?), fol. 1r. Similarly, see *Triall of Maist. Dorrell, or A Collection of Defences against Allegations not yet suffered to receive convenient answere* (1599), p. 13. However, Darrell may also have been wary of too close an association with Dee. In another publication he simply describes how Starkey 'sent unto mee first one messenger, after that another with letters from Gentlemen in that countrie, whereoff the one iff not both were iustices off peace: to request my paynes in the behalfe off the 7. aforesayd distressed persons.' John Darrell, *An Apologie, or defence of the possession of William Somers, a yong man of the towne of Nottingham. Wherein this worke of God is cleared from the evil name of counterfaytinge: and thereupon also it is shewed that in these dayes men may be possessed with Devils, and that being so, by prayer and fasting the unclean spirit may be cast out* (n. p., 1599?), fol. 18r. In yet another place he states explicitly: 'I went not upon *M. Dee* his letter' and continues: 'Theruppon he procured other letters, wherof one was from a Iustice of peace therby, and sent the second time unto me. Then I cravage first the advice of many of my brethren in the ministry, met together at an exercise: yealded to *M. Starchyes* request, & about 3. Wekes after went thither.' John Darrell, *A Detection of that Sinful Shamful Lying and Ridiculous Discours, of Samuel Harshnet, entitled, A Discoverie of the Fraudulent Practises of John Darrell* (1600), p. 26. I am grateful to Tom Webster for drawing these passages to my attention and for discussing their significance with me.

<sup>x</sup> Darrell records Hopwood's visit to Cleworth Hall immediately after he writes of the odd behaviour of the children there on 19 Mar. 1597: *True Narration*, p. 4.

<sup>xi</sup> *The Diaries of John Dee*, ed. Edward Fenton (Charlbury, 1998) (hereafter cited as *Dee, Diaries*), pp. 281, 283. The copies lent by Dee are identifiable as Oporinus's 1562 edition of Weyer owned by Dee;

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Girolamo Menghi, *Flagellum daemonum* (probably Bologna 1584 or 1586); and H. Krämer and J. Sprenger, *Malleus maleficarum* (bound with five other demonic or spiritual tracts): *John Dee's Library Catalogue*, ed. Julian Roberts and Andrew G. Watson (1990), nos. D14, 1551 (with 1552-6).

<sup>xii</sup> Almond, *Demonic Possession*; Thomas Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance, and Defiance: John Darrell and the Politics of Exorcism in Late Elizabethan England', in *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560-1660*, ed. Peter Lake and Michael C. Questier (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 34-63.

<sup>xiii</sup> James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (1996), ch. 8.

<sup>xiv</sup> Alexandra Walsham, 'Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain: The Origins of Folklore', in *The Religion of Fools?: Superstition Past and Present*, ed. S. A. Smith and Alan Knight (Oxford, 2008), pp. 178-206; *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe*, ed. Helen Parish and William G. Naphy (Manchester, 2002).

<sup>xv</sup> Freeman, in Lake and Questier, *Conformity and Orthodoxy*.

<sup>xvi</sup> Almond, *Demonic Possession*, p. 198.

<sup>xvii</sup> J. E. C. Hill, 'Puritans and "The Dark Corners of the Land"', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., (1963), 77-102.

<sup>xviii</sup> Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), pt. 1.

<sup>xix</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-05.

<sup>xx</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-75.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 321-23. R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester, 1972), pp. 3-4, cites other contemporary cases drawn from diocesan visitation records.

<sup>xxiii</sup> James Sharpe, 'Introduction: The Lancashire Witches in Historical Context', in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. Robert Poole (Manchester, 2002), p. 10.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 321.

<sup>xxv</sup> A waxen image was discovered and Sir Edward Fitton was called in as justice of the peace to examine witnesses: 'A brief declaration touching the strange sickness and death o[f] most honorable Ferdinando late Earle of Derby' in BL, Harl., MS 247, fols. 204r-05v. A verbatim account is given by John Stow, *The Annales of England* (1600), pp. 1275-77.

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<sup>xxvi</sup> Jonathan Lumby, ““Those to whom evil is done””: Family Dynamics in the Pendle Witch Trials’, in Poole, *Lancashire Witches*, ch. 4, explores such ties and feuds and their contribution to the 1612 case in some detail. See also idem, *The Lancashire Witch Craze: Jennet Preston and the Lancashire Witches, 1612* (2nd edn, Lancaster, 1999), esp. chs 21-22. Brian Levack has concluded that in early modern Europe accusations of witchcraft tended to be made between co-religionists rather than by Catholics against Protestants or vice versa: *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (2nd edn, 1995), pp. 116-117.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Stephen Pumfrey, ‘Potts, Plots and Politics: James I’s *Daemonologie* and *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches*’, in Poole, *Lancashire Witches*, ch. 2; and Richard Wilson, ‘The pilot’s thumb: *Macbeth* and the Jesuits’, in *ibid.*, ch. 8.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Michael Mullett, ‘The Reformation in the Parish of Whalley’, in *ibid.*, ch. 6, esp. pp. 98, 102.

<sup>xxix</sup> For some warnings about the use of the terms ‘puritan’ and ‘puritanism’ in relation to popular culture see *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, ed. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (Basingstoke, 1996), Intro.

<sup>xxx</sup> Walsham, in Smith and Knight, *Religion of Fools?*, esp. p. 182.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Helen Parish and William G. Naphy, ‘Introduction’, in Parish and Naphy, *Religion and Superstition*, esp. p. 4.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), chs. 26-27, esp. pp. 392, 403, 412.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> John Fisher, *The Copye of a Letter Describing the wonderful worke of God, in delivering a Mayden within the City of Chester, from an horrible kinde of torment and sicknes, 16. of February 1564.* (John Awdely, 23 Mar. 1564 [1565]), sig. Aiiir-v. There is a transcription of the pamphlet made in c.1593 with the title: *The Copenye of a letter Discribinge the Wonderfull worke of god in deliveringe a mayden within the Cittie of Chest’r from a horrible kynde of torment and sicknes the 10 [sic] of februarye 1564* bound with a number of transcriptions of pamphlets made around the same time in Cambridge University Library, MS Ee.2.12, no. 22, fols. 66r-67v (pencil foliation). This version was printed in the *Chester Courant*, 25 May 1881, 3, col. 1; and 1 Jun. 1881, 3, col. 1. The newspaper item, and the connection with Dee were both noted in *The Palatine Notebook*, II (Jun. 1882), 131-32. Finally, see *The Cheshire Wheatsheaf, being local gleanings, historical & antiquarian, from many scattered fields*

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... reprinted after revision and correction from the Chester "Courant", old series, II (1883), 296-97, 299-300, 317-18, 327-28.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Bodl, MS Ashmole 337, fol. 36v (24 Apr. 1565).

<sup>xxxv</sup> Fisher, *Copy of a Letter*, sig. Aiiiiv.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Ibid., sig. Aiiiir.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Ibid., sigs. Aiiiir-Biv, Aiiir.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> The Catholic exorcism and some notes in Dee's hand are attached to his copy of Gualterus Henricus Ruffinus, *In Caii Plinii Secundi Naturalis historiae ... I & ii cap: libri XXX Commentaries* (Würzburg, 1548), which Dee acquired in Antwerp in 1562. The work had passed into the hands of Nicholas Saunders by 1584, and is now held in the Royal College of Physicians, London, pressmark D133/6, 19c.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Dee, *Diaries*, 22, 24, 25, 26, 30 Jul., 24, 29 Aug. 1590. Note also the 'fiend' and 'spiritual creature' mentioned at *ibid.*, 3 Nov. 1577; 9 Oct. 1581; 6 Mar. 1582.

<sup>xl</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 Apr. 1592; 21 Jan. 1593.

<sup>xli</sup> John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, London, 4 Nov. 1602: *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. and intro., Norman Egbert McClure, 2 vols (Philadelphia, 1939), I, 170. Lady Mary Sandys (née Hayward) had a relapse in 1615, and the death of 'mad Lady Sandes' was duly noted in 1621: *ibid.*, 579; II, 361. On the possession of Mary Glover see Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, pp. 191, 195, 196, 197, 198, 203, 204, 206, 208, 216, 223.

<sup>xlii</sup> William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst, 1995); Nicholas H. Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (1988); and Deborah E. Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>xliii</sup> In general, see Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999). The North-West was certainly not immune to millenarian currents: in 1581 the Privy Council ordered the Bishop of Chester to deal with recusants in his diocese, including the visionary Elizabeth Orton of Flint. See *ibid.*, p. 210; and S. Hibbert, 'History of the Collegiate Church of Manchester', in *History of the Foundations in Manchester of Christ's College, Chetham's Hospital, and the Free Grammar School*, 3 vols (Manchester, 1830), I, 105.

<sup>xliv</sup> *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge, 2006).



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<sup>xlv</sup> Dee quoted in C. H. Josten, 'An Unknown Chapter in the Life of John Dee', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXVIII (1965), 227.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Thomas S. Freeman, 'Darrell, John (b. c.1562, d. in or after 1607)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7168>, accessed 20 Nov 2009].

<sup>xlvii</sup> John Dee, *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 Philosophicall studies and exercises, of a certaine studious Gentleman: An ancient Servaunt to her most excellent Maiesty Royall* (1599). A woodcut depicts Dee's enemies as a wolf (Envy) and a many-headed monster (Slander) while Dee prays to God, whose hand is seen brandishing a sword over them. Dee's pamphlet is mentioned in a letter from John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton dated at London, 1 Mar. 1599. Chamberlain enclosed a copy for Carleton to read remarking contemptuously that the letter 'of Dr. Dee is a ridiculous bable of an old imposturinge jugler.' *Letters of John Chamberlain*, I, 70.

<sup>xlviii</sup> I have found no record of this in the presentments listed in the diocese of Chester visitation court correction books for 1600-02: C[heshire] C[ounty] R[ecord] O[ffice], Chester, EDV 1/12b, fols. 6r-30v (ex officio), fols. 103r-118v (Manchester parish).

<sup>xlix</sup> CCRO, Visitation Correction Book, EDV 1/12b, fol. 110r; EDV 1/13, fol. 64r.

<sup>1</sup> John Dee, *A Letter, Nine yeeres since, written and first published: Containing a most briefe Discourse Apologetical, with a plaine demonstration, and fervent Protestation, for the lawfull, sincere, and very Christian course, of the Philosophicall studies and exercises, of a certaine studious Gentleman: a faithfull Servant to our late Sovereigne Lady, Queene Elizabeth, for all the time of her Raigne: and (Anno 1603. Aug. 9) sworne Servant to the King his most excellent Maiestie* (1603). The copy in the BL, pressmark C.21.b.25(3) contains minor marginal annotations and corrections in a contemporary hand at sigs. B3v, B4r. William Sherman has noted that the copy of this work in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, contains minor manuscript corrections by Dee: *John Dee*, p. 206 n. 58. I have consulted this copy online at <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>

<sup>li</sup> *Witchcraft and the Act of 1604*, ed. John Newton and Jo Bath (Leiden, 2008).

<sup>lii</sup> John Dee, *To the Honorable Assemblie of the Commons in the present Parliament* (1604?). Dee was called a 'conjuror' to his face in an argument with Richard Meredith, Bishop of Leighlin: Dee, *Diaries*, 22 Feb. 1593.

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<sup>liii</sup> The culprit may have been the Catholic Robert Parsons. See Andreas Philopater [Pseud. Robert Parsons], *Elizabethae, Angliae Reginae Haeresim Calvinianam Propugnantis, Saevissimum in Catholicos sui Regni edictum quod in alios quoque Reipublicae Christianae Principes contumelias continet indignissimas: Promulgatum Londini 29. Novemb. 1591. Cum Responsione ... Per D. Andream Philopatrum* (Augsburg: Apud Ioannem Fabrum, October 1592), sectio I, responsio 43, p. 36. This identification of Parsons with the implied libel was first proposed by Ernest A. Strathmann, ‘John Dee as Raleigh’s “Conjurer”’, *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, X (1946-7), 365-72.

<sup>liv</sup> John Dee, *To the King’s most excellent Majestie* (1604). A copy of this petition was sent to Sir Julius Caesar, the master of requests: BL, Lansdowne MS 161, fol. 179.

<sup>lv</sup> Dee received a collection of alchemical manuscripts from his friend Mary Nevel of Chichester (Dee, *Diaries*, 17 Dec. 1597). Roger Cook, Dee’s old alchemical assistant and scryer then offered to help Dee with his work, and consequently they began to distil in Manchester (*ibid.*, 1 Nov. 1600). The Nevel MS is now in Corpus Christi College Library, Oxford, MS 226, and has been catalogued by Roberts and Watson, *John Dee’s Library*, 180, DM140. Dee’s notes on alchemical matters dating to Dec. 1597-Feb. 1598 are in the Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 485, fols. 176v, 179v. Dee subsequently discussed alchemical matters with the physician and astrologer Richard Napier on 2 Jul. 1604. Napier noted on that date: ‘Doctor dee & I met at dynner at Mr [Richard] Stapers howse ... Doctor dee intreated for Raymund <Lullye> he shewed me a little booke of on[e] hooger [i.e. Ewald de Hoghelande] of transmutation of mettals wrought by a noble Scot relating diverse examples of ye Scot & of his transmutation of mettals’. Bodl, MS Ashmole 1488, fols. 21v [red ink], 224 [Ashmole’s pagination]. On Dee as a ‘cunning man’ see the note by Edward Eccleston (of Eccleston House, Eccleston, Lancashire) about Thomas Webster of Lancashire attached to Dee’s account of the angelic conversations of Jul. 1607. Dee has endorsed it ‘Thomas Webster the thefe’, BL, Cotton MS Appendix XLVI, pt II, fols. 231v, 232r. Microfiche.

<sup>lvi</sup> Most recently, in the novel by Peter Ackroyd, *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993); and the film *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007).

<sup>lvii</sup> ‘Die veneris hora quinta post mediam noctem sc: undecimo die mensis Novembris 1597. Homo provectae aetatis mihi συνχρονδ̄ facie venerandâ, gravis, compositus adeptâ mente vigens philosophus: sic a me salutatur: Sir, you are hartly welcome to these parties as I may say. He answered: In what state are we now? &c. deinde traxit me ad se osculandum os & spiravit in os meum & in guttur

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spiraculum vitae verissime igneum, callidum, acutum, inextinguibile, lucidum, omnia superfervidum, calefaciens non tamen urens. Nota: triplex ignis [followed by a brace] Elementis, urit / caelestis, vivificat / supercaelestis adept: amat.’ In the margin is an equally enigmatic note: ‘You think the tyme long but you may think it short.’ Bodl, MS Bodley 485, fol. 176v.

<sup>lviii</sup> On the practical difficulties Dee may have experienced see Deborah Harkness, ‘Managing an Experimental Household: The Dees of Mortlake and the Practice of Natural Philosophy’, *Isis*, LV (1986), 247-62; Bowd, ‘In the Labyrinth’, 31.

<sup>lix</sup> *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, ed. Lyndy Abraham (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 35-39.

<sup>lx</sup> Jonathan Durrant, ‘The *osculum infame*: Heresy, Secular Culture and the Image of the Witches’ Sabbath’, in *The Kiss in History*, ed. Karen Harvey (Manchester, 2005), pp. 36-59.

<sup>lxi</sup> John Dee, *A True & Faithful Relation of what passed for many yeeres between Dr. John Dee (a mathematician of great fame in Q. Eliz. and King James their reignes) and Some Spirits: tending (had it succeeded) to a general alteration of most states and kingdomes in the world ... with a preface confirming the reality (as to the point of spirits) of this relation: and shewing the severall good uses that a sober Christian may make of all by Meric Casaubon* (1659), pt 2, p. 34. Omitted from Dee, *Diaries*. I have checked this version of Raphael’s outburst against the original manuscript transcription in BL, Cotton MS App. XLVI, pt II, fol. 229r. Microfiche. This folio is reproduced in Harkness, *John Dee’s*, p. 25, Figure 2. Professor Pauline Croft has pointed out that printed and manuscript libels about prominent men such as Sir Robert Cecil were in fairly wide circulation at this time: ‘Libels, Popular Literacy and Public Opinion in Early Modern England’, *Historical Research*, LXVIII (1995), 266-85.