

Aries

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Since *Aries* tries to keep its readership informed about recent and upcoming events relevant to the study of western esoterism, the editors welcome announcements of conferences, exhibitions etc.

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Between Loagaeth¹ and Cosening: Towards an Etiology of John Dee's Spirit Diaries²

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Abstract

Entre Loagaeth et Cosening: Vers une étiologie des Journaux spirites de John Dee

Bien que le contenu de ce qu'on appelle les "journaux spirites" du Dr. John Dee (1527–1608/9) et de son "skryer" Edward Kelly (1555–1597?) ait fait l'objet de maintes interprétations savantes, une théorie étiologique systématique des séances elles-mêmes fait encore défaut. Après une évaluation et une critique des théories étiologiques données jusqu'ici, et spécialement de la "théorie charlatan", cet article entreprend d'établir une méthodologie critique centrée sur des facteurs explicatifs de mise entre parenthèse, puis de construire un modèle explicatif comprenant quatre éléments de base: 1) Les conditions environnementales dans lesquelles les séances se situaient culturellement et matériellement. 2) Les traits comportementaux de Kelly qui dénoteraient la possibilité d'un état psychotique préexistant. 3) Des états modifiés de conscience (EMC) déclenchés par les séances elles-mêmes et venant, en plus, agir sur celles-ci. Et finalement: 4) Le processus épistémologique formateur qui permettait à Kelly de créer les contenus des séances comme une sorte de fabrication de mythe et comme quelque chose qui est à l'opposé de la tromperie délibérée. Cet article, qui s'appuie très largement sur les rapports que Dee tenait des séances, a pour objet de rendre compte, de façon substantielle, de l'étiologie des "conférences angéliques" elles-mêmes.

Keywords

Dee, John; Edward Kelly; Altered States of Consciousness; Enochian; Scrying

In various libraries throughout England there remain hundreds of pages in the same hand, sometimes elegant and clear, others frenetic and scrawling, filled

¹⁾ Loagaeth. A word in "Enochian", one of the antediluvian languages "revealed" through Edward Kelly, meaning "Speech from God".

²⁾ I would like to thank Wouter J. Hanegraaff for his comments and review of this paper as it developed, the Ritman Library in Amsterdam, and Everarde Berendsen for assistance on a matter of contention.

with grids, bizarre alphabets, treasure ciphers, prayers in unknown languages, apocalyptic prophecies, all the records of nearly ten years of conversations between, arguably, the greatest scholar in England at the time, John Dee (1527–1608/9), his “skryer” Edward Kelly (1555–1597?), and an elaborate host of “spiritual creatures” including angels and demons. With an analysis of Dee at the cusp of modernity, we are faced with at least two enduring mysteries: How does a scholar such as Dee, a mathematician interested in navigation, cartography, optics, among other “scientific” pursuits simultaneously engage in thousands of hours of communicating with spirits? In other words, how did Dee navigate what appears to us to be mutually exclusive worldviews? Secondly, how do we account for the content of these sessions? What would be a reasonable etiology for Dee and Kelly’s conversation with spirits?

We should flesh out the above questions in a bit more detail. Dee’s intellectual life has attracted a steady stream of critical inquiry over the 20th and early 21st centuries although only recently have there been attempts to present a totalizing picture of his wide range of intellectual, political, and spiritual habits. The difficulty of this process has been marked by the inability of contemporary discursive categories to capture a man that could engage simultaneously in rigorous mathematical deduction,³ writing, in fact, the preface for the first English edition of Euclid’s *Elements*, but also being in constant contact with the world of angels, spirits, and demons through his “skryer” Edward Kelly. The ability to navigate so many and varied discursive fields without the same cognitive dissonances which so strongly occur to modern scholars, while not uncommon to the Humanist episteme, remains difficult for the modern scholar to comprehend much less to systematically examine.

It seems precisely this “colloquium of angels”,⁴ meticulously recorded in Dee’s diaries stretching over many years, has proven to be the thorniest issue in modern attempts to understand Dee. Only in the past twenty years have monographs emerged which have attempted any systematic incorporation of this vast corpus into a picture of Dee’s *weltanschauung*. Yet, a curious anomaly

³ Of course, we should acknowledge that Dee’s conception of mathematics was deeply infused with Neo-Pythagorean philosophy and thus mystical through and through. Dee claims in the Euclid preface, employing classic Platonic language, that mathematics arouses the *dianoia* aspect of the mind. While Dee was no doubt one of the premier mathematicians of his day we cannot stress enough the deeply philosophic and mystical character that mathematics had in his lifetime.

⁴ This is Dee’s term for the sessions. They are alternately referred to as “Spirit Actions” and by Harkness as “conversations”.

remains. Approaches to these spirit diaries have been strongly polarized. On the one hand, the magical traditions of groups such as the Golden Dawn, OTO, and AA have co-opted the contents of the diaries, often in a less than critical manner, for use in their magical practices accepting the face value account of men communicating with supernatural beings. On the other hand, scholars such as Clucas, Clulee, Håkansson, Harkness, Szőnyi, and Yates among others have all presented academic readings of the content of the spirit diaries focusing on how themes fit into Dee's world and worldview. However, aside from passing remarks, none have put forward any developed etiological theory to what otherwise amounts to Dee and Kelly communicating with spirits. This gap between a supernatural etiology and hermeneutical agnosticism is deeply unsatisfying.

Following an evaluation and criticism of previous etiological theories by scholars, especially what I term the “charlatan theory”, this paper will proceed by first setting up a critical methodology centered on rigorous bracketing of explanatory factors, and employing it to form an explanatory model comprising four basic elements: (1) environmental conditions which culturally and materially situated the sessions; (2) behavioral traits of Kelly which may betray the possibility of a pre-existing psychotic condition; (3) altered states of consciousness (ASCs) triggered by and further informing the sessions themselves and, finally; (4) the formative epistemological process which would allow Kelly to create the contents of the sessions as a kind of myth-making and not willful deception. Drawing extensively from the records kept by Dee, this paper aims to be a substantive account of the etiology of the “angelical conferences” themselves.

I. Methodology and Background

The Method and Contents of the Actions

The sessions which produced the contents of the diaries were primarily the result of a process known as “skrying” or crystal gazing. The central figure of the sessions is the “skryer” or medium who could, because of a developed or born talent, peer into various objects in order to communicate with the supernatural⁵ world. These objects could range from bowls of liquids, crystal

⁵) For Dee and many intellectuals during his time the partition between “natural” and “supernatural” would have not been dichotomous. Rather, the cosmos was a “great chain of being” with interpenetration of the various realms into each other.

balls, reflective surfaces, or even a polished fingernail. Dee began to employ “skryers” before 1581, although the first sessions to have survived in documentation begin on December 22nd 1581, eleven years after the publishing of the Euclid preface. The first recorded skryer was Barnabas Saul who was replaced by “Edward Talbot”, soon after revealed as an alias for Edward Kell(e)y,⁶ on March 10th 1582. The documented sessions with Kelly continued, on and off but semi-regularly,⁷ until May 23rd 1587 after the wife-swapping incident and Kelly’s employment as a court alchemist for Rudolf II. Dee would return to England and new sessions would begin again in 1591 with Bartholomew Hickman acting as skryer and would continue until 1607 although only a small section of these actions survive in documentation.⁸ Since the vast majority of the surviving diaries⁹ feature this middle-period most prominently, our analysis will focus on the person and states of Kelly alone.

While the overall formula of the sessions has been shown to have much in common with previous forms of ritual magic,¹⁰ the character of the sessions was largely of Dee’s making. Dee and Kelly would retreat to rooms of varying degrees of privacy, often in the afternoon, and after a prayer or, sometimes, prompted by a preliminary visions or appearances of a “spiritual creature”, Kelly would adjust the “shewstone”, a small crystal ball still available for viewing in the British Museum, to catch natural light from a window and after some time would begin to see visions therein.¹¹ The phenomenology here is important. Kelly’s “sight” is, as Clucas has pointed in, almost always meant in the most literal sense.¹² While Dee sees the spirits ‘only by faith and imagina-

⁶) The spelling of /Kelly/ and /skryer/ are used throughout this paper although, because of the erratic character of 16th orthography, there is some variation in the spelling of Dee’s texts.

⁷) A notable break occurred in 4 May 1582 to 15 November of the same year. Near the end of the sessions, after Kelly again refused to continue, Dee’s young son Arthur was used as a skryer. Although he initially saw men with crowns, some letters and shapes, Dee was unsatisfied and Kelly eventually returned a few days later. See Casaubon, *Relation*, (henceforth TFR), *4–*9.

⁸) For a more detailed account of Dee and his skryers see Harkness, *Conversations*, 16–26.

⁹) Noteworthy is the fact that Hickman, and not Kelly, was the longest employed skryer although, as pointed out above, very little documentation from this period survives.

¹⁰) See Clucas, ‘Ars Notoria’, for a comprehensive comparison of Dee’s approach with previous thaumaturgical systems.

¹¹) See Harkness, *Conversations*, 26–45 for a comprehensive account.

¹²) For Clucas’ learned analysis of the phenomenology of the *Liber Mysteriorum* see Clucas, ‘Inspectival Knowledge’.

tion' Kelly is able, he reports, to see the spirits in the same sense normally used by the term.¹³ Indeed, Kelly describes his sight as 'with my external eye, not within my imagination'. Later, the angels would reveal special furniture and talismans to be used in the process including intricately engraved wax tablets for the "shewstone" to rest upon during the sessions, special golden lamens, an elaborately engraved table, colored ensigns, among other items. These visions would range in content from entire landscapes, individual "spiritual creatures", fleets of ships, geographic countries, grids full of letters, etc. Dee himself would, with some exceptions, not see or hear anything. While the visions were both amazingly detailed and fabulously diverse, the actual process of their invocation was quite formulaic.

Surviving in Dee's handwriting throughout libraries in England,¹⁴ parts of the diaries were first printed by Meric Casaubon in 1659 as *A True and Faithful Relation of What Passes for Many Years Dr. John Dee ... and Some Spirits* (TFR). No complete, modern edition of the totality of the diaries exists in print as of yet. The diaries themselves are transcriptions of the conversations between Dee, Kelly, and the "spiritual beings" which either speak through Kelly directly or dictate messages for Kelly to repeat. Dee himself kept meticulous notes in his personal diaries, even going so far as to employ special signs to indicate each instance of sexual intercourse with his wife and her menstrual cycles, and he was equally fastidious in the spirit diaries—no doubt, because he was convinced of their importance and veracity.

The range of the narrative content of the diaries is immense, from the location of buried treasure to the apocalypse itself, and it is impossible to provide even a survey of their contents here. In effect, what has survived are nearly ten years of transcribed conversations between two men and, ostensibly, supernatural beings. Without a viable etiology of such a record the scholar must either accept them at face value, suspend more disbelief than required to enjoy even the most imaginative science-fiction novel, operate from a total hermeneutic agnosticism (a philosophically unsatisfying position), or ignore the texts out of stultification.

¹³⁾ TFR, 227. Although we may rightly assume enough overlap in our and Dee's notion of "imagination" for the term to be meaningful, the genealogy of the notion remains captivating.

¹⁴⁾ See Harkness, *Conversations*, 230, for a complete list of relevant MSS. The vast majority of these MSS are now available in high resolution photographs at: <http://www.themagickalreview.org/enochian/mss/>

Three Etiological Theories

The question of what counts for a viable theory is still hotly debated in philosophy of science circles. For our purposes we will operate from a somewhat simplistic definition: a good theory is one that presents the maximum ratio between coherence of variables (non-contradictory) and explanatory completeness (leave as little as possible out) and critically covers previously operating theories (explains what they did as well as explaining previous shortcomings).¹⁵ Neither we, nor can any theorist claim, a perfect balance between these poles—while a strong theory surpasses the bare requirement of being “sufficient” onwards to being maximal in its explanatory power, it is never optimal, the world (and history especially) is simply too messy. This balance of coherence and completeness is our aim for establishing a viable theory but also showing how previous theories were deeply unbalanced. Good theories explain the causes of an event with a good ratio between coherence and completeness and the best theories even allow us predictive power. Thus, we may outline three basic etiological theories for the spirit sessions forwarded by previous scholars. The first is the occult forces / supernatural theory the second and, until recently, most popular is what we will term the charlatan theory, and the third is centered on the likely occurrence of Altered States of Consciousness (ASC). Some outlining of and conversation with these three theories is in order.

The first and simplest theory is simultaneously the most complicated and the least acceptable: that Dee and Kelly contacted a supernatural or otherwise hidden realm teeming with spiritual / psychological activity and recorded the contents of those communications in the diaries. Simply put, an empirical scholar must gloss over this explanation as “possible” in the most liberal sense of the word but immediately find it (1) untestable, (2) philosophically committed to a metaphysical worldview which would also have to be accounted for and finally (3) covered by other, more reliable theories. Similarly, psychoanalytic explanations for the experiences are equally grouped under this heading. While, again, it is possible that Kelly is externalizing sexual frustrations (Freud), archetypical forms from the collective unconscious (Jung), or a

¹⁵) We are only discussing the positive traits of theories. The negative traits of bad theories are equally important. Verifiability and falsification are also important features of theoretical statements. Famously, Karl Popper's critique of Marxism and Psychoanalysis was not only aimed at the coherence or completeness of the theories *per se*, but the inability for analysts to falsify them.

complex identity-formation-mechanism through an encounter with an externalized, more powerful Ego (Lacan), these explanations rely on the assumption of additional philosophic concepts,¹⁶ namely the theory of the unconscious, to operate. As we will see below, in order to remain closer to developing a first-order theory, a more directly materialist explanation is in order.¹⁷

The second possibility is the Kelly-as-charlatan theory. A version of this theory, in addition to the supernatural theory, was the first put forward by Casaubon in his edition of the spirit diaries¹⁸ and has been one of the dominant discourse by scholars until recently.¹⁹ Simply put, this theory states that the diabolical and greedy Kelly systematically mined Dee's extensive library

¹⁶ Which, while not incorrect *prima facie*, remain beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁷ While at first it may seem odd to place supernatural and psychoanalytic (as opposed to, perhaps, clinical psychology) etiologies in the same category, our reasoning here is simple: Both deal with non-falsifiable claims and both are “reductionist” in that they claim a single operative source for a given phenomena. Again, this is not an indictment of such an etiology *per se*, it is simply the natural result of operating from the methodological standards setup in this paper. In other words, we are not declaring them “wrong” we are declaring them beyond our ability to interrogate them.

¹⁸ See TFR, Preface, (unnumbered in text but 13–16) in which Casaubon paints a picture of Dee as deceived by Kelly who is both a fraud and a conjurer. Casaubon concludes that Kelly did see spirits but there were “of the devil”.

¹⁹ The other discourse has been agnosticism or silence as to the etiology of the sessions. Dominant opinions below represent the range: Harkness, *Conversations*, 24, ‘Although we may decide that Dee's relationships with all his skryers—and especially Kelly—were based on chicanery and fraud, he nonetheless needed their assistance if his angels conversations were to succeed’. Håkansson, *Word*, n. 29 blurs the distinction between Dee being ‘merely deceived’ by Kelly and the possibility of Dee's own experience but does not venture a middle theory. French, *John Dee*, 114 again repeats the likelihood of the charlatan argument but finds it ‘very difficult to believe that he saw nothing at all’, positing that Kelly possibly ‘had some form of mental illness’. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 167 is clear, ‘Kelly was a fraud who deluded his pious master ...’. Szőnyi, *John Dee*, 278 has called the sessions the result of an ‘extraordinary and strained psychotic symbiosis’ stating ‘We cannot help feeling that Kelly either must have believed, at least to some extent, in the prophecies he was communicating, or, if he pretended and invented, he successfully deceived himself as well’. He goes on to conclude ‘Dee's naïve logic and Kelly's behavior are equally perplexing, but at the same time understandable’. In what manner “understandable” remains unclear in Szonyi's account. Clulee, *Natural Philosophy*, 205 writes ‘He [Kelly] may well have consciously fabricated everything to deceive Dee, but his bouts of emotional anxiety and arguments with the spirits in the course of his visions, his reluctance to continue except for Dee's desperate pleadings, and his admission of the visions to religious authorities in Prague when that might have had serious consequences all suggest that more than conscious deception was involved’. What “more” Clulee has in mind is never explored.

for occult sources, fed Dee's confirmation bias through his hope to discover "radicall truthe", fabricated the visions, and abandoned him when he got a better position under Rudolf II. Although sometimes disclaimed by the possibility that Kelly was *both* insane²⁰ and diabolical, the charlatan theory remains an easy, although less than critical, explanatory mechanism. This theory is, however, not without its merits, and since it has been the dominant theory for the origins of the sessions until recently, we will deal with it at length below.²¹

The Charlatan Theory

The charlatan theory can be said to have three tracks of orbit:

1. Kelly certainly had a checkered past marked by run-ins with the law. There is evidence that he had at least one of his ears mutilated for fraud, perhaps coin forging, before he met Dee and early during their work he was thought by his brother to be facing arrest for a similar charge.²² Kelly would later be in and out of prison on the continent, for unclear reasons, and may have died attempting an escape. Nevertheless, rumors of Kelly as a felon followed him during his life and certainly afterward.²³
2. Kelly seems to have practically confessed on at least one occasion, Krakow 24th May 1584, to the "spirits" employing Cornelius Agrippa's geographic taxonomy, itself taken from Ptolemy, and were 'cozeners to give us a description of the world, taken out of other books of your [Dee's] own ...' Kelly would go on to declare that he 'would have nothing more to do with them [the spirits]'.²⁴ Dee, in what can be read as an act of amazing naivety, rebuked Kelly in that his 'reason is marvelously confounded by your [Kelly's] willful phantasie ...' pointing out that, of course, some books such as Agrippa's would be correct and align with the angelic dispensations. Incredulous,

²⁰) The possibility of mental illness, a serious issue, will be explored below.

²¹) As we can see in the note above, many recent Dee scholars seem wary of the "charlatan theory" but do not forward a replacement.

²²) TFR, 5–6.

²³) Wilding, *Edward Kelly*, explores the complex web of history, fable, and myth surrounding Kelly in great detail (we will explore some features of this biography in depth below). While the exact nature of Kelly's character cannot be easily ascertained, he seems to have consistently managed to earn the ire and admiration of authority figures and authorities generally during his turbulent and fascinating life.

²⁴) Op. cit., 158–159.

Kelly stormed off back into his study. Other examples can be culled from the diaries, but even this often told incident in support of the Charlatan-theory, is framed by Kelly in a tempestuous state of mind the previous night and being similarly that day. While the incident can certainly be read as patently naïve on Dee's part, why would Kelly go so far out of his way to lose his job? He also never states that the whole business was a farce, an easy way for him to be dismissed, rather that the spirits were less than credulous.²⁵

3. Kelly was handsomely paid, eventually at the sizeable rate of £ 50 a year, by Dee for his talents.²⁶ Kelly, to keep his job, had every reason to keep Dee busy with revelations, mystical languages, apocalyptic visions, and every manner of vagary. Indeed, Kelly quit Dee when he was given titles and lands by Rudolf II leaving what Dee felt was a process of apocalyptic importance unfinished.

The charlatan theory is marked by serious inconsistencies which undermine it as a totalizing explanatory model. While Kelly was in trouble with the law at several points in his life there is no reason to conclude that Kelly did not genuinely have a “talent” for skrying, a socially viable job, and employed it in Dee's service. Even as a forger of coins or title deeds, depending on the story, this does not predicate Kelly as a fabricator of the entire spirit sessions. Although Kelly repeatedly doubted the quality of the spirits and their messages, he never seemed to deny their existence—even going so far as following many of their more extreme diktats. Secondly, Dee was not beyond correcting the spiritual beings and the vision of Dee as man blinded by his religious aspirations is simplistic. Dee himself repeatedly compiles questions to further interrogate the spirits about contradictions or vagaries, linguistic nuances, and more detailed accounts of previous visions.²⁷ Indeed, as has been

²⁵) This often repeated episode is found in Op. cit., 158–159.

²⁶) Op. cit., 28. This amount was arrived upon after Kelly threatened to quit Dee and work elsewhere. For an idea of the relative value, the average day laborer in 1584 London made approximately 16p a day which, if he worked six days a week for fifty-two weeks (i.e. per annum) would make less than half (£ 20.8 per annum) Kelly's salary per annum. See ‘Wages and the Cost of Living in Southern England (London) 1450–1700’, for full paper and spreadsheet for calculations. Some calculations are even higher. For instance, <http://www.measuringworth.com/>, ranges the value at between £ 9,621.66 per annum (2007) using the retail price index and an amazing £ 108,527.12 per annum (2007) using average earnings. While the exact relation to the contemporary £ remains unclear, it was a substantial salary nevertheless.

²⁷) E.g., Op. cit., 25 where Dee writes, ‘Upon perusing and examining, this prayer Gabriel

shown by recent scholarship, Dee certainly believed he was in contact with spirits and felt the need to check their veracity—he was certainly not a passive recipient of the dispensation.

While Kelly was paid for his skrying, he also took dramatic and dangerous advice from the spirits including making expensive travels, rebuking aristocrats, including a dramatic episode with Rudolf himself, (which certainly could have had he and Dee arrested), confessing his activities to priests (again a dangerous business), humiliating himself through confessing to engaging in necromancy and heresy in Dee's presence, repeatedly attempting to quit skrying for Dee, and finally engaging in the wife-swapping incident of May 1587.²⁸ In other words, if we are to subscribe to the charlatan theory we must also explain why Kelly consistently risked his job, freedom, mental health and life in order to continue the action with spirits.

Finally, we are simply faced the quantitative reality of the diaries. Kelly spent hundreds of hours in what must have been extremely stressful conditions simply “making up” elaborate speeches, novel languages, revelations, even the names and personalities of the spiritual creatures betray amazing depth and evolution. Compared with his later alchemical poems, the spirit diaries are so idiosyncratic that even from the position of literary criticism most would find them exceptional both in quality and quantity.²⁹ While the charlatan theory has potential merit, it is far from complete or coherent and it seems that a more complex etiology for the skrying sessions must be had.

The third theory, and the one explored in detail by this paper, is that Kelly entered into altered states of consciousness (ASC) and genuinely had phenomenological experiences, covered by material explanations, which are recorded in the spirit diaries. This theory has been previously forwarded, usually in the form of “Kelly was in a trance”, with no explanation as to what that means empirically or as a *via negativa* in which the author acknowledges the perplexing character of the sessions and problematizes the charlatan theory

revealed unto us, I found certain imperfections, and some doubts, where we thought it good to ask counsel, and require Gabriel's advise'. Or TFR, 80, when Dee corrects the angel Nalvage's confusion between a “square” and a “roote”.

²⁸ Op. cit., 64, 102, 370 for just such examples.

²⁹ Aleister Crowley, who ritually experimented with the “Enochian calls” shares this sentiment when he states in his *Confessions*, 611, ‘To condemn Kelley [sic] as a cheating charlatan—the accepted view—is simply stupid. If he invented Enochian and composed this superb prose, he was at worst a Chatterton with fifty times that poet's ingenuity and five hundred times his poetical genius’.

in part but provides little else in terms of an etiological theory.³⁰ The ASC theory will form the basis for the etiological account of the actions with spirits and will be explained in the following pages but does not, and this is key, rule out the charlatan theory for at least some of the “visions”.

Methodological and Philosophic Considerations

Before defining and discussing the scope of our definition of an ASC, it would be prudent to discuss the problem of cognitive historical analysis and how it is, in part, mitigated by the character of the spirit diaries. Simply put, it is impossible to do a cognitive or neurobiological analysis, much like is being done with Zen monks and Christian nuns, on Edward Kelly or John Dee.³¹ We are faced with a real gulf of time which greatly dampens our ability to achieve the empirical and analytical power we would like. However, although our findings may be dim in comparison to hands-on analysis, it would be uncritical to simply not attempt to forward a novel, more comprehensible theory. What remains for us to study, in lieu of Dee or Kelly’s brainstates, is the narrative itself.

While the problem of narrativity is something to seriously consider when doing such an investigation, many common forms of narrative interference may, luckily, not be at play in the spirit diaries. Uniquely, perhaps, the spirit diaries afford some advantages which other, similar texts or previous studies may not.

1. While psychoactive substances were likely in use at the time of Kelly’s visions, there is no evidence from the diaries that they were employed to generate the visions.³² Such substances can provide the user powerful

³⁰ See the survey note above which enumerates previous scholars’ opinion on the matter for examples.

³¹ As pointed out in the section for further research, a possible indirect verification of our hypothesis would be to neurologically evaluate contemporary ritualists who employ the “Enochian system” for magical purposes. During the preparation of this paper I have heard several anecdotal accounts of contemporary “skyers” using similar techniques to Kelly to “receive visions”. If the cognitive states of Buddhist monks and Carmelite nuns have produced revealing data, I suspect the same will ring true with the study of occultists. The emerging literature surrounding the correlation between neuroscience and mysticism is extensive and highly technical.

³² Giovanni Della Porta provides recipes for hallucinogenic concoctions as early as 1588 in his widely read *Magia Naturalis* which were apparently used for recreation by he and his friends. Della Porta notes a compound which causes recreational hallucinations stating

alterations in phenomenological experience and have been convincingly shown, although woefully understudied, to be at play in the etiological of many similar mystic states and occult practices. In that Kelly's visions do not seem to have been mediated through or affected by such substances, we simply have a less complicated task in developing our etiological theory.³³

2. Aside from Dee's abiding sense that he was witness to a heavenly dispensation, there is little evidence that few ulterior motives shaped the narrative of the diaries. Luckily, the diaries themselves were produced and kept largely secret during Dee's lifetime and were only discovered by accident after his death.³⁴ Dee seems to have had no intention to abstract the narrative of the diaries into capital, via printing or even as the impetus to appeal for better patronage (rather, he seems to have seen himself as a prophet, simply repeating the dire revelations received by the "angels" to worldly authorities), and thus no motivation for changing them to make them either more amazing or less controversial.³⁵ Likewise, there does not seem to be a correlation between the quality, in terms of importance, quantity, or bombast, of Kelly's visions and his salary.
3. Thirdly, the diaries themselves were both produced at the time of the experiences themselves and thus have a "raw" quality to them but also were redacted later in the margins after Dee's critical reflection. While Dee does employ marginal editing after the sessions themselves, the diaries remain largely a faithful copy of Kelly's practice and Dee's experience. Significantly, unmediated by memory but marginally edited, we have a narrative which

'... sed non quae id perpetuo operentur, docebimus, sed quae no jucundo spectaculo per diem demulceri possint et post ludum nulla remanent noxa et incipiemus'. Kelly himself, according to one version of his history, was a trained apothecary. Again, while possible, there is no evidence for such substances being in use during the sessions.

³³ Rogers in 'Angelical Stone' has suggested that Kelly's "red powder" may have been a psilocybin derived psychotropic. While interesting, I find the argument unlikely for several reasons in this case. Firstly, the powder is found after the skrying sessions begin with Dee and the amount required for so many years of producing the sessions does not seem to match with the small amount described by Dee. Secondly, the complex symptomatology displayed by Kelly seems far beyond the range of the attested effects of such a substance.

³⁴ See MS Sloane 3188 for Ashmole's account of the provenance of the Dee MSS.

³⁵ Although Dee did on some occasions show the diaries to a few individuals, there seems to be no indication in the documents themselves that he amended their contents to make them more amenable to his audience. Indeed, the "angels" were often less than acquiescent to those with worldly wealth, power, and prestige.

navigates between the pitfalls of reliance on memory and the dangers of an unreflective raw account. Secondarily, we have nearly ten years of material to evaluate and note for significant changes in the narrative character and reports of Kelly's behavior giving us more data to dialectically shape the complex character of the overall body of narrative.

Again, while the philosophic boundary between narrativity and historiography remains something we should keep constant and critical attention on, we hope that a dialectical position is made possible by both modeling the narrative in such a way as to give us as much analytical power as possible and also by employing a text which, at least in part, is resistant to the most common pitfalls of deconstructability due to narrative interference.

Finally, a word about the philosophic disposition of this analysis should be made clear. While we will employ the language of "Altered States of Consciousness" we do so with two serious caveats:

1. We will limit our analysis to phenomenological experiences of ASCs accounted for in neurobiological literature alone.³⁶ Without reference to the neurological substrate, even if mediated by narrativity, it becomes increasingly difficult to level the subject into a normalized body for analysis. Not only is it impossible empirically to analyze Edward Kelly, Jacob Bohme, or Emmanuel Swedenbourg, it is philosophically impossible to gain access to their, or anyone's interior, subjective states. Thus by anchoring the discussion within the literature of currently understood, or at least iteratively modeled, patterns of phenomenological accounts in tandem with neurobiological states, mechanisms, and triggers, we hope to avoid the greater philosophic "problem of interiority" as much as possible. We will never know what Kelly "really experienced" within the hidden domain of the mind but we can know that "speaking in tongues" does tend to correlate, and is likely has its substrate, in a certain pattern of brainstates. From this correspondence, we hope to employ a useful taxonomy within which to situate the narrative itself.³⁷

³⁶ This may seem unnecessarily conservative and therefore greatly limiting. Our reasoning is that by beginning from such a conservative, neurobiological position we can steer clear of anecdotal evidence, problems of developing a phenomenological apparatus for situating the sessions generally, and, of course, such a paradigm can always be liberalized in future studies. This study, therefore, attempts to serve as an etiological "lower bound".

³⁷ For an excellent overview of the methodological issues surrounding studying mystical and religious states materially see Newberg and Yee, 'Neuroscientific Study'.

2. Secondly, the language of “Altered States of Consciousness” explicitly assumes that there is such a thing as “consciousness” and that it is subject to both normative states that can be subsequently altered. Philosophically, the concept of “consciousness” itself is not universally accepted and has come under serious attack. Thus, not only are we employing the theoretical frame of ASCs with some anxiety due to its cultural associations,³⁸ we are also profoundly skeptical of its theoretical assumptions. Again, this becomes another reason why our discussion will be anchored in the language and finding of neurobiology and not a phenomenological approach to consciousness.

II. Discussion and Problems

An Explanatory Matrix

Based on our analysis above, this paper seeks to present a multi-pronged theory with which to situate the spirit diaries. In our analysis, we will focus on (1) environmental conditions which culturally and materially situated the sessions, (2) behavioral traits of Kelly which may betray the possibility of a pre-existing psychotic condition, (3) ASCs triggered by and further informing the sessions themselves. The above three conditions are simultaneously met in the epistemological framework of Kelly’s experience and integration of both his role as skyrider and the contents of the sessions. While we will discuss this process in depth below, a sustained analysis of Kelly is in order first.

A Salient Profile of Kelly

While biographies of figures associated with “esotericism” are generally difficult, for more or less obvious reasons, Kelly proves to be an extreme example. Numerous biographic sketches have appeared through the years, ranging from recent scholarly attempts to centuries-old fantastic tales of espionage and necromancy. Michael Wilding has produced the first systematic

³⁸ We refer primarily of the association with the counter-culture of the 1960’s and various “psychedelic spiritualities”. These currents should be considered separately, and seriously, but our study, despite the connotations associated with ASCs, is totally removed from these currents.

account which critically presents all known biographic sources. It is from this text that we draw out features about Kelly's life important to this investigation.³⁹

Kelly was born on August 1, 1555 and was christened at St. Swithin's church in Worcester, England. His education is unknown, with one account that he attended Oxford although he left abruptly due to having an "unsettled mind". Kelly did, at some point, learn Latin indicating some formal education in either a university or ecclesiastical setting. He is also claimed to have learned astrology, engaged in the forging of title deeds, and worked as an apothecary⁴⁰ in Worcester. A famous incident documented in a 1631 woodcut retells the story of Kelly entering a Lancashire cemetery with a certain Paul Waring⁴¹ and, after digging up a recently buried body, employs incantations to make it predict the future. As Wilding points out, the story also employs an otherwise, at that time, unknown fact—Kelly also went by the alias of "Edward Talbot". Several sources report that Kelly had at least one ear mutilated on the account of some crime, usually attributed to forgery. Even during the first year of his employ with Dee, Kelly was told by his brother Thomas that he was soon to be arrested 'as a felon for the coyning of money'. Although Kelly was, 'in a marvelous great disquietnesse of minde, fury, and rage ...' he was able to engage in a scrying session that very day and nothing ever came of the charge.⁴²

He entered the Dee household, one buzzing with activity,⁴³ at the age of 26 (Dee himself was 55) under the alias of "Edward Talbot" although by November of the following year Dee begins to refer to his real name.⁴⁴ The famous sessions began on Saturday, March 10, 1582. During Dee's employ, Kelly traveled several times throughout England in search of magical books,

³⁹ The following account is a running paraphrase of Wilding 'Edward Kelly'. For specifics consult the article directly as it is meticulously researched and annotated.

⁴⁰ As we pointed out above, if this account is true, Kelly would have had knowledge and access to psychoactive substances. However, as already noted, aside from alcohol and the potentially noxious alchemic elements which he and Dee were both exposed to, no psychoactive substances seem to have a role to play in the etiology of the skrying sessions.

⁴¹ The woodcut, which appears in Weever's 1631 *Ancient Funeral Monuments*, is often erroneously described as depicting Dee with Kelly. The episode, indeed, would have taken place before their meeting.

⁴² This episode is found in TFR, 5–6.

⁴³ For a fascinating look into the Dee household from a woman's point view see Harkness. 'Experimental Household'.

⁴⁴ Oddly, Dee does not record his feelings or reaction when he learned that "Talbot" was an alias for Kelly. It would seem to arouse suspicion but Dee is silent on the matter.

alchemic powders, and other, unknown reasons. In April of 1582, the angel Michael commands “Talbot” to marry, despite his protests that is ‘which thing to do I have no natural inclination: neither with a safe conscience may I do it, contrary to my vow and profession’.⁴⁵ Wilding is rightly perplexed by the wording of the protests and speculates that Kelly may have taken priestly vows at some point in the past (perhaps also the source of his Latin?). The answer may never be known although Kelly was certainly (and dangerously) friendly with Jesuit confessors on the continent in later years. Despite his protests, it seems he was married, by April 29, 1583 Kelly’s wife is mentioned for the first time although the marriage is less than amicable. Indeed after a “spiritual creature” in Kelly’s right shoulder warned him (Kelly) that if he stayed with Dee he would be hung, if he went to the continent he would be beheaded, and that Dee did not mean to actually pay him. He continues, and tellingly states, ‘and again I cannot abide my wife, I love her not, nay I abhor her’.⁴⁶ Despite an abortive attempt to leave, Kelly returns that night and endeavors another skrying session.

Kelly’s “fiery temper”, in Wilding’s language, is a salient feature for this study. In repeated instances Kelly is described by Dee as having ‘sundry pangs of disquietness’,⁴⁷ ‘marvelous rage’,⁴⁸ ‘raging in words’,⁴⁹ ‘unquiet of mind—blasphemous’.⁵⁰ In at least one instance Kelly, after a night of drinking, threatens to cut off the head of the Polish Lord Laski’s, their host, servant Alexander. After a momentary apology, Kelly finds out that Alexander spoke ill of him, and seeks to attack him with a rapier in the street. It takes Dee and two other men to stop Kelly, now sobered up, from killing the man. Dee was so impressed that he reflected, ‘The rage and fury was so great in words and gestures as might plainly prove that the wicket enemy sought either E.K. own destroying of himself, or of me, or his brother, etc’.⁵¹ In addition, Kelly sought on multiple occasions,

⁴⁵) *Liber Mysteriorum*, 76. MS Sloane 3188 or Dee’s *Liber Mysteriorum*. I have consulted Joseph Peterson, *Mysteriorum Libri Quinti* (1985) in addition to photographic scans of the MSS. My pagination follows the Peterson edition, henceforward abbreviated as LM.

⁴⁶) TFR, 30–31. Hilariously, Kelly, during this session, asks the adolescent female spirit Madimi, to lend him ‘a hundred pounds for a fortnight’. She turns him down stating ‘I have swept all my money out of doors’. With Dee quickly settling the matter thus ‘As for money we shall have that which is necessary when God seeth time’.

⁴⁷) Op. cit., 19.

⁴⁸) Op. cit., 30.

⁴⁹) Op. cit., 182.

⁵⁰) Op. cit., 399.

⁵¹) This episode is found in Op. cit., 229–230.

to cease skrying for Dee citing his doubts about the beneficence of the spirits (although never their existence) and his general dislike for the whole process.

As we mentioned above, Kelly was less than tactful and would often rebuke both spiritual and earthly authorities. While Kelly's impudence with the spirits has often been used as evidence of their orchestration, Kelly was similarly arrogant with Catholic and secular authorities in Prague. Indeed, after being called in for a Papal Nuncio in March of 1586, Kelly rebuked the inquisitors for the poor conduct of Catholic priests and disclosed the existence of the spirit diaries.⁵² By May of that year, Dee, Kelly and their respective families would be expelled from the Empire on the charge of necromancy.

Physically we know little of Kelly. It seems likely that he was at least partially handicapped. He is referred to as a "zoppo" or cripple by the Bishop of Piacenza and in May of 1587 a spirit acknowledges that Kelly has difficultly kneeling.⁵³ By December of 1586 Kelly seems to be performing alchemic operations independent of Dee in the courtly environment and by 1588 is growing increasingly estranged from the spiritual operations. By April of 1587 he refuses to continue the sessions, something he was oft to do, and Dee's young son Author attempts to skry with little success. In May of that year the angels announce the infamous wife-swapping command and it appears to have been consummated beginning on May 22 1587 with Dee noting "pactum factum". Nine months later, Jane Dee gives birth to a son. It is unknown if this child was Kelly's. Saturday May 23, 1587 marks the last documented skrying session with Kelly resulting in the amazingly poetic "Daughter of Fortitude" vision.⁵⁴ Through 1588 Dee and Kelly focus their attention almost totally on alchemic endeavors. Dee leaves the continent, never to see Kelly again, in March of 1589. Kelly will go on to become a fixture in the alchemic world although his ability to skry is never mentioned again and it does not seem that he ever

⁵² In fact, the priests withheld the sacraments from Kelly until he promised to provide them to the authorities. Serendipitously, the spirits ordered most of the records burned with Dee and Kelly complying. Miraculously, the books reappear unharmed, after the appearance of a spectral gardener, some weeks later. This episode, found in Op. cit., 418–419, along with the appearance of one of the crystal balls used during the sessions on Nov 15 1582, remains mysterious.

⁵³ See RJW Evans, *Rudolf II* quoted in Fenton, *Diaries*, 228.

⁵⁴ The sessions, as pointed out by Edward Fenton continue through 1588 with beginning *Heptagoni Mysterium* on January 15th 1588 although it is unclear that Kelly is still involved. Dee notes that 'Mr Ed. K. rode to Crumlaw' on January 14th and his return on January 19th indicates Kelly was not with Dee when he began this project. See Fenton, *Diaries*, 232–241 for these entries.

used this “talent” after his work with Dee. After being in and out of prison, given titles and lands, being petitioned personally by the Queen to return to England, Kelly enters as much into legend as history. Indeed, how he died and when remains mysterious.⁵⁵

Conditions of Emergence

Kelly existed in a cultural setting in which belief in supernatural forces, spiritual entities, and apocalyptic anxieties were a given fact. With the constant encouragement of Dee, Kelly would have had absolutely no reason to think that the contents of his visions were anything less than communication with otherworldly beings. It is not until the 17th century that works such as Causabon's⁵⁶ delimiting of supernatural affectation in his *Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (1655) and the famous *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1691) of Glanvill will begin to express an reactionary, existential anxiety concerning supernatural forces and entities. Furthermore, these visions carried with them apocalyptic importance. Given the cultural and political framework of the time, Kelly likely would have felt culturally, personally, and economically compelled to continue despite his misgivings.

The environmental conditions surrounding the sessions were no doubt extremely stressful.⁵⁷ Dee, Kelly and their sizeable entourage migrated repeatedly because of expulsion on the grounds of being necromancers, threats by the Catholic church, and the difficulties associated with patronage. Dee and Kelly were both summoned to respond to charges of necromancy by a papal nuncio on at least two occasions making clear just how dangerous their project was for them. Indeed, on Wednesday March 27th 1585, less than a week after Dee's wife Jane had petitioned the spirits for more funds, Kelly physically attacks Dee

⁵⁵) Wilding's biography of Kelly continues although much of the later life of Kelly is less consequential for this study.

⁵⁶) Note this is the same Causabon that first published Dee's spirit diaries in order to accomplish a wide range of theological/political (his constant accusation of Dee as an “Anabaptist” seems to only make sense in a political context, see Szonyi, *John Dee*, 270–281 for his exploration of this dimension of the text) and metaphysical agendas (note the full title of the 1655 *Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme, as it is an effect of nature, but is mistaken by many for either divine inspiration, or diabolical possession*).

⁵⁷) There was a temptation to place such conditions under the rubric of “extreme environmental conditions” although those explored below in PASC only refer to temperature and pressure conditions. Connections between psychological stress and its neurological relationship to ASCs has not yet been investigated.

after he [Dee] refuses to provide Kelly a copy of some of the diaries. Why? Kelly wished to show it to a Jesuit confessor for authentication and Dee knows this could result in prison if not death for the both of them. Kelly himself was virtually forced, through economic and personal pressure, to stare for hours into the crystal stone and report what he saw. Even early in the sessions, Kelly confronted Dee about the condition describing his (Dee's) home as a "prison".⁵⁸ Such stressful environmental conditions, which continued for years, no doubt had a serious effect on Kelly's mental health and would have likely exacerbated any pre-existing condition. Perhaps Kelly says this best when, on Wednesday May 23 1584 he declares 'I am contented to see, and to make true report of what they show; but my heart standeth against them'.⁵⁹

Simultaneously, Dee's personal library and alchemic study surely became part of the data set which is no doubt interpolated into the content of the sessions. As pointed out above, Dee's massive library featured numerous "occult" books which Dee and Kelly spent hundreds of hours pouring over. This intellectual diet, including a steady stream of apocalyptic readings in the books of *Edras* (one of Dee's most read texts on the continent), *Apocalypse of John*, the *Corpus Hermeticum*,⁶⁰ Trithemius' *Stenographia*,⁶¹ Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*, and others clearly becomes the pool from which Kelly derives both the language of the visions (clearly of a pseudo-biblical character) and the worldview into which they become interpreted.

Altered States of Consciousness

Consciousness, both in its philosophic nature and clinical investigation, continues to be an intellectual wild west. Lacking a totalizing theory of consciousness, it is no wonder that the domain of the study of aberration therein remains either so specialized that only a neuroscientist can decipher or so

⁵⁸ LM, 201.

⁵⁹ TFR, 153.

⁶⁰ Coincidentally, it would be Isaac Casaubon who in 1614 would go on to prove the late dating of the *Corpus Hermeticum* thus removing it significantly from its position of prominence. His son Meric would be the editor and printer of *True and Faithful Relation*.

⁶¹ Itself a cipher system "hidden" under the guise of using angels to transmit messages over long distances. This text was clearly important to Dee. It was among the first "occult" texts he purchased and he personally delayed his return to England in 1564 from Antwerp, the year he published his obscure *Monas Hieroglyphica*, to copy it.

general as to misrepresent the state of research.⁶² Despite this, the study of altered states of consciousness began largely with Tart's 1969 *Altered States of Consciousness*. Due to the philosophic leanings of this study however, we will rely on the more recent multi-authored 2005 article *Psychobiology of Altered States of Consciousness* (PASC)⁶³ which prioritizes establishing neurological correlates for phenomenological reports of ASCs.

PASC does not forward a new definition of ASCs, rather it relies on the one found in Arnold Ludwig's famous article in the Tart text mentioned above. We quote it in detail:

For the purpose of discussion I shall regard altered state(s) of consciousness [hereafter referred to as ASC(s)] as any mental state(s), induced by various physiological, psychological, or pharmacological maneuvers or agents, which can be recognized subjectively by the individual himself (or by an objective observer of the individual) as representing a sufficient deviation in subjective experience or psychological functioning from certain general norms for that individual during alert, waking consciousness.⁶⁴

PASC, while employing the Ludwig definition as a heuristic, does not employ his taxonomy relying rather on the following:⁶⁵

Origin	Alteration
Spontaneously Occurring	States of drowsiness Daydreaming Hypnagogic states* Sleep and dreaming ⁶⁶ Near-death experiences

⁶² An excellent example of this simplification is the media attention given to the so-called "God Spot" in the temporal lobe. While an intriguing investigation, it seems that the phenomena of "mystic states" are much less localized and complex.

⁶³ Vaital, et al., 'Altered States of Consciousness', 98–127.

⁶⁴ Arnold Ludwig, 'Altered States', 11. The following taxonomic chart is reproduced from PASC, 100.

⁶⁵ PASC, 100.

⁶⁶ Curiously, neither Dee's nor Kelly's dreams feature as relevant in the contents of the diaries. While such states are usually important for other mystics, they are virtually absent here.

Origin	Alteration
Physically and Physiologically Induced	Extreme environmental conditions? (pressure, temperature) Starvation and diet ⁶⁷ Sexual activity and orgasm Respiratory maneuvers ⁶⁸
Psychologically Induced	Sensory deprivation, homogenization, and overload Rhythm-induced trance (drumming and dancing) Relaxation* Meditation* Hypnosis* Biofeedback
Disease Induced	Psychotic disorders* Coma and vegetative state Epilepsy
Pharmacologically Induced	(Not reviewed)

This paper seeks to show, using evidence drawn from the documentation described above, that Kelly likely underwent significant alterations of consciousness, as described by Ludwig and categorized in PASC. In the chart above we have marked; hypnagogic states, relaxation, meditation, and hypnotic states, with a * indicating a likelihood that Kelly experienced such states both during the skrying sessions and outside them which, given his philosophic, domestic, and cultural settings formed a matrix into which the content of the skrying sessions emerged. We also mark extreme environmental conditions with a ? to indicate our hypothesis that the stress levels in the Dee household for Kelly likely had some effect on his neurobiology. In addition, we also mark Psychotic disorders and feel that there is compelling textual evidence that Kelly had a pre-existing condition which was exacerbated by both the skrying sessions themselves but also the stress level associated with his stay with Dee.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Diet, such as fasting, is to my knowledge, never mentioned in the texts under investigation.

⁶⁸ Patterned breathing is also absent. No mention is made of any curious breathing anomalies employed by Kelly.

⁶⁹ Religious rituals may likely be, among myriad other things, the semi-accidental historical

Hypnagogic States

A Hypnagogic state is defined in PASC as 'transient states of decreased wakefulness characterized by short episodes of dreamlike sensory experience'.⁷⁰ In such states subjects often report visual experiences of faces, landscapes, and natural or social scenes and can be perceived as real (hallucinatory).⁷¹ These states occur between states of wakefulness and dreaming, being hypnagogic when passing from wakefulness to sleep and hypnapompic when reverse, and have clear markers in patterns of brain states. 'Subjective experience in hypnagogic states comprises vivid, mostly brief episodes of usually visual (86%) and acoustical (8%) imagery with other sensory modalities occurring less frequently and with an average recall rate of 35%'.⁷² Such states can also occur during wakefulness and can be superimposed over the perceptual environment.

While receiving less attention than the skrying sessions, Kelly reports on several occasions that "spiritual creatures" appeared to him while he was in bed and near times when he had only recently fallen asleep or woken up. Such a state seems to have occurred on Wednesday June 20 1584, when

... this morning (early) to E.K. lying in his bed, and awake, appeared a vision, as followeth: One standing by his bed, who patted him on the head gently, to make him more vigilant. He seamed to be cloathed with feathers, strangely wretched around him all over, &c.⁷³

What follows in this case is a vision of four castles at the corner corners of the world with trumpeters atop each.⁷⁴ Later that day, Kelly 'felt on his head some strange moving' followed by a session with the spirit Ave. Another instance occurred on February 28th 1585 when Kelly 'yet lay in his bed awake' heard Dee's voice call out to him. Moments later, he rose from bed, met Dee then 'he

accumulation of practices which induce ASCs of varying degrees of intensity. The character of the spirit sessions of Dee and Kelly could likewise be described as intensive and prolonged execution of such practices.

⁷⁰ PASC, 101.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. While intensively studying British witchcraft anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann describes just such an ASC (she saw druids floating outside her window in a similar state between dreaming and wakefulness). Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 319.

⁷³ TFR, 168.

⁷⁴ This vision was so important to Kelly that he and Dee would later go on to inscribe its contents on a gold disk which is preserved in the British Museum.

felt something crawling, as one writing on his back, and at length to ascend to his head'. Kelly then 'slumbered by reason of the heaviness of his head; and that he seemed to see me praying, and Michael [the archangel] to stand by me'. What followed was an angelic conference with the angel Michael.⁷⁵ Again, on Wednesday May 8th 1585, after Kelly had, 'became very blasphemous against God to my [Dee's] great grief and terror' the days previously, Kelly calls his brother Thomas to call Dee into his bedroom (Kelly still in bed). When Dee arrived Kelly informs him 'A Spirit appeared to me this morning by me bed-side and bid me be quiet ...' Again, it appears Kelly was planning to leave (suspecting non-payment) and the unnamed spirit instructed him to remain and aid Dee.⁷⁶ These three instances, among others, seem to meet the criteria, associated with the symptomology above. While the vast majority of the sessions or visions did not occur near sleeping, indeed they often occurred in the afternoon to early evening, such a hypnagogic state can be associated with the content of some visions.

Psychologically Induced ASC

Relaxation—Meditation—Hypnosis

The cognitive-behavioral model of relaxation (Smith, Amutio, Anderson, & Aria, 1996) suggests that three elements are basic to all forms of relaxation: (a) focusing, the ability to maintain concentration on and return attention to simple stimuli (acoustic or visual) for an extended period of time; (b) passivity, the ability to refrain from goal-directed and analytic thoughts; and (c) receptivity, the ability to tolerate and accept unusual or paradoxical experiences.⁷⁷

These three conditions seems to exactly correspond to the conditions and praxis of the skrying sessions. Here the salient feature of Dee's program of skrying is the limiting of movement, unlike much renaissance ritual magic which requires elaborate bodily gesturing, such that Kelly's attention could be fixed constantly on the stone. Further:

Almost all relaxation techniques apply various interventions to prevent subjects from falling asleep after they have left the state of full alertness and approach the critical threshold of sleep onset (showing significant EEG signs, such as K-complex and sleep

⁷⁵ Op. cit., 380.

⁷⁶ Op. cit., 399.

⁷⁷ PASC, 107.

spindles). Therefore, trainees gradually learn to circumvent all usual sleep-promoting activities and imageries as soon as they have left the stage of full alertness by initiating the relaxation response. The better they are trained, the longer they can stay within this particular intermediate stage between decreased arousal and falling asleep. This provides the opportunity for making new experiences similar to those described for hypnagogic states. These novel experiences may be subjectively considered as ASC.⁷⁸

The skrying praxis seems also to meet these criteria as well. Kelly would have certainly been kept awake due to his role in dictating and describing the words and actions of the spirits and certainly could have trained himself to maintain a semi-constant Hypnagogic state.

The classic hypnagogic state described in the previous section seems to also be emulated by inducing a curious state of concentrated relaxation. Such a state, it seems, greatly overlaps with the practical conditions for the vast majority of the visions experienced by Kelly. As we pointed out above, after intense periods of praying, Kelly would have stared into a translucent crystal ball for varying periods of time ranging from fifteen minutes to over three hours before visions would begin.⁷⁹ Assuming he was speaking at a regular pace, longer visions, in various languages, would take hours to expound. In effect, Kelly, we argue, entered into hypnagogic-like states, in which he was able to, through years of training, remain alert enough to carry on conversations but generate brain states similar to the ones described above including the likelihood of hallucinations and delusions. Such a state was great facilitated by the environmental and cultural conditions described above and any pre-existing neurological/mental condition described below. Regardless, Kelly seems to have genuinely experienced the phenomenological content of his visions and such an ASC, as part of a complex symptomology, seems to provide the strongest etiology of his visions.

Disease Induced—Psychotic Disorders

In addition to the hypnagogic state described above it also seems likely that Kelly also suffered from several potential mental disorders. Kelly appears to have been an emotionally and psychologically erratic personality. It is difficult

⁷⁸) Op. cit., 108.

⁷⁹) Although sometimes, such as on Saturday May 14th 1584, they appear instantly upon inspection of the stone.

to know from what little evidence survives of Kelly's behavior, but it seems likely that he was mentally unstable, perhaps, suffering from what is now known as bi-polar disorder or border-line personality disorder.

Furthermore, some of the Kelly's visions are prompted by headaches alternatively described as feeling like his head were being, 'as if clawed with hawks claws', or feeling 'on his head some strange moving'.⁸⁰ Perhaps most telling of all, is the feeling reported by Kelly and described by Dee:

There semed one with a sword, suddenly to thrust out of the stone at EK his hed. Where at he started; and said he felt a thing (immediately) creeping within his hed, and in that pang he becam all in a sweat. And he remained much misliking the moving and creeping of the thing in his hed. At the quarter of an howre ende it cam to one place: and ceased somewhat: & and then the Curten was drawn away.⁸¹ Later, on February 18 1584, Kelly states during a conversation between several spirits Now I feel a hussing⁸² thing go from my hed.⁸³

Kelly hears voices external to him (auditory hallucinations) but also internal as well. On Sunday Janurary 12 1584 Dee notes 'After dinner we were talking together of our affairs. A voice in E.K. his hed said, "Jam venit hora"'.⁸⁴ Much later on the continent Kelly describes to Dee a small vision he had previous neglected of a "piece of fire" during the

occasion of a great stir and moving in his brains, very sensible and distinct, as of a creature of humane shape and lineaments going up and down and fro in his brains, and within his skull: sometimes seeming to sit down, sometime to put his head out of his ear.⁸⁵

During the sessions in which the first "Enochian language" is revealed, Kelly is described as feeling, 'his hed as if it were on fire' no less than eight times. In another place he looks down to make sure his legs are not on fire and similarly describes his bowels as 'filled with fire'.⁸⁶ Near the end of the sessions

⁸⁰) LM, 28.

⁸¹) Op. cit., 158.

⁸²) Most dictionaries indicate it is a variant spelling of "hissing". I have also consulted a high resolution photo of the MS upon which TFR relation is derived and the spelling appears there as well.

⁸³) TFR, 67.

⁸⁴) Op. cit., 59.

⁸⁵) Op. cit., 382.

⁸⁶) LM, 147.

Kelly again reports, ‘that his body had in it like a fiery heat, even from his brest down unto all his parts, his privities and thighs’.⁸⁷ These somatic features associated with some visions seem to indicate the possibility of a pre-existing neurological and / or psychiatric condition which may also explain the apparent ease in which Kelly was able to enter into various ASCs. PASC describes a wide range of Disease-Induced ASCs under the rubric of Psychotic Disorders.⁸⁸ While it is impossible to know in our analysis it seems very possible that Kelly suffered from such a condition, or constellation of conditions, making him more susceptible to ASCs generally. Such somatic and downright bizarre perceptions plague Kelly throughout his work with Dee and it seems prudent to attribute them to a pre-existing condition.⁸⁹

Glossolalia and ASC

The two mysterious languages “revealed” by Kelly during the Skrying sessions has garnered much attention through the years, including systematic treatment by linguistics, dictionaries, even use in video games and modification for the use in official Church of Satan rituals.⁹⁰ The first “language” begins to appear on March 26 1583, with a letter-by-letter transmission of small clusters of paragraphs on Good Friday of the same year. Short paragraphs of this language, although rarely translated,⁹¹ are transmitted to Kelly in strange states with Dee noting repeatedly that

⁸⁷⁾ TFR, * 20.

⁸⁸⁾ PASC, 111–112.

⁸⁹⁾ While it is beyond the scope of this paper, a psychiatric evaluation of Kelly would also do much to understand these bizarre feelings and has similarly never been done. If they occur in the literature of other patients then we could clarify the nature of this possible pathology.

⁹⁰⁾ The extent to which the “Enochian” language has entered into popular culture is surprising. Anton LaVey modified versions of the Enochian calls which appear as an appendix in his *Satanic Bible* (mostly employing the Golden Dawn versions and replacing words such as *Iaida*, a word for “the highest”, with *Saitan*). Some musical groups, mostly in the heavy metal genre, have even composed songs in Enochian. The popular progressive rock band Tool named a song “Faaip De Oiad” meaning “Voice from God”. The accessibility of such an obscure language was likely greatly propelled by the publication of the late Australian linguist Donald Laycock, *The Complete Enochian Dictionary*, which remains the standard linguistic analysis of Enochian as well.

⁹¹⁾ A few words are translated however. For example, “Gahoachma” is glossed as “Sum quod sum” and “Laua zuraah” as “Use humilit in prayers to God”. Such an economy between small words and expansive meanings is not without linguistic precedent, such as in

The fire went from EK his eyes to the stone again. Then EK his understanding was gone also', and the next sessions similarly, although with somatic symptoms as well. The fire shot into EK, as before was used: wherat he startled. All was uncovered, as the manner was. But EK had such a whirling and beating inwardly in his hed, that he could not use any judgement to discerne what appeared, for half a quarter of an howre almost'.⁹²

The short, usually less than three syllables per semantic unit, pseudo-linguistic bits have, as Australian linguist Donald Laycock pointed out, all the characteristics of glossolalia or “speaking in tongues”.⁹³

Glossolalia, while most often associated with charismatic Christians, is known to occur in a variety of cultures, religious and non-religious groups, and can emerge without regard to the linguistic knowledge of the speaker. Glossolalia has been observed to be ostensibly asemic, although, it carries great personal importance for the speaker. It sounds language-like with tonal changes and syllabic quantification and can occur in varying states of voluntary or conscious awareness of the speaker.⁹⁴ Curiously, as a skill, it can be taught, learned, and “improved” upon.⁹⁵

While observed and analyzed by psychologists and anthropologists for some time, only recently has glossolalia been studied by neuroscientists. A recent paper by Newburg, et al has found notable modulations in brainstates associated with the phenomena including significantly deceased frontal-lobe activity (where “intentionality” is thought to largely emerge), a shift in activity between singing and glossolalia in the thalamus (an important “gating function” between different parts of the brain), and slightly increased activity in the right amygdala (corresponding to unspecified, although usually profound, shifts in emotional states).⁹⁶ Previous studies have described ‘seizure-like electrical activity in a subject during prolonged glossolalia’.⁹⁷ Kelly’s glossolalic behavior fits broadly within the explanatory matrix described above and could also be considered resultant from a form of ASC.

agglutinative languages, and similarly occurs in other “mystic” languages such as the *lingua ignota* of Hildegard of Bingen, the “inner language” of Friederike Hauffe and the “Martian language” of Catherine Elise Muller a.k.a Helene Smith. A comparison of “occult linguistics” is a fascinating and largely unexplored domain of inquiry.

⁹² LM, 166.

⁹³ Laycock. *Dictionary*, 32–35.

⁹⁴ Spanos and Hewitt, ‘Glossolalia’, 427.

⁹⁵ Spanos, Cross, Lepage, and Coristine, ‘Glossolalia as Learned Behavior’, 21–23.

⁹⁶ Newberg, Wintering, Morgan, Waldman, ‘Measurement’, 67–71.

⁹⁷ Op. cit., 4.

What this section has attempted to show is that Kelly, likely in tandem with a pre-existing psychiatric condition, experienced brainstates currently understood to significantly alter perception, cause both auditory and visual hallucinations, and provide the conditions under which glossolalia could emerge. These brainstates were also, we have argued, systematically, although unconsciously, conditioned through years of skying sessions in which Kelly learned to induce such states with relative ease.

Epistemological Considerations

Thus far we have provided substantial correlation between Kelly's behavior and a range of altered states of consciousness as an etiology for much of the sessions. Here we break slightly with the methodological considerations above to contend with, at least philosophically, a more difficult and captivating aspect of the spirit sessions—the criteria for establishing Kelly as acting deceptively during the sessions. As we have pointed out above, the charlatan theory has an apparent easiness to it we find less than critical or comprehensive. However, there can be no doubt that with at least one substantial section of the spirit sessions, the revealing of the so-called second Enochian language, Kelly is operating from state of intentional, likely pre-meditated agency. We must answer two questions here, one empirical, (1) What about the second language is proof of pre-meditation? and (2) What is the relationship between Kelly's epistemological conditions and his telling of the truth? In other words, does pre-meditation here necessarily imply fraud? Additionally, we wonder what the proper epistemological conditions for fraud are as they apply to these sessions specifically. As we will see, in such extraordinary circumstances we must provide a careful and nuanced answer to these questions.

The second language begins to appear on or around, Tuesday April 10th 1584 and continues until Friday July 13 of the same year and details elaborate "calls" similar to psalms used in the evocation of spiritual beings.⁹⁸ The second language is revealed through Kelly in three methods: seeing, in the stone, a spiritual creature (usually "Nalvage") point to or give coordinates for letters found

⁹⁸ Starting TFR, 78. Although a few preliminary words are revealed through a similar magic square method as early as Tuesday April 10 1584, TFR, 73. There is, however, linguistic consistency with even these early words, such as "Zir" and "Iad" which become "I am" and "God" in the later sessions.

in huge grids with word by word translation;⁹⁹ letter-by-letter reverse order and word-by-word reverse order with translation provided *in toto* the same day;¹⁰⁰ and finally word by word in forward order with translation provided *in toto* some weeks later.¹⁰¹ This increasing ease in dispensation also corresponds to the quantity of the calls given in said forms, i.e. the more difficult grid system produced only two calls, while the forward order provided the vast majority, on Saturday, May 14th 1584.¹⁰² Similarly, translations were given word by word for the first few calls while the results of the laborious May 14th session was not provided until Thursday July 5th of the same year.¹⁰³ This all resulted in a series of nineteen “calls” in varying length for use in the invocation of spiritual entities.

Unlike the first language, the second contains rudiments of grammar, syntax, and a viable lexicon with words in various forms of morphological mutation which are recognizable and semi-consistent throughout the calls. The second language does not seem to follow the syllabic, semantic, and tonal characteristics of glossolalia and must be explained differently. In other words, it is effectively impossible that Kelly could have made up the content of the “calls” as he went.¹⁰⁴ Given that the Enochian words carry meaning, grammatical

⁹⁹ While some, especially occultists such as Aleister Crowley, have contended that the use of such grids would prevent fraud on Kelly's part, the size of these grids probably helps to conceal the semi-random nature by which the letters are generated. On TFR, 79–80, we have Kelly dictating the various coordinates of the letters in which the range can travel over 312004 “ascending” then 42,012 spaces “left angle descending” onwards 602 “descending” spaces from the previous letter. In other words, in a grid of such enormity, it would be easy to generate letters in which no falsifying overlap would occur.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. TFR 83, where the angel dictates ‘SIMAPI—Pronowse it IPAMIS. Make a point at S, the A pronounced short’.

¹⁰¹ This was the manner by which $\frac{2}{3}$ of the calls were received.

¹⁰² Starting TFR, 118.

¹⁰³ Starting TFR, 189.

¹⁰⁴ While Renaissance feats of the *ars memoria* abound, it seems unlikely that in the short period of time that the calls were given that Kelly could have committed such a complex constellation of syntax and vocabulary to memory in order to generate the calls ad hoc during the sessions. On the other hands, many words in the second language, as Laycock has pointed out, obeys the rudiments of morphology which do not seem random. For instance the word “earth” which consistently appears throughout the calls in various forms: caosgi—(of) the earth—7 occurrences; caosga—the earth—1 occurrence; caosgin—than the earth—1 occurrence; caosgo—of the earth—5 occurrences; caosgon—be to the earth—1 occurrence. This ubiquitous word appears to have the root *caosg— which may etymologically derived from the Greek word Χάος. While we cannot deduce a real grammar it would seem that the word itself is undergoing a semi-systematic mutation, something

mutability, syntactical similarity to English, and etymological correspondence to many English, Hebrew, Biblical and Latin words, it seems certain that Kelly “created” the language, memorized the contents of the “calls” beforehand, and recited them, in some stage of completeness, during the sessions. While we must conclude a significant degree of intentionality here, should we simultaneously also conclude willful deception on Kelly’s part?

To establish willful deception it seems that we would need at least two operating theories. The first would have to establish method and motivation while the second would have to answer a deeper epistemological problem (discussed below). We will deal with each in turn. The first would have to describe what motivation Kelly had in creating such an elaborate hoax—we must answer to the principle of sufficient reason bearing in mind the critiques raised against the simple charlatan theory above, in addition it would have to address the methods by which such a hoax could be perpetrated.¹⁰⁵

While fraud seems an easy answer, there are serious questions with which to wrestle. Why would Kelly create such an elaborate hoax? Why not something similar to the previous sessions which seemed to more than sufficiently enthrall Dee? In other words, why not an easier graft than the arduous task of creating a language, composing “calls” in it, memorizing them in various states of disorder, and then reciting them—especially the real difficulty of reciting so many on one day? Additionally, Kelly seems to have taken the spirits quite seriously, as we have shown above, and it is difficult to imagine him flaunting so bold a lie before them. Indeed, the spirits seemed to take a particular interest in forcing Kelly to admit embarrassing and dangerous sins during the sessions. Kelly seems to have had nothing to gain by undergoing such a task and if his fraud were revealed he would have been ruined.

declension-like perhaps with -o acting as a genitive singular although such a rule does not seem to apply to other words where -a seems to have the same function. The fact that the “language” has a propensity for such systematic inconsistency (a notorious trait of English grammar) makes it even more difficult to comprehend Kelly memorizing dozens of rules and their exceptions, vocabulary, and then creating the calls on the fly.

¹⁰⁵ This is more difficult than it first appears to be. While the first few calls could have been put on a “cheat-sheet” the longer May 4th and July 5th session would likely require something too large to conceal in the direct presence of Dee. It seems that memorization is the most viable option although this points back to the question of “Why not something easier?” As far as creating the language itself, it seems that, while no Tolkien, Kelly’s knowledge of Latin, his access to Dee’s library, and a bit of creativity would have been enough to create the core system of grammar and vocabulary.

We would offer a more complex answer, something between “speech from God” and “cosening”. Kelly’s worldview was permeated with the psychological drama of the spiritual sessions, the world of Renaissance Hermetic philosophy, and the lived reality of a world in which natural and supernatural co-existed meaningfully and constantly. For Kelly, the spiritual sessions would have established his position as a sort of prophet (in the literal sense, as one who speaks for supernatural authority) as properly basic¹⁰⁶ for his epistemology. In other words, the content of many of Kelly’s propositional attitudes and behaviors would have been informed most directly by the practice of the angelic conferences and consequently would have diminished the discreteness of partition between the practices of Kelly as a free agent and Kelly as skryer. This diminishing discreteness, we argue, would have greatly blurred the distinction of appreciation between what Kelly himself created and what the spirits revealed through him. The “creation” of the second language would likely not to have seemed to Kelly to be deceptive or disingenuous. Rather, they could have easily been created and simultaneously interpreted (or rationalized, depending on your viewpoint) as being part of a continuum of revelatory dispensation. Such a process could be likened to the stigmatic who certainly must persistently create their physical wounds with some degree of intentional agency yet remains credulous that the wounds are of divine origin. While an affront to strictly rational thinking, the notion that people believe the myths they themselves create should be far from shocking. While the myth Kelly “created” seems prodigiously fantastic to us, Kelly, while he doubted the contents from time to time, never seemed to question the ontological status of the messengers. By 1584 it was no huge step, especially after the first Adamic language was revealed through him, from Kelly to see little difference between his creation or supernatural revelation of the second language. We cannot forget that Kelly not only lived in a world densely populated by “spirits”,¹⁰⁷ he was inhabited by them, spoke with them, they spoke through him both automatically and then finally through, we argue, his very intentionality.

¹⁰⁶ “Properly basic” being a technical phrase borrowed from epistemology meaning the set, more or less variable, of pre-suppositions from which one forms propositional attitudes.

¹⁰⁷ Again, it makes very little difference if we reject the existence of such entities. Dee, Kelly, and virtually the entire world at that time not only accepted their existence but seemed to live in constant, low-level interaction with them. In a substantial sense, they were *actual* whether they were real or not.

Tanya Luhrmann describes a similar process as “interpretive drift” in her analysis of the epistemological transition from modern “rationality” to magical thinking among contemporary Neo-Pagans.¹⁰⁸ In her analysis, the three-fold process of interpretation, experience, and rationalization is not primarily shaped by a core set of beliefs which simply propel action in a linear manner but by slow ‘experimental changes which are not so systematic’ which are, in turn, later always shaping into a worldview through various forms of verbal and nonverbal affirmation.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, even as an academic, she began to experience such an epistemic transformation at work in her own reasoning during the course of her field-work with contemporary British magicians. The situation for Kelly was, perhaps, even easier, so to speak. Luhrmann and modern adherents of occult philosophies inherit the results of a cultural epistemic disjunction in which the “rational” normative modality of thinking inherently rejects supernaturalism. This would require a “drift” significantly more substantial than that of Kelly for whom no such disjunction had occurred. We would argue that the second Enochian language begins to exist somewhere between being created and being discovered by Kelly under a state of increasingly pronounced epistemological inclusivity between the angelic revelation, his own thoughts, and the dizzying array of alterations in his consciousness brought on by the effects of the sessions themselves and / or mental illness.

Here we may define our second and deeper epistemological criteria necessary for establishing willful deception. For the process to be called “fraud” one would have to show how Kelly operated from two epistemological positions—one that appreciated the contents of the sessions positively (in that he had an operating truth criteria which allowed the sessions to directly inform his experience as we have shown above with his angelically inspired marriage, etc) and another negatively (such that he willfully manipulated the contents) in addition to providing some theory for his agenda in doing so. As pointed out above, we argue that such a dichotomy did not exist exactly because Kelly is epistemologically “thrown”, to borrow a term from Heidegger, somewhere between fraudulent creation and passive prophetism, there is a degree of play both in terms of the content of the visions and in their interpretation (not to mention Dee’s input in this dialectic). The content of Kelly’s propositional

¹⁰⁸ Luhrmann develops her theory of “Interpretive Drift” from 307–323 of *Persuasions* although she highlights the process throughout her study (especially in Part II). Perhaps its most fascinating application is when she notices the process at work in her own epistemology.

¹⁰⁹ Op. cit., 318–319.

attitudes existed on a singular continuum between these two dialectical poles. Does this rule out chicanery? Of course not, but we have presented a strong case for Kelly as man overwhelmingly struggling with the revelations rather than manipulating their contents for personal gain. The mistake, then, is to assume that Kelly is operating from a position of singular motivation or shares our epistemological prerogatives.

Interpretive strategies which seek to reject the whole affair as the inventions of a demented trickster are making, at least, the inverse mistake of the occultist who accepts the whole matter as communication with spiritual entities—they are either needless complicating the epistemological question by bifurcating Kelly (liar/prophet) or simplistically reducing the complex happening to singular, linear causation.¹¹⁰ As Luhrmann points out in her study, it is a mistake to assume (1) people operate from either a consistent and/or complete set of core beliefs and that (2) action is solely the result of such beliefs. At work, always already, is a complex dialectic between experimental, perhaps irrational, action, a malleable epistemology which seeks to simultaneously affirm and test the boundaries of propositional attitudes, and experiences which inform and alter (sometimes dramatically) our standards of interpretation and rationalization.¹¹¹ Such a “drift” is always occurring in the sessions but only strikes us when it runs contra to what we currently prioritize in our theory for establishing a criterion for truth, in this case, intentionality. While we often strongly connect free agency, intentionality, and willful deception into a heuristic for dichotomizing enunciations as “true” and “false” this process cannot uncritically accepted as an absolute epistemological law.

Conclusions

The world of Edward Kelly and John Dee is indeed foreign to us in many respects but that cannot serve to justify an epistemological normalization, much less a program of epistemological normativity,¹¹² on our part. The genuine oddness of the angelic conferences do not allow for easy answers and in the same way that they stretched the philosophic and religious horizons of Dee and Kelly to the point of sacrilege and madness in their world, should

¹¹⁰ While recent Dee scholarship has moved away from such a dualism another theory has not yet been forwarded to fill the gap.

¹¹¹ Op. cit., 321–323.

¹¹² That is, if the role we want to play is historian. Philosophers, on the other hand, are compelled to make just such evaluations.

we seek an understanding so comfortable in our own? Indeed such a discomfort should well result from a rejection to cover the content of the sessions with simplistic dismissals, blind credulity, or ignoring the problem as hopelessly muddled.

After detecting a gap in scholarship regarding the etiology of the contents of the spirit diaries, this paper has attempted to forward a systematic explanatory matrix for the contents of the sessions. We have argued that a “perfect storm” of cultural, psychiatric, neurobiological, and epistemic conditions came together in the symbiotic relationship of Dee and Kelly to produce a stunning array of visions which have gone on to capture the imaginations of novelists, film makers, occultists and finally academics. After establishing a conservative methodological apparatus we presented the complex etiology of the spirit actions as having four interpenetrating sources of causation: (1) Environmental conditions which culturally and materially situated the sessions; (2) Behavioral traits of Kelly which may betray the strong likelihood of a pre-existing psychotic condition; (3) Altered states of consciousness (ASCs) triggered by and further informing the sessions themselves and, finally; (4) The formative epistemological process which would allow Kelly to create the contents of the sessions as a kind of myth-making as opposed to willful deception. These four forces created a matrix for emergence and an operative engine which informed and propelled the sessions until their eventual decline as Kelly entered the orbit of courtly life on the continent and Dee continued his quest for “radicall truthe” back home in England—never far from his “angelic” guides.

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