

Jacob Boehme's foremost 17th century English translator: John Sparrow
(1615–1670) of Essex

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John Sparrow (1615–1670), the foremost seventeenth-century English translator of the writings of the German Lutheran mystic Jacob Boehme (c.1575–1624) is a name unfamiliar to many students of early modern England. What little fame he enjoys is largely a result of the efforts of a small group of scholars interested in the reception of the Teutonic Philosopher's writings in the British Isles.¹ There is a brief entry on Sparrow in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Unfortunately it is of little

* Earlier versions of this chapter were read at conferences held at Reading University and at Görlitz. I would like to thank the participants for their helpful comments and suggestions. In addition, I have profited from the advice of Lorenza Gianfrancesco and Diego Lucci. Interpolations and inclusions from various Holman extracts in the body of quotations from Holman are indicated by <arrowheads>.

¹ J. Yeowell, 'Jacob Böhme, or Behmen', *Notes and Queries*, 1st series, 8 (1853): 246; Alexander Whyte, *Jacob Behmen: an Appreciation* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1894), 46, 54–55; Margaret Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme: A study of German Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford UP, 1914), 58–60, 62–63; R.R.A. Walker, 'John Elliston and John Sparrow, the English translators of Jacob Behmen', *Notes and Queries*, 14th series, 167 (1934): 312; Reginald Maxse, 'The reception of Jacob Boehme in England in the XVII and XVIII centuries', unpublished Oxford University B.Litt. thesis, 1934, 2–3, 5–6; Werner Buddecke, *Die Jakob Böhme-Ausgaben. Ein beschreibendes Verzeichnis* (2 vols., Göttingen, 1937–57), vol. 2, 64–67, 129–32; Serge Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Denoël, 1960), 39–42; W. Heijting, 'Hendrick Beets (1625?–1708), publisher to the German adherents of Jacob Böhme in Amsterdam', *Quaerendo*, 3 (1973): 259; Ariel Hessayon, 'Gold Tried in the Fire': *The prophet Theaurau John Tany and the English Revolution* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 290–97.

value, although unlike some earlier notices it avoids conflating him with his father and namesake.²

Nonetheless, Sparrow's obscurity is unmerited. By drawing on a range of my recent archival discoveries, notably scattered extracts made from Sparrow's diaries by the congregational minister and Essex antiquarian William Holman (1669–1730),³ I aim to situate Sparrow's interest in Boehme within broader contexts; namely his religious beliefs, intellectual pursuits, and extensive social network. By so doing I also intend to show why, to quote Holman, 'this unfortunate Gent deserv'd a better Fate'. For Sparrow was 'a person of most rare accomplishments':

He was a rare linguist but excelled in y^e knowledge of the Teutonick language.

He was not only master of the French, Latin, Greeke and Hebrew Languages, but understood most of the Orientall, and was a great Encour[a]ger of the profoundly learned Dr Edmund Castle in compiling his Lexicon Polyglottall. He was an encourager of Mr [William] Robertson to print the New Testam[en]t in Hebrew with the Points for the Conversion of the Jewes.

<He understood Heraldry well Merch[an]ts acc[oun]ts admirably well>

He was admirably verst in Chimistry Arithmetick Astronomy and Mathematicall Sciences and a great promoter of the Royall Society when in its Infancy-

² K. Grudzien Baston, 'Sparrow, John (1615–1670)', *ODNB*; cf. James Granger, *A Biographical History of England* (3rd edn., London: J. Rivington & sons, 4 vols., 1779), vol. 3, 108–09; Alexander Gordon, 'Sparrow, John (1615–1665?)', *DNB*; D. Willen, 'Sparrow, John (1615–c.1665)', in Richard Greaves and Robert Zaller (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (3 vols., Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982–84), vol. 3, 190–91.

³ W. Raymond Powell, 'Holman, William (bap. 1669, d. 1730)', *ODNB*.

He understood musick.

He was a great proficient in Naturall and Experimentall philosophy and was attempting to supply the Defects in my L[or]d Verulams's Instauration Magna.

He was intimately acquainted with the Famous Mr [Henry] Oldenburgh Secretary to the Royall Society, Mr [Samuel] Hartlib, Samuel Parker, afors[ai]d Bishop of Oxford, Dr [Joachim] Paleman, [Wenceslaus] Hollar <^the Kings Scenographer, [William] Lilly, [John] Gadbury, Edw[ard] Benlowes>, [Edward] Cocker and others, the most ingenious men of the Age, with whom he corresponded, and was not a little esteemed by them.⁴

I. Sparrow's family and biography

So who was Sparrow? He was born on 12 May 1615, the eldest son of John Sparrow (1592–1664), then of Stambourne, Essex and his first wife Maryan (1590–1638), daughter of Robert Hawley (*d.*1599), merchant of Ipswich.⁵ His paternal grandfather John Sparrow senior (1564–1626) was a younger son of John Sparrow (*d.*1590) of Sible Hedingham, Essex and his second wife Joan (*d.*1599), daughter of one Jackson of Ashdown, Essex. At the time of the Boehme translator's birth Sparrow senior was lord of the manor of Overhall in Gestingthorpe, Essex which he had purchased in October 1608 together with the advowson. In April 1622 Sparrow senior sold the manor but not the rectory for £3600 to John Elliston senior (*d.*1630), an eminent clothier of Hawkwood in Sible Hedingham. In addition, Sparrow senior was a

⁴ Essex Record Office, D/Y 1/3/68 (ii, vi); Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fols. 222v–24r.

⁵ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vii); Essex RO, D/P 85/1/1, burial at Gestingthorpe, Essex of 'Maryan the wife of Captain John Sparrow of Stamborne' (22 January 1638); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 221r; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 295r.

Captain of the Essex trained band for Hinckford hundred.⁶ He married Anne (d.1634), daughter of Robert Buckminster (d.1566/67) of Poynton, Lincolnshire.⁷ They had only one son but four daughters. Sparrow senior was buried at the upper end of the chancel at Gestingthorpe church [figure 1] where on the south wall there is an alabaster monument with a Latin inscription. It depicts him as a kneeling figure in half-armor, set in a round-headed niche, with an achievement of arms above the pediment [figures 2, 3, 4].⁸

⁶ Essex RO, D/P 93/1/1, parish register of Sible Hedingham; Suffolk RO, Bury St Edmunds, HA 517/C15; Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (i, ii, iii, iv); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 220r–v; Essex RO, T/P 195/12/12, no pagination; Philip Morant, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex* (2 vols., London: T. Osborne, J. Whiston, S. Baker, L. Davis, C. Reymers and B. White, 1768), vol. 2, 289, 306, 372; Thomas Wright, *The History and Topography of the county of Essex* (2 vols., London: George Virtue, 1836), vol. 1, 537, 542, vol. 2, 7; William Berry, *County Genealogies* (8 vols., London: Sherwood, Gilbert & Piper, 1830–42), vol. 7, 53–55 (Essex); George Marshall (ed.), *Le Neve's pedigrees of the Knights*, Harleian Society, 8 (London, 1873), 213; Walter Metcalfe (ed.), *The Visitations of Essex by Hawley, 1552: Hervey, 1558; Cooke, 1570; Raven, 1612; and Owen and Lilly, 1634 to which are added, miscellaneous Essex pedigrees from various Harleian Manuscripts*, Harleian Society, 13–14 (London, 1878–79), 492, 714–15; 'The Sparrow family of Gestingthorpe', *Essex Review*, 48 (1939): 214–15.

⁷ TNA: PRO, Prob 11/49 fol. 48; Essex RO, D/P 85/1/1.

⁸ Frederic Chancellor, *The ancient sepulchral monuments of Essex: a record of interesting tombs in Essex churches and some account of the persons and families connected with them* (London: the author, 1890), 372; *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England): an inventory of the historical monuments in Essex* (London: H.M.S.O., 1916–23), vol. 1, 100.



Figure 1. Gestingthorpe, Essex

[photograph by the author]



Figure 2. Funeral monument of John Sparrow senior (*baptised* 7 November 1564 – *died* 11 September 1626) in the church of Gestingthorpe, Essex
[photograph by the author]

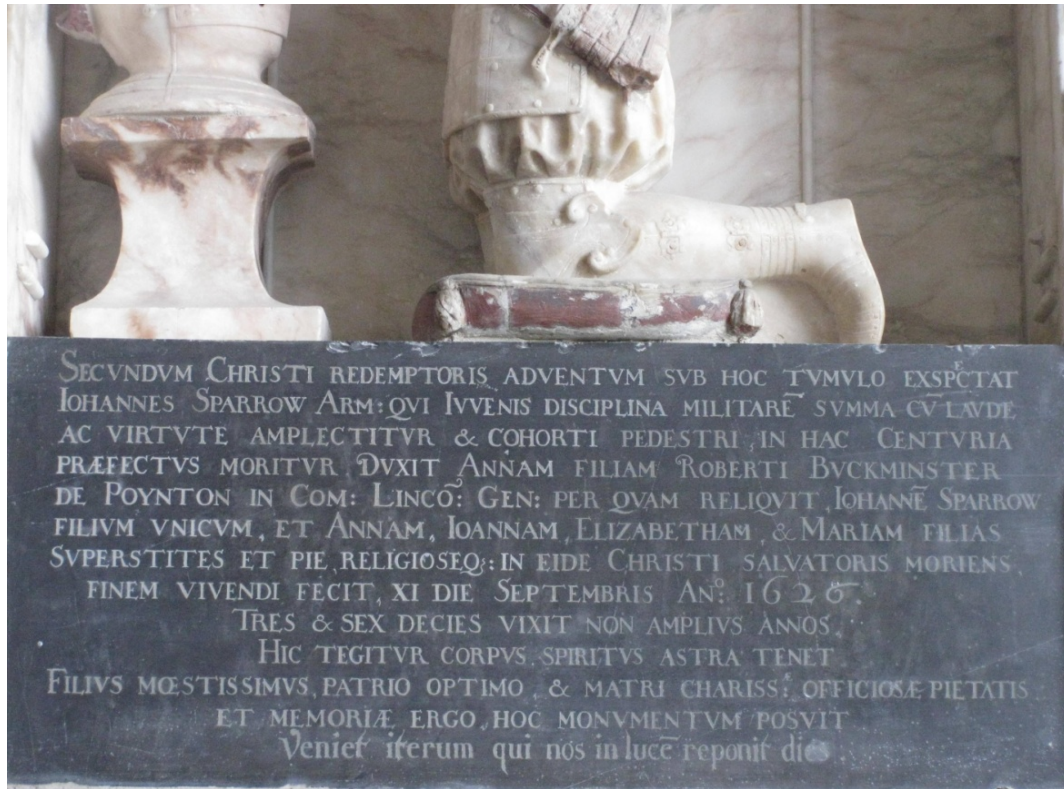


Figure 3. Funeral monument of John Sparrow senior (detail), at Gestingthorpe, Essex. An engraving of the monument together with a translation of the Latin inscription can be seen in Frederic Chancellor, *The ancient sepulchral monuments of Essex: a record of interesting tombs in Essex churches and some account of the persons and families connected with them* (1890), 372. Another translation is provided in Thomas Wright, *The History and Topography of the county of Essex* (2 vols., 1836), vol. 1, 542.

Wright translates the inscription thus:

‘Under this tomb lies, expecting the second coming of Christ, his redeemer, John Sparrow, Esq. who, when a young man, engaged in a military life, in which, for his exemplary conduct and courage, he received the highest applause. He died in this century, captain of a company of foot. He married Anne, the daughter of Robert Buckminster, of Poynton, in the county of Lincoln, gent. by whom he had John Sparrow, his only son, and four daughters, Anne, Johanna, Elizabeth, and Mary: he died piously, religiously, and in the faith of Christ, his Saviour, on the eleventh day of September, in the year 1626. He lived no more than sixty-three years. Here his body is entombed, but his soul is in heaven. An afflicted son erected this monument, out of dutiful affection to, and in memory of, the best of fathers, and the most beloved of mothers. The day will come, when we shall see each other again’.



Figure 4. Funeral monument of John Sparrow senior (detail), at Gestingthorpe, Essex.

The Sparrow family coat of arms

1. Argent, three roses 2, 1, and a chief gules [*Sparrow*]
2. Vert, three chevronels or, on the uppermost a crescent, gules, for difference [*Aspall?*]
3. Per chevron, azure and argent, a bordure, engrailed gules [*Aldres*]
4. Vert, a buck trippant or [*Buckminster?*]

The Boehme translator's father John Sparrow the elder was, in Holman's estimation, 'generally esteem'd a Gent of sobriety courage and conduct; every way fitted to be trusted'.⁹ Born on 8 October 1592, he matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1606, graduating BA in 1610 and MA in 1613.¹⁰ In his youth the elder Sparrow had served as one of the gentlemen ushers to James I.¹¹ Afterwards he lived at Stambourne although in November 1630 he presented William Berman to the rectory of Gestingthorpe.¹² From 1634 he was also a Captain of one of the Essex trained bands.¹³ When Civil War broke out the elder Sparrow sided with Parliament. His banner bore the motto 'Res nomines'.¹⁴ He served initially as a Captain in Colonel Sir John Seaton's regiment.¹⁵ By summer 1643 he had been promoted to Major.¹⁶

⁹ Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 222r; Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vii).

¹⁰ John Venn and J.A. Venn (eds.), *Alumni Cantabrigienses: a biographical list of all known students, graduates and holders of office at the University of Cambridge, from the earliest times to 1900* (2 parts in 10 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1922–54), vol. 4, 128.

¹¹ Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 220r; Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vii).

¹² Richard Newcourt, *Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense* (2 vols., London: Benjamin Motte, 1710), vol. 2, 279–80; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 222r; Lambeth Palace Library, Comm. XIIa/8, fols. 308–10, printed in Harold Smith, *The Ecclesiastical History of Essex under the Long Parliament and Commonwealth* (Colchester: Benham & co., [1933]), 298.

¹³ Metcalfe (ed.), *Visitations of Essex*, 492; Essex RO, D/P 85/1/1.

¹⁴ Bodl., MS Rawlinson D 942, fol. 32; John Prestwich, *Prestwich's Respublica; Or a Display of the Honors, Ceremonies & Ensigns of the Common-Wealth, Under the Protectorship of Oliver Cromwell* (London: J. Nichols, 1787), 54–55, 104.

¹⁵ TNA: PRO, SP 28/5 fol. 204.

¹⁶ British Library, MS Egerton 2646 fol. 283r; BL, MS Egerton 2647 fols. 82r, 84r, 95r, 180r, 281r; *Historical Manuscripts Commission. Seventh Report, Appendix* (London: H.M.S.O., 1879), 552, 556, 560.

Thereafter he was appointed Colonel of a 400-strong regiment of foot which in September 1644 formed part of the garrison of Abingdon, Berkshire. According to his commander, however, Sparrow soon absented himself intending to lay down his commission. Consequently a number of his troops deserted.¹⁷ Even so, Colonel Sparrow was active during the Second Civil War, participating at the siege of Colchester (summer 1648).¹⁸ In addition, John Sparrow the elder was a member of the Parliamentary Committee for Essex sitting at Chelmsford (1644–55),¹⁹ a Justice of the Peace for Essex (1644–45, 1648, 1651–56, 1657–60),²⁰ and twice High Sheriff of Essex (1656, 1657).²¹ Together with his nomination to sit on the High Court of Justice (26 March 1650),²² this accords with Holman's verdict that the elder Sparrow was 'in great esteem with the Republican Party then predominant'. He was also a well-bred

¹⁷ *CSPD 1644*, 479–80; TNA: PRO, SP 21/17, fol. 153; TNA: PRO, SP 21/19, fols. 67, 69; *CSPD 1644–45*, 8, 11, 13, 14, 16, 180, 233; *CJ*, vol. 4, 1.

¹⁸ Cambridge University Library, Add. MS 89, fols. 227–28, printed in *HMC. Thirteenth Report, Appendix, part I* (London: H.M.S.O., 1891), 467–68; *CJ*, vol. 5, 613; *LJ*, vol. 10, 478; PA, HL/PO/JO/10/1/294; Alfred Kingston, *East Anglia and the Great Civil War* (London: Elliot Stock, 1897), 258–60, 267.

¹⁹ *CJ*, vol. 3, 403; *LJ*, vol. 6, 435; Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/1/165; BL, Add. MS 37,491 fols. 234v, 235r, 236r, 237r; BL, MS Stowe 833, fol. 121.

²⁰ *HMC. Tenth Report, Appendix, part IV* (London: H.M.S.O., 1885), 508–10; Essex RO, Q/SO 1/674; D.H. Allen (ed.), *Essex Quarter Sessions order book 1652–1661*, Essex edited texts, 1 (Chelmsford: Essex County Council, 1974), xl, 1, 12, 13, 18, 25, 30, 35, 48, 74, 107, 114, 133, 139, 143, 149, 153.

²¹ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 220r.

²² Charles Firth and R.S. Rait (eds.), *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660* (3 vols., London: H.M.S.O., 1911), vol. 2, 364–67 [hereafter *A & O*]; *CSPD 1651*, 479.

gentleman and ‘in his prosperity was very civill and obliging’ to the defeated Royalists.²³

John Sparrow the elder apparently married three widows, although he only had issue with his first wife Maryan.²⁴ Besides the Boehme translator, their children were Anne (1618–1667), Maryan (1619–*fl.*1664), Dorothy (1621–*fl.*1664), William (*b.*1622), Robert (1624–1651?), and Drue (1630–1653). His second wife was Alice, the widow of Richard Gore of Nether Wallop, Hampshire and Alexander Butler, an Essex-born inn holder with premises in St. Peter Cornhill, London. His third wife was Mary (*d.*1669), daughter of James Rolfe an official of the Archdeaconry of St. Albans, Hertfordshire. She was the widow of William Colles of Parkbury, Hertfordshire and Sir Richard Sanders of St. Albans.²⁵ Sparrow the elder died of gangrene on Sunday, 27 November 1664 at the ‘Saracens Head’ in Gracechurch Street, London. He was buried at Gestingthorpe on 1 December 1664. His grave was located in the north-east end of the chancel of Gestingthorpe church, about three feet from the north wall. The elder Sparrow’s dying wish was to be buried in his first wife Maryan’s grave, separated with a little earth, and that he be commemorated with an inscription attesting that he had ‘lived in the Hope of the Resurrection and died to enjoy the same’.²⁶

²³ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fols. 220r, 222r.

²⁴ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vii).

²⁵ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vi, vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 221r–v.

²⁶ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vi, vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fols. 221v–22r, 226r; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fols. 296v–97r; Alan Macfarlane (ed.), *The Diary of Ralph Josselin 1616–1683* (1976; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), 513–14; Essex RO, D/P 85/1/1, ‘Jo[ann]es Sparrow Armiger de Maplested Magna sepultus suit primo die Decembris’ 1664; TNA: PRO, Prob 11/317 fol. 82 r–v; TNA:

Like his father before him, John Sparrow the younger attended Trinity College Cambridge, where he matriculated pensioner on 15 December 1631.²⁷ There is no record of him taking a degree, however, and on 24 October 1634 he was admitted at the Inner Temple where he trained successfully as a barrister.²⁸ According to Holman, he also ‘performed there the Readers Exercise with great Applause’.²⁹ Before the outbreak of Civil War Sparrow the younger married Hester (1621–*fl.*1664), daughter of Joseph Norgate (*d.*1636), brewer and afterwards gentleman of St. Michael Coslany in Norwich.³⁰ The couple had ten known children: John (1642–*fl.*1707), Robert (1644–*fl.*1664), Philip (*b.*1646), Joseph (1648–1705), Mary (1649–1651), Hester

PRO, Prob 11/335 fol. 312r. Evidently there was no memorial inscription since about fifty years later Holman noted that ‘I can’t find y^t this his Dying Request was ever fulfilled – so y^t the distinct place of his sepulchre is unknown’.

²⁷ CUL, Cambridge University Archives, Matric. 6, no. 1195; CUL, C.U.A. Matric. 2, no pagination; Venn and Venn (eds.), *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. 4, 128; W.W. Rouse Ball and J.A. Venn (eds.), *Admissions to Trinity College, Cambridge* (5 vols., London: Macmillan & co., 1911–16), vol. 2, 333.

²⁸ CUL, Add. MS 6697, fol. 202v; cf. W.H. Cooke (ed.), *Students admitted to the Inner Temple, 1547–1660* (London, [1878]), 279.

²⁹ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (ii, vi, vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 222r.

³⁰ J.J. Howard (ed.), *A Visitation of the County of Essex Begun AD MDCLXIII, finished AD MDCLXVIII by Sir Edward Bysshe* (London: Mitchell & Hughes, 1888), 86; Norfolk RO, AF 157, 175x5; Norfolk RO, Parish register of St. Michael Coslany, Norwich; Norfolk RO, NCC, will register Spendlove, 272, will of Joseph Norgate (1636); TNA: PRO, C 3/462/19; Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vi, vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 222r; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 295v; TNA: PRO, Prob 11/317 fol. 82v.

(1651–*fl.*1670), Anne (*d.*1653), Drue (1656–*fl.*1670), Elizabeth (1657–*fl.*1670), and Margaret (1660–1661).³¹

While living at Gestingthorpe in the late 1640s the younger Sparrow seems to have been commissioned as a Captain.³² But it was Sparrow's reputation as a lawyer – not to mention his influential connections – that resulted in him sitting on the Parliamentary Committee to consider reformation of the law (17 January – 23 July 1652).³³ Besides his appointment as a Judge for the Probate of Wills (8 April 1653, and again from 19 May – 30 June 1659),³⁴ he also sat with his father as a Justice of the Peace for Essex (1659–60).³⁵ In addition, on the recommendation of Colonel Edward Popham (*c.*1610–1651) and the regicide Colonel Richard Deane (1610–1653), Sparrow the younger had been appointed one of several treasurers and collectors of prize goods (17 April 1649 – before 20 June 1657).³⁶ During the same period one of the Sparrows – identified only as of Gestingthorpe and therefore most likely the elder

³¹ Essex RO, D/P 346/1/2; Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vi, vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 295v; Marshall (ed.), *Le Neve's pedigrees*, 214.

³² TNA: PRO, C 3/462/19; BL, MS Harleian 6244, fol. 25v; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 222r; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 294r.

³³ *CJ*, vol. 7, 67, 73, 74; *Mercurius Politicus*, no. 85 (15–22 January 1652), 1364; BL, Add. MS 35,863; M. Cotterell, 'Interregnum law reform: the Hale Commission of 1652', *English Historical Review*, 83 (1968): 693.

³⁴ *A & O*, vol. 2, 702–03, 1272; *CSPD 1653–54*, 271; *CJ*, vol. 7, 657.

³⁵ Norman Penney (ed.), *Extracts from State Papers relating to Friends 1654 to 1672* (London: Friends' Historical Society, 1913), 106; Essex RO, Q/SO 1/674; Allen (ed.), *Essex Quarter Sessions*, xl, 149, 153.

³⁶ *CSPD 1649–50*, 39–40, 51, 71, 171, 190, 204, 527; *A & O*, vol. 2, 75–78, 1180–81; *CSPD 1650*, 212; *CSPD 1655–56*, 181, 224; *CSPD 1657–58*, 17.

– was appointed one of several trustees for the sale of former Crown lands (16 July 1649); for overseeing the sale of fee-farm rents that had formerly been payable to the Crown, the Duchy of Lancaster and the Duchy of Cornwall (11 March 1650); and for supervising the sale of castles, mansions, parks and lands hitherto in the Crown's possession (31 December 1652).³⁷ Moreover, in August 1654 John Sparrow – again most likely the elder – was named a trustee for the sale of four forests (Needwood, Kingswood, Ashdown and Sherwood) designated as collateral security for arrears owed to army officers and the rank-and-file.³⁸

Given the elder Sparrow's military rank and administrative responsibilities together with the younger Sparrow's legal expertise, it is unsurprising that between May 1650 and January 1656 father and son were involved in a number of complex transactions concerning former Crown possessions. It should be stressed, however, that beyond the nominal conveyance of land and property, it is difficult to ascertain whether the elder and younger Sparrow were acting merely as trustees for soldiers disposing of their debentures or as interested parties. Whatever the specific arrangement, it is clear that they profited greatly from their involvement. Thus either individually or together with some London merchants and a Buckinghamshire gentleman, the elder Sparrow purchased portions of Theobalds house, Hertfordshire (notably the council chamber) for undisclosed sums; Dell's lodge and 113 acres in Theobalds for £600; and 78 acres in Theobalds Park for £613. The portions of Theobalds house were sold for an undisclosed sum and £200 respectively; Dell's lodge and 113 acres for £1,200; the 78 acres in Theobalds Park in six separate parcels for more than £1214; and a tenement

³⁷ *A & O*, vol. 2, 168–71, 358–59, 691–94; BL, Add. MS 21,427 fols. 98r, 172r; *CSPD 1651*, 267.

³⁸ *A & O*, vol. 2, 993–96, 1116–22.

at the east gate of Theobalds Park for £80. In short, the elder Sparrow and his partners probably made more than £1500 from buying and selling parts of former Crown possessions in Theobalds.³⁹

A similar process can be observed in the acquisition and redistribution of the manor house at Havering-atte-Bower, Essex together with Havering Park and keepers' lodges. Contracts were drawn up on 1 May 1650 and in September that year Colonel Richard Deane, John Sparrow the elder and John Sparrow the younger purchased a moiety of the manor of Havering for £1196-13s.-8d. on behalf of Deane and some soldiers. The park itself was divided into three parts (subsequently designated as the East, Middle and West divisions). What became known as the East division of Havering Park consisted of 497 acres. This together with the manor house, outhouses, gardens and a lodge was bought on behalf of several army officers and the rank-and-file by Deane, the elder Sparrow, and the younger Sparrow for £4492-2s.-6d. on 16 June 1651 (later improvements resulted in an adjusted price of £4733-16s.-8d. with the purchasers discharged the difference of £241-14s.-1d.). William Wood a London merchant and formerly Muster General of the Northern Army purchased another part of Havering Park for £4,158-14s.-3½d., while Captain John Rayner bought the other

³⁹ TNA: PRO, C 54/3689 no. 16; C54/3691 no. 17; C54/3695 no. 33; C54/3696 no. 34; C54/3701 no. 7; C54/3703 no. 26; C54/3705 no. 2; C54/3720 nos. 3, 32; C54/3724 no. 34; C54/3733 nos. 30, 31; C54/3734 no. 29; C54/3793 no. 26; C54/3877 no. 1; Ian Gentles, 'The Debentures Market and Military Purchases of Crown Land, 1649–1660', unpublished University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1969, pp. 166–68, 337. I owe most of these references to the kindness of Professor Gentles.

part for £4350-8s.-5d.⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that in many of these transactions the younger Sparrow, described as of the Inner Temple, acted as attorney for the soldiers. Thereafter the Sparrows conveyed a messuage in Havering with a yearly rent of £54 to a grocer for £700.⁴¹ They retained a substantial property, however, which seems to have been the manor house. It was here that the Boehme translator mostly lived between about October 1651 and January 1661, if not longer, for three of his daughters were buried in nearby Romford during this period. During his residence the younger Sparrow spent a considerable amount on home improvements, including £100 on a single room.⁴² Shortly after the Restoration the house was said to be well-furnished with plate and other objects. The younger Sparrow also possessed a lease for about 300 acres where Havering Park had been and on which he kept a great head of cattle.⁴³

According to Holman, the elder Sparrow was involved in a further transaction – namely the purchase of Hyde Park, which he supposedly exchanged with Anthony Deane (1630–c.1676) for Deane’s ‘noble seat’ of Dynes Hall in Great Maplestead,

⁴⁰ TNA: PRO, E 121/2/5 nos. 14, 19, 35, 37; TNA: PRO, E 214/480; TNA: PRO, E 315/153/10–11, pp. 261–75; TNA: PRO, E 320/F9, F16, F18; TNA: PRO, SP 46/109 fols. 26, 28; CUL, MS Dd.viii.30, fols. 12v–13r; CUL, MS Dd.xiii.20, fol. 67.

⁴¹ TNA: PRO, C 54/3854 no. 29.

⁴² Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vi, vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fols. 220v, 222v; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 295r; Essex RO, D/P 346/1/2, parish registers of St. Edward, Romford, which record the burial of ‘Marie Sparrow daughter of John gent from Hau[er]ing’ (21 October 1651), ‘Ann Sparrow daughter of John of Havering’ (28 June 1653), and ‘Maragretta Sparrow daughter of John fro[m] Hauering’ (7 January 1661).

⁴³ BL, MS Egerton 2979, fol. 64r.

Essex.⁴⁴ Although Holman represented Deane as ‘very much addicted’ to the Parliamentary cause, believing ‘the structure then raised would have stood for ever’, this story may be nothing more than a flight of fancy prompted by a coincidence.⁴⁵ Alternatively, since Holman had access to the younger Sparrow’s papers and diaries, it suggests the possibility that the elder Sparrow used a proxy for additional purchases of former Crown possessions. What can be established is that on 27 November 1652 Parliament ordered Hyde Park to be sold. It was split into five divisions: Kensington, Gravel Pit, Banqueting House, Old Lodge and Middle. Anthony Deane purchased the Banqueting House, Old Lodge and Middle divisions for £9,020-8s.-2d. on 5 April 1653, afterwards selling 61 acres to the purchaser of the Kensington division and leasing most of the remainder of his holdings.⁴⁶ Deane’s financial records indicate both that he had borrowed substantial sums of money, and that on 27 December 1653 he and his business partner were anticipating the repayment of an £8,000 loan.⁴⁷ Moreover, Anthony Deane sold Dynes Hall together with manors of Dynes, Hosedens and Caxtons to John Sparrow the elder for £6,000 on 1 February 1654. This ‘fine brick house’ and attached lands – including barns, stables, coach-house, dovecote, malt-house, brick kilns, orchards, garden, ‘handsome avenue of elms’, bowling alley, pond, watermill, and roughly 80 acre park – had an estimated yearly value of £304.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vi, vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fols. 220v, 221v.

⁴⁵ Essex RO, T/P 195/12/10, p. 22; Morant, *Essex*, vol. 2, 278–79.

⁴⁶ *CJ*, vol. 7, 222; Alec Tweedie, *Hyde Park. Its history and romance* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1908), 81–83; Gentles, ‘Debentures Market’, 118, 120, 187–88, 274, 291, 340, 346.

⁴⁷ National Maritime Museum, LBK/3; Essex RO, D/DAc 166.

⁴⁸ BL, Charter Harleian, 111 H. 24. a, b; Essex RO, D/DAc 157, 158, 159, 160; Essex RO, T/P 195/12/10, p. 21; Bodl., MS Rawlinson C 441, fols. 112–13; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 5, fol. 177r; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 297r; Morant, *Essex*, vol. 2, 278–79; Joseph Rush, *Seats in Essex*

On its acquisition the elder Sparrow seems to have mainly resided at Dynes Hall until his death in November 1664, while the Boehme translator seems to have lived there from about July 1665 until he was forced to sell the property for £6,490 on 20 November 1667 – of which more in the concluding section to this chapter.⁴⁹

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Judging by Sparrow the elder's administrative, judicial, fiscal and military responsibilities, he was among the fifty most important men in Essex during the English Revolution. The younger Sparrow can be placed on the rung below, ranking roughly among the two-hundred-and-fifty most influential men in the county.⁵⁰ Moreover, as we have seen, the elder and younger Sparrow were clearly among those privileged army and navy officers and civil functionaries serving in the upper echelons of the Commonwealth government who benefited greatly from the English republic's sequestration of a number of Royalists' estates together with the state's confiscation and redistribution of property that had belonged to the crown, bishops, dean and chapters. Their position was further strengthened through mutually beneficial alliances – notably the marriage of Colonel Richard Deane's youngest sister Jane (*d.*1670) to the Boehme translator's youngest brother Drue.⁵¹ By April 1651 Drue Sparrow was serving as Deane's secretary, probably accompanying him to

comprising picturesque views of the seats of the noble men and gentry, with historical and architectural descriptions (London: King, Sell & co., 1897), 69–72.

⁴⁹ BL, Add. MS 37,078; Essex RO, D/DHt T 114/1; Essex RO, D/DHt T 177/1; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fols. 297r–v, 304r.

⁵⁰ *A & O*, vol. 2, 24–57, 285–319, 456–90, 653–88, 1058–97, 1233–51, 1320–42, 1355–1403.

⁵¹ John Bathurst Deane, *The Life of Richard Deane* (London: Longmans, Green & co., 1870), 57.

Scotland where Deane shared military command with Major-Generals John Lambert and George Monck. Together with Robert Blake, Deane had also been appointed one of three Generals-at-sea in February 1649. Completing the triumvirate was Edward Popham who, with Deane, had recommended John Sparrow the younger's appointment as a collector of prize goods. Following Popham's death and eventual replacement by Monck, Drue Sparrow served as secretary to the Generals of the fleet.⁵² But he was killed aboard Blake's flagship 'The Triumph' during the battle of Portland against the Dutch on 18 February 1653.⁵³ Deane himself died in another fierce naval engagement at the battle of the Gabbard on 1 June 1653. His recently drawn up will had been witnessed by John Sparrow.⁵⁴ On 24 June Deane was buried in a public funeral at Westminster Abbey and laid to rest near Popham. An elegy lamented that they should 'make roome' in their 'five-fold Tombe' for 'pious' Drue Sparrow.⁵⁵

Elsewhere I have noted Major-General Lambert's ownership of a copy of Boehme's *XL. Questions Concerning the Soule* (1647), as well as Lambert's interest in mystical

⁵² Sheffield University Library, HP 28/2/3A; CSPD 1651–52, 542; BL, Add. MS 22,546 fol. 88; CSPD 1652–53, 526, 528, 529, 532; S.R. Gardiner and C.T. Atkinson (eds.), *Letters and papers relating to the First Dutch War, 1652–1654*, Navy Record Society, 37–41 (1910–12), vol. 37, 63, 80, 83, 101; Deane, *Life of Richard Deane*, 528–32.

⁵³ *A Perfect Account*, no. 111 (16–23 February 1653), 886; *The Faithful Scout*, no. 105 (18–25 February 1653), 824; *The Moderate Messenger*, no. 3 (21–28 February 1653), 20; CSPD 1652–53, 213; Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vi, vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 221r.

⁵⁴ TNA: PRO, Prob 11/239 fols. 339r–40v, printed in Deane, *Life of Richard Deane*, 692–94.

⁵⁵ J.R., *An Elegie upon the Death of the thrice Noble Generall, Richard Dean* (London: Thomas Jenner, 1653), brs., reprinted in Deane, *Life of Richard Deane*, 704.

theology while on campaign in Scotland.⁵⁶ Here I want to focus on a comment by Monck's contemporary biographer that General-at-sea Deane 'was a *Beemist* in Religion'. There has been disagreement among Deane's own biographers as to whether this meant Deane was a follower of the moderate Lutheran Michael Behm (1612–1650) rather than Jacob Boehme.⁵⁷ But Holman's hitherto unknown evidence is conclusive. According to Holman, John Sparrow the younger had obtained his post as a collector of prize goods through Deane's patronage in the following manner:

Being well skill'd in the Teutonick Language he gave a Specimen of it by translating one of Jacob Behmens Books, which falling accidentally into the Hands of Generall Dean afores[ai]d he was so taken with the performance of it y^t he advanced him to the forementioned <prize> Office <in ye Dutch war in the time of the Com[m]onwealth: then made him attempt the Translation of the rest of Behmens writings – wch he accomplisht>.⁵⁸

It may have been Deane who brought Boehme's writings to Lambert's attention. Yet whatever the reason that Lambert acquired one of Boehme's books, it is surely significant that two of the highest ranking military officers in the republic were

⁵⁶ CUL, Syn.7.64.145¹; BL, Add. MS 21,426 fol. 349r; Hessayon, 'Gold', 292–93.

⁵⁷ Thomas Gumble, *The Life of General Monck* (London: Thomas Bassett, 1671), 60; cf. John Prince, *Danmonii Orientales Illustres: or, The Worthies of Devon* (London: Rees & Curtis, 1810), 590; Deane, *Life of Richard Deane*, 246–47, 535–36; J.K. Laughton, 'Deane, Richard (*bap.* 1610, *d.* 1653)', rev. Michael Baumber, *ODNB*.

⁵⁸ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (ii, vii); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 222v–23r; see also, Essex R.O, D/Y 1/1/134/2.

interested in the Teutonic Philosopher and that one was closely linked to his foremost English translator.

Besides this connection with a prominent regicide, the Sparrows were also associated with certain investors in an overseas venture. On 9 July 1647 articles and orders were made and agreed on behalf of a company of Adventurers for the colonization of the islands of Eleutheria, formerly known as Buhama in the Caribbean.⁵⁹ Mindful that the imposition of religious conformity both in England and abroad had had deleterious consequences – divisions, factions, persecutions and unrest – the Eleutheria plantation (the name was an English adaptation of the Greek word for liberty) was to be a republic with no ‘names of distinction or reproach, as *Independent*, *Antinomian*, *Anabaptist*, or any other cast upon any such for their difference in judgement’. Accordingly, without any form of ecclesiastical authority such as bishops and their detested church courts, or even a Presbyterian polity, the jurisdiction of power was to be strictly limited to the civil sphere: elected magistrates and other officials were to be responsible for the maintenance of justice, peace and sobriety; not matters pertaining to religious belief. Government of the islands was to be by a single governor, twelve councillors and 100 senators. There was also to be a common treasury administered by the governor and council. Moreover, once the plantation had been sufficiently fortified, storehouses provisioned and public buildings erected, one third of both the salvage from shipwrecks and the islands’ commodities was to be distributed in ‘works

⁵⁹ J.T. Hassam, ‘The Bahamas: Notes on an Early Attempt at Colonization’, *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, 2nd series, 13 (1899): 4–58; W.H. Miller, ‘The Colonization of the Bahamas, 1647–1670’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 2 (1945): 33–46; Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution. Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London’s Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 523–27, 548; Hessayon, ‘Gold’, 294–95.

of mercy and charity'. Planters were to be 'godly people' and their servants Christians. Relations with indigenous Indians were to be peaceable and respectful so as to facilitate their conversion. Any natives who had been taken and sold as slaves within the Caribbean were to be sought out, redeemed and returned to the plantations so that they might appreciate the benefits of English civilisation.⁶⁰

Following debate in the House of Commons an amended act was passed on 31 August 1649 for 'settling the Islands in the *West Indies*' between 24 and 29 degrees latitude. Though there appears to be no official record, a subsequent letter of attorney named twenty-six investors: Captain John Blackwell (1624–1701), John Bolles (1603–1665/66), Nicholas Bond (*d.*1673), Peter Chamberlen (1601–1683), Gregory Clements (1594–1660), John Elliston the elder (*c.*1599–1652), Gualter Frost the elder (1598–1652), Robert Houghton (*d.*1653/54), Cornelius Holland (1600–1671?), Colonel John Humphry (*d.*1651), Major Azariah Husbands (*d.*1666), Lieutenant-Colonel George Hutchinson (1618–*fl.*1664), Colonel John Hutchinson (1615–1664), Thomas Jopson (*d.*1653), Captain Robert Norwood (*c.*1610–1654), Colonel Nathaniel Rich (*c.*1621–1701?), Colonel Owen Rowe (1592/93–1661), Scoutmaster-General William Rowe (*fl.*1655), John Rushworth (*c.*1612–1690), Captain William Sayle (*d.*1671), Thomas Smith (*d.*1658), Colonel John Sparrow (1592–1664), Samuel Spurstow, Arthur Squibb (*d.*1679/80), Nicholas West and Thomas Westrowe (1616–

⁶⁰ *Articles and Orders, made and agreed upon the 9th Day of July, 1647 ... By the Company of Adventurers for the Plantation of the Islands of Eleutheria* ([1647]), brs., reprinted in F. Mood, 'A Broadside Advertising Eleuthera and the Bahama Islands London, 1647', *Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, 32 (1933–37): 81–85.

1653).⁶¹ As Robert Brenner has recognised, the Eleutheria plantation is important because it shows a cluster of ‘London-based colonizing radicals working together with a group of similarly radical City, army, parliamentary, and bureaucratic personages in an explicitly oligarchic republican and tolerationist project a year and a half before the advent of the Commonwealth’. Furthermore, Brenner has suggested that models for this ‘self-perpetuating oligarchic republic’ were primarily Dutch and Venetian.⁶² That may be so, although there are parallels with the select vestries that controlled the affairs of several London parishes, not to mention a partial anticipation of Gerrard Winstanley’s ideal republic as outlined in his *The Law of Freedom* (1652).

As for the investors themselves, three were regicides (Gregory Clements, John Hutchinson, Owen Rowe), while another had attended the king’s trial but not signed the death warrant (Cornelius Holland). Three were nominated with Sparrow the elder to sit on the High Court of Justice (John Blackwell, Robert Norwood, Owen Rowe).⁶³

⁶¹ *CJ*, vol. 6, 270, 283, 284, 286, 288; *SUL*, HP 28/1/26B; Hassam, ‘Bahamas’, 5; Miller, ‘Colonization of the Bahamas’, 37.

⁶² Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 525, 526.

⁶³ Contrary to Brenner, I have omitted William Rowe since the Eleutheria adventurer was most likely Scoutmaster General, whereas the High Court of Justice nominee Sir William Rowe of Walthamstow, Essex seems to have been a different man. Likewise, and again contrary to Brenner, I have not included John Sparrow the elder among the 64 men appointed to sit on the court for the treason trials of the five Lords (February 1649). This was clearly Robert Sparrow, who may have been either a younger brother of the Boehme translator, Major Robert Sparrow (1624–1651?), or his namesake Captain Robert Sparrow (*fl.*1659), sometime of Wickhambrook, Suffolk. See Metcalfe (ed.), *Visitations of Essex*, 479; *CJ*, vol. 6, 128, 130; *Perfect Occurrences of Every Daies iournall in Parliament*, no. 110 (2–9 February 1649), 825; *A List of the Names of the Iudges of the High Court of Iustice* (London:

Two were appointed with Sparrow the elder to oversee the sale of fee-farm rents (Nicholas Bond, John Humphry), and one to supervise the sale of castles, mansions and estates formerly in the Crown's possession (Nicholas Bond). In addition, John Rushworth was appointed with Sparrow the younger to sit on the Parliamentary committee to consider law reform and as a judge for the probate of wills. Deeper relationships can be demonstrated with John Bolles and John Elliston the elder. Bolles had served as acting clerk of the Crown in Chancery from December 1643 and became the Commonwealth's clerk in Chancery.⁶⁴ He named the younger Sparrow an executor and possessed a modest library including works by the puritan clergymen William Perkins, Robert Bolton and Richard Sibbes as well as writings by Cornelius Agrippa and Boehme.⁶⁵ Elliston the elder, whose will included a bequest of his £50 investment in the Eleutheria plantation, had married Sparrow the elder's younger sister Elizabeth (*d.*1632).⁶⁶ Their eldest son, John Elliston the younger (*c.*1625–1652) translated Boehme's *Epistles* (1649) and *Signatura Rerum* (1651), as well as more than half of *Mysterium Magnum* (1654). The work was completed by his 'deare

William Wright, 1649), brs.; Parliamentary Archives, main papers, 20 June 1660, printed in *HMC*.

Seventh Report, Appendix, 71; cf. Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 548–49.

⁶⁴ *LJ*, vol. 6, 338, 340; *CSPD 1651–52*, 162; *CSPD 1653–54*, 357; Bodl., MS Rawlinson A 328, pp. 4, 12; *CSPD 1654*, 135–36; *CSPD 1668–69*, 245; Gerald Aylmer, *The State's Servants. The Civil Service of the English Republic 1649–1660* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 87–88.

⁶⁵ TNA: PRO, Prob 11/320 fols. 173r–74r, abstracted in Henry Waters (ed.), *Genealogical Gleanings in England* (2 vols., Boston, MA: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1901), vol. 1, 606–07.

⁶⁶ Essex RO, D/P 85/1/1; TNA: PRO, Prob 11/225 fol. 218r; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 247r.

kinsman' John Sparrow the younger, who also witnessed Elliston's will and was appointed one of its supervisors.⁶⁷

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The upshot of this section is that John Sparrow the younger's prefaces to his translations of Jacob Boehme must be reappraised. For they constitute a careful act of self-representation. Despite the contemplative tone, not to mention his oft-repeated self-effacing claim to be 'one of the unworthiest of the Children of Men' Sparrow was, on the contrary, a university-educated, legally trained, multilingual polymath descended from an Essex gentry family. Moreover, he was a relatively high-ranking Commonwealth official who acquired substantial property following the English republic's seizure and sale of former Crown possessions, was firmly established within the social and political hierarchy of his county community, and closely associated with an assortment of influential republicans and advocates of religious toleration. Hoping to catch the attention of these powerful governmental and military figures, Sparrow regarded Boehme's admittedly difficult texts as both a pathway for individual salvation and as a balm to heal the nation's sectarian wounds; even as a means to advance much needed law reform. Accordingly, it is to these translations that we now turn.

⁶⁷ Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, trans. John Elliston and John Sparrow (London: Humphrey Blunden, 1654), 'To the Reader'; TNA: PRO, Prob 11/225 fols. 218v–19r; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 296r; Hessayon, 'Gold', 295–96.



Figure 5. John Sparrow (born 12 May 1615 – buried 8 December 1670), ‘lover of the theosophy and philosophy of Jacob Boehme, German’; engraving by David Logan (1659)

II. Sparrow's translations

It is not known what motivated Sparrow to study German nor when he began learning the language, although he regarded himself as 'an Instrument' for publishing Boehme's 'Divine Writings' in English.⁶⁸ Like another Boehme translator Charles Hotham (1615–1672), who had also matriculated at Cambridge in 1631 and who would tutor his youngest brother Drue,⁶⁹ Sparrow may have been partly self-taught, perhaps receiving additional instruction from an unidentified Fellow of Peterhouse who was a native speaker.⁷⁰ Quite possibly Sparrow's German teacher was part of the loose community of Protestant refugee scholars forced into exile by plundering armies marauding through central Europe during the Thirty Years' War.

Sparrow probably began translating Boehme by the age of twenty-nine for in 1644 an anonymous English manuscript translation of a German work was completed.

Variouly entitled 'The most Remarkable History of IOSEPH Mystically expounded & interpreted' or 'The most excellent Historie of Joseph, with morall and mystical expositions', it survives in two copies in different scribal hands – one in the British

⁶⁸ Jacob Boehme, *XL. Qvestions Concerning the Soule*, trans. J[ohn] S[parrow] (London: Matthew Simmons, 1647), 'To the Reader'; Jacob Boehme, *Concerning the Election of Grace*, trans. John Sparrow (London: Giles Calvert & John Allen, 1655), 'To the Reader'.

⁶⁹ Thomas Walker (ed.), *Admissions to Peterhouse ... A biographical register* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1912), 45, 91; John Peile, *Biographical Register of Christ's College, 1505–1905* (2 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1910–13), vol. 1, 418–19; Venn and Venn (eds.), *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. 2, 412, vol. 4, 128.

⁷⁰ Jacob Boehme, *A Consolatory Treatise Of The Four Complexions*, trans. Charles Hotham (London: Humphrey Blunden, 1654), A5.

Library Harleian collection with which scholars are familiar, the other in the Bibliothèque Mazarine which I discovered.⁷¹ The Harleian version lacks the final two paragraphs and is without ownership inscription, whereas the undated Mazarine copy was made ‘for the Lord Phillip Herbert’ who would accede to Earldom of Pembroke on 23 January 1650.⁷² The text itself consisted of a translation of Boehme’s *Mysterium Magnum* ‘beginning at y^e 36th Chapt^r of Genesis and continuing to y^e end of y^l booke’. The translator’s source was chapters 64 to 78 (pp. 537–704) of the German version of *Mysterium Magnum* published at Amsterdam in 1640.⁷³ It is noteworthy that this manuscript translation is quite similar in style and structure to *The Third Part* of the English version of Boehme’s *Mysterium Magnum* which was published with a separate title-page as *The most excellent history of Joseph* at London in 1654. While Sparrow’s cousin John Elliston the younger translated more than half this text (presumably at least 40 of the 78 chapters), Sparrow himself was likely responsible for the third part since Elliston would have been about nineteen at the time of the manuscript’s completion. It can therefore be assumed the manuscript represents an earlier version of Sparrow’s translation which, much like scribal copies of *Theologia Germanica*, circulated among aristocratic or wealthy patrons.⁷⁴

⁷¹ BL, MS Harleian 1821; Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 4581.

⁷² Hessayon, ‘Gold’, 320–23.

⁷³ These chapters of Boehme’s *Mysterium Magnum* had been previously issued as a separate publication entitled *Iosephus Redivivus, das ist, Die Vberaus Lehr vnd Trostreiche Historia von dem Ertzvatter Joseph* (Amsterdam: Veit Heinrichs, 1631).

⁷⁴ Scribal copies of John Everard’s translation of *Theologia Germanica* were in the possession of Edmund Sheffield, 1st Earl of Mulgrave and Henry Rich, 1st Earl of Holland.

On 8 November 1644 the London book collector George Thomason acquired a copy of *The Life one Jacob Boehmen* by the Silesian nobleman Abraham von Franckenberg (1593–1652). This version of Franckenberg’s essentially hagiographic 6-page biography derived from the prefatory material to the German version of *Mysterium Magnum* published at Amsterdam in 1640, although it omitted Michael Kurtz’s verses praising Boehme. Since this was the same edition used by the translator of the ‘The most excellent Historie of Joseph’ described above it is likely to have been by Sparrow as well.⁷⁵ Possibly the pamphlet was issued to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of Boehme’s death on 7/17 November 1624. While some of Boehme’s followers regarded him as a prophet of the Thirty Years’ War, Franckenberg had praised his ‘*profound*’ and ‘*deepe-grounded*’ writings, believing that they hinted at the great wonders God would perform in future generations.⁷⁶ So it is significant that the publication of Franckenberg’s *Life of Boehme* signalled the beginning of a loosely co-ordinated project to issue English versions of the Teutonic Philosopher’s writings.

Between 1645 and 1662 most of Boehme’s treatises and the majority of his letters were printed in English translation at London. Moreover, two shorter pieces were rendered from English into Welsh in 1655. These translations must be located within the wider context of the breakdown of pre-publication censorship during the English Revolution and the broader framework of the dissemination of continental alchemical, astrological, millenarian and mystical writings during this turbulent period of English

⁷⁵ BL, Thomason E 16(16). This translation differs somewhat from a later version included in Jacob Boehme, *Forty Questions of the Soul*, trans. John Sparrow (London: Lodowick Lloyd, 1665).

⁷⁶ Anon., *A reall and unfeigned Testimonie, concerning Iacob Beme* (1649), 6 [usually bound with Jacob Boehme, *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen*, trans. John Elliston (London: Giles Calvert, 1649)].

history. Elsewhere I have discussed at greater length why Boehme's writings were translated into English and shown the mechanisms behind this process.⁷⁷ Among his followers there circulated a garbled story that Charles I had been the main patron of this venture before his execution in January 1649. Some like Francis Lee (a nonjuror and co-founder of the Philadelphian Society) also maintained, probably correctly, that after the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 the remaining works were brought out under the auspices of Philip Herbert, 5th Earl of Pembroke. In their eyes this tradition of royal and aristocratic support gave the undertaking prestige. Yet it simplifies developments, obscuring the involvement of a number of people with common aims. Actually, there were three overlapping phases. Initially several individuals with knowledge of Latin or German received abstracts of Boehme's teachings or selected treatises from their associates in Amsterdam. Then manuscript translations were made from German and Latin versions of works published at Amsterdam, as well as from copies of the original texts. These circulated privately in much the same way as had the writings of the sixteenth-century mystic Hendrik Niclaes and other conspicuous members of his heretical sect known as the Family of Love. Finally there was an organized scheme for publishing the extant corpus. While some of the cost was met by the translators themselves, it is clear that Samuel Hartlib, a Prussian émigré resident in London since 1628, and members of his circle acted as go-betweens by using agents to purchase books, subsequently shipping them to England.

⁷⁷ A. Hessayon, "The Teutonicks writings": translating Jacob Boehme into English and Welsh', *Esoterica*, 9 (2007): 129–65 <<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeIX/EsotericaIX.pdf>>.

As is well known, Hartlib's circle promoted reconciliation between the Protestant churches and planned to establish a University in London with a College for Oriental Studies to assist with the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. They also advocated educational and medical reform as well as disseminating the Moravian exile Johannes Amos Comenius's theories concerning universal knowledge (pansophy) and the importance of translation as a first step towards establishing communication through a common tongue.⁷⁸ Although it had gone unheeded by many of his compatriots, Boehme's announcement of the dawn of a new reformation thus chimed with their vision of universal reformation. Similarly, Sparrow hoped his efforts would be rewarded with the settlement of religious controversies and the disappearance of sects and heresies. And though he feared making such things known in his native language to '*so many various minds, as are now sprung up*', Sparrow nonetheless contented himself with the knowledge that his public-spirited efforts might provide '*much comfort*' to '*troubled doubting*' souls, enabling them to attain that '*inward Peace which passeth all understanding*'.⁷⁹ It was, however, to prove a vain hope. Instead of the promised 'Day of Pentecost', when the '*true sence and meaning of all Languages*' would be united into one tongue, there was a new Babel.⁸⁰ Instead of doctrinal unanimity there was discord. For Boehme's readers responded in largely unforeseen ways: sometimes with enthusiasm but on other occasions with exasperation, ambivalence and even revulsion. A handful were convicted of blasphemy, others formed spiritual communities, while others still fulminated against what they regarded

⁷⁸ Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (eds.), *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

⁷⁹ Boehme, *XL. Qvestions*, 'To the Reader'

⁸⁰ Jacob Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, trans. J[ohn] Elliston (London: Giles Calvert, 1651), A3^{r-2}.

as Boehme's incomprehensible nonsense and vile falsehoods. All the same, engagement with Boehme's teachings was more extensive at this crucial moment in English history than has usually been recognised. Nor was his influence either straightforward or always easy to untangle from the wider tradition of continental mystical, prophetic and visionary writing that he epitomised.⁸¹

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Significantly, Sparrow's acquaintanceship with Hartlib preceded his undertaking to translate Boehme. For in 1639 Hartlib noted in his ephemerides that Mr Sparrow had gone to great lengths to ascertain the fate of Francis Bacon's manuscripts, which had been divided between his chaplain and biographer Dr William Rawley, Sir William Boswell and a servant. Further observations indicate that over a period of several months Sparrow related certain anecdotes and some of Bacon's apothegms to Hartlib. He also supplied Hartlib with a complete catalogue of Bacon's extant manuscripts together with the beginning of an unfinished treatise on education.⁸² Twenty-five years later in his preface to a new edition of Boehme's *Forty Questions of the Soul* (1665) Sparrow praised the intellectual edifice constructed by the 'renowned' Sir Francis Bacon in his *Instauratio Magna* ['the great instauration'], in which Bacon taught people how to 'free themselves from the *Idola Mentis humanae*' ['phantoms of

⁸¹ A. Hessayon, 'Jacob Boehme's writings during the English Revolution and afterwards: their publication, dissemination and influence', in Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (eds.), *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception* (New York & Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 77–97.

⁸² SUL, HP 30/4/4B, 5A, 6A; SUL, HP 30/4/27B; SUL, HP 30/4/54B; Alan Stewart, 'Rawley, William (c.1588–1667)', *ODNB*.

the human mind’]. Although Bacon never completed his projected six-volume *Instauratio Magna*, Sparrow nonetheless regarded Bacon’s innovative natural philosophy as a necessary foundation for building a divine philosophy. Accordingly, Sparrow intended to use those of Bacon’s manuscripts in Rawley’s possession to remedy the deficiencies of Bacon’s *Instauratio Magna*. But nothing seems to have materialized.⁸³

Further entries in Hartlib’s ephemerides between 1639 and 1651 indicate that he was regularly updated about the Sparrows’ – both father and son – latest scientific inventions. These included the ‘Perpetuus Motus’, which would ‘not so much take away worke from Men as facilitate and ease them in their great toyles and labours’ (Captain Sparrow); the ‘Mechanica Oeconomica’, a new and more efficient method of heating large rooms during winter (Colonel Sparrow); mechanical instruments made by a skilled blacksmith (Sparrow); new types of keels (young Sparrow); a water pump designed to drain fens and clear flooded mines (young Sparrow); a process for reducing the cost of fuel (young Sparrow); and another to make beer brewing more efficient (young Sparrow).⁸⁴ These inventions brought Sparrow the younger into contact with Hartlib’s correspondent William Potter, who advocated a scheme to establish a Public Bank, and a son of the Dutch drainage engineer Sir Cornelius Vermuyden (possibly Colonel Cornelius Vermuyden).⁸⁵ In addition, Hartlib’s friend

⁸³ Jacob Boehme, *Forty Questions of the Soul*, trans. John Sparrow (London: Lodowick Lloyd, 1665), A3r-v; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 224r; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 300v.

⁸⁴ SUL, HP 30/4/10B, 27B, 44A, 53B; SUL, HP 28/1/22A, 82A, 84A; SUL, HP 28/2/2A, 3A, 5B, 6A-B.

⁸⁵ Virginia Hewitt, ‘Potter, William (fl.1650–1651)’, *ODNB*; Joan Thirsk, ‘Vermuyden, Sir Cornelius (1590–1677)’, *ODNB*.

and collaborator the philosopher and historian Joachim Hübner wrote to him from Cleves, Westphalia in March 1647 welcoming the news that ‘the good lad Sparrow is still in his well-meaning humour’ and that he had an ‘even greater appetite’ to see Sparrow’s ‘little tract on the approbation of the common writing’.⁸⁶ Doubtless this otherwise unknown piece was prompted by Francis Lodowick’s *A Common Writing* (1647), a publication very likely sponsored by Hartlib.⁸⁷ Yet it is also noteworthy that Hübner was associated with Comenius and that he knew some works by the grammarian Joseph Webbe,⁸⁸ who for his part appears to have copied an English translation of an extract from one of Boehme’s letters.⁸⁹

At an unknown date Hartlib listed Sparrow as one of a number of recipients of a new book by Comenius.⁹⁰ Hartlib’s accounts also indicate that he paid £3-6s.-0d. to Mr Sparrow and a further sum to Captain Sparrow in connection with the printing and distribution of certain questions.⁹¹ From another source it can be demonstrated that within two weeks of the publication of Franckenberg’s *Life of Boehme* Sparrow was using his association with Hartlib to purchase what was most likely editions of Boehme’s works printed at Amsterdam and that the agent used for this transaction

⁸⁶ BL, MS Sloane 639 fol. 234v. I am grateful to Leigh Penman for this reference and his translation.

⁸⁷ Felicity Henderson and William Poole (eds.), *Francis Lodowick: On Language, Theology, and Utopia* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 23–24.

⁸⁸ Vivian Salmon, *The Study of Language in 17th-century England* (1979; 2nd edn., Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1988), 4–12.

⁸⁹ Bodl., MS Ashmole 1499 fol. 279r-v; Hessayon, ‘Gold’, 291.

⁹⁰ SUL, HP 23/13/1B.

⁹¹ SUL, HP 21/15/1.

was the millenarian and student of mystical theology Petrus Serrarius.⁹² Moreover, Hartlib knew of the German version of *Mysterium Magnum* published at Amsterdam in 1640;⁹³ the same edition used by the translator of the ‘The most excellent Historie of Joseph’ who, as shown above, was probably Sparrow.

Sparrow’s piecemeal acquisition of German editions of Boehme’s works printed at Amsterdam provides an insight into his method. He did not translate Boehme’s texts in chronological order. Nor, by and large, did he prioritise the supposedly easier writings, leaving the more difficult ones till last. Hence Boehme’s second work *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence* (1619) appeared in 1648; his third work *The Threefold Life of Man* (1620) in 1650; and his fourth work *Forty Questions concerning the Soul* (1620) in 1647. On the other hand, Sparrow did make some concessions, appending *The Clavis, or Key, being an exposition of some principal matters and words in Boehme’s writings* (1624) to *Forty Questions*, as well as issuing a collection of four relatively accessible pieces concerning *True Repentance* (1622), *True Resignation* (1622), *Regeneration* (1622) and *The Super-sensual life* (1624) under the title *The Way to Christ Discovered* (1648).⁹⁴ That said Sparrow’s practice seems to have been generally to wait until he acquired reliable versions of each treatise through foreign contacts. This can be illustrated in the case of Boehme’s first and most famous book *Aurora* (1612).

⁹² SUL, HP 3/2/77; Hessayon, ‘Gold’, 291–92.

⁹³ SUL, HP 30/4/27A, 27B, 53A; Hessayon, ‘Gold’, 290.

⁹⁴ Hessayon and Apetrei (eds.), *Introduction to Boehme*, 299–300; Ariel Hessayon, Leigh Penman and Jennifer Smyth, ‘Seventeenth-century editions of Jacob Boehme’s works in English and Welsh: a census of extant copies’ (forthcoming).

On 18 October 1656 the publisher Giles Calvert, having paid the standard fee of sixpence, had the copyright of Boehme's *Aurora, that is the day spring* entered in the Stationers' Register by a warden of the company. The previous day the London book collector George Thomason had acquired and dated a copy of this publication, which had been printed for Calvert by John Streater and was to be sold at Calvert's shop at the 'Black-Spread-Eagle' at the west end of St Paul's Cathedral.⁹⁵ This quarto volume consisted of 643 pages of text together with a preface by Sparrow and an engraving by the Prague-born etcher Wenceslaus Hollar. Evidently there was more than one printing since a variant has some misnumbered pages.

Sparrow's translation seems to have been based on three sources. Firstly, a transcription of Boehme's 'Morgenröthe im Aufgang' made in 1614 from what seems to have been the original unfinished autograph manuscript of January to June 1612. This copy had been brought to light on 26 November 1641 by Dr Paul Scipio a burgomaster at Görlitz and was afterwards presented to Georg Pflug, Hausmarschall of Johann Georg the Elector of Saxony.⁹⁶ Secondly, an abridged and unreliable German edition published by Johann Janssonius at Amsterdam in 1634.⁹⁷ This was derived from an imperfect and truncated copy of Boehme's text but contained notes

⁹⁵ G.E. Briscoe Eyre, H.R. Plomer and C.R. Rivington (eds.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the worshipful Company of Stationers from 1640 to 1708* (3 vols., London: privately printed, 1913–14), vol. 2, 91; BL, Thomason E 890(1); Ariel Hessayon, 'Calvert, Giles (*bap.* 1615, *d.* 1663)', *ODNB*.

⁹⁶ Jacob Boehme, *Aurora*, trans. John Sparrow (London: Giles Calvert, 1656), (a) 2^v; Dr Williams's Library, MS 186.17 (15), fol. 65; Francis Okely (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life, Death, Burial, and Wonderful Writings, of Jacob Behmen* (Northampton: James Lackington, 1780), 10.

⁹⁷ Amsterdam UL, BV5080 .B6 M67 1634 T; BL, 853.a.16.

added by the author in 1620. Once in the possession of Boehme's patron Michael von Ender, it was judged so 'unfit' that the Amsterdam merchant Abraham Willemsz van Beyerland had warned against using it on account of 'many alterations' to the text.⁹⁸ Thirdly, a German version recently printed at Amsterdam in 1656, perhaps based on the 1614 manuscript copy used by Sparrow, and which had been compared with Boehme's original autograph of 1612.⁹⁹ Sparrow drew primarily on the 1614 copy but also incorporated, where he judged appropriate, Boehme's amendments from the 1634 edition. To further assist the reader Sparrow added his own marginal glosses. Shortly after the main text of his English version had been printed, but before the prefatory material had been inserted and the whole stitched and bound, Sparrow acquired the 1656 Amsterdam edition. He then compared this text with his own, adding substantial errata for the reader's benefit so as to clarify the meaning of obscure passages.¹⁰⁰ It must also have been at this point that Sparrow commissioned Hollar to engrave the frontispiece since despite some minor but interesting variations Hollar's representation of the Trinity seated on a throne, which incorporates motifs from Revelation, Isaiah 9:2 and Matthew 4:16, clearly derives from the 1656 Amsterdam edition.

Space does not permit discussion of how the English version of Boehme's *Aurora* was interpreted. But in his preface to the reader Sparrow explained that Boehme's highly valued and deep writings should collectively be regarded as a true guide to understanding the divine and natural mysteries hidden within the Holy Scriptures, one

⁹⁸ Boehme, *Aurora*, (a) 2^v; DWL, MS 186.17 (15), fol. 50.

⁹⁹ BL, 853.a.19.

¹⁰⁰ Boehme, *Aurora*, (a) 2^v, [b 2]^{r-3}, 66.

moreover that superseded ancient and modern biblical commentaries. Thus enlightened men and women would be able to resolve their religious differences and settle their ‘*debates controversies disputes and contests*’. For example, among recent thorny issues – especially since the advent of the Quakers – were the questions of whether Christ was present within the believer as an inner light; whether it was possible to attain perfection in this life and live without committing sin; and why not everyone would attain eternal salvation even though Christ was the saviour of all. Boehme was admittedly a difficult author to understand, even with the aid of ‘*explanatory Tables, and a Clavis*’ to his writings. Yet Sparrow held out the promise that with careful and repeated study understanding would come by degrees. Indeed, of all Boehme’s texts Sparrow had found *Aurora* to be the most beneficial, regarding it as a suitable and plain introduction to the remainder of his works; ‘*a large and most cleere ABC ... for Beginners*’.¹⁰¹

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Abraham von Franckenberg reckoned that Boehme wrote thirty works besides his correspondence and an explanatory key for ‘some principal matters and words’. A handful of writings were unfinished while a few minor works and some correspondence has been lost.¹⁰² Altogether twenty different books – some containing several titles – by the ‘Teutonic Philosopher’ were issued in English versions at London between 1645 and 1662. Sparrow acknowledged the translation of ten of these publications, together with *The Clavis, or Key*. He also translated one or more

¹⁰¹ Boehme, *Aurora*, A^v–(a) 2^v.

¹⁰² Hessayon and Apetrei (eds.), *Introduction to Boehme*, 34, 299–300.

works in collaboration with Elliston and may in addition have translated two books anonymously. While others today are better placed to judge the quality and fidelity of his endeavour, Sparrow's achievement was commemorated by one contemporary. This was the poet and future dramatist Samuel Pordage (1633–1691?), who in lines that he mistook for poetry penned an encomium on Boehme's foremost translator:

learned *Sparrow* we thy praises too
Will sing; Rewards too small for what is due.
The gifts of Glory, and of Praise we owe:
The English *Behman* doth thy Trophies shew.
Whilst English men that great Saints praise declare,
Thy Name shall joyn'd with His receive a share:
The Time shall come when his great Name shall rise,
Thy Glory also shall ascend the Skies.
Thou mad'st him English speak: or else what Good
Had his works done us if not understood?
To *Germany* they beneficial prove
Alone; till we enjoy'd them by thy Love.
Their German-Robes thou took'st from them, that we
Their Beauties, might in English Garments see.
Thus has thy Love a vast rich Treasure shown,
And made what was exotic now our own.¹⁰³

An eighteenth-century writer likewise commended Sparrow as a man of 'true virtue', who seemed to have penetrated 'very deeply into the spirit of the author'.

¹⁰³ S[amuel] P[ordage], *Mundorum Explicatio* (London: Lodowick Lloyd, 1661), a4^{r-2}.

Nevertheless, he noted that while his translation was regarded as faithful and correct except for some of the most obscure passages, it was ‘not the most beautiful’.¹⁰⁴

Wishing to justify the undertaking of a new translation of Boehme into English the nonjuror and mystic William Law (1686–1761) was even less charitable:

The translators of J[acob] B[ehmen], Elliston and Sparrow, are much to be honoured for their work; they had great piety and great abilities, and well apprehended their author, especially Elliston; but the translation is too much loaded with words, and in many places the sense is mistaken.¹⁰⁵

III. Sparrow’s diaries

Had it not been for the partial recovery and reconstruction of Sparrow’s lost diaries there would be little else to add.¹⁰⁶ But this valuable source provides remarkable insights enabling us to locate Sparrow in a milieu similar to that inhabited by Samuel Pepys. While there is no evidence that the two knew each other, the worlds of this Essex gentleman and Londoner (who shared common acquaintances) intersected at several fascinating junctures.

Both were educated at Cambridge University and had an extensive social network of kin, friends, correspondents and neighbours. Both owed the advancement of their

¹⁰⁴ DWL, MS 186.17 (15), fol. 59; cf. DWL, MS I.1.62, p. 175.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher Walton, *Notes and Materials for an adequate Biography of the celebrated divine and theosopher, William Law* (London: privately printed, 1854), 45 n.

¹⁰⁶ Ariel Hessayon and Leigh Penman (eds.), *Extracts from the diary of John Sparrow (1615–1670) of Essex, made by the antiquarian William Holman (1669–1730)* (forthcoming).

careers during the English republic to powerful patrons within the navy hierarchy; Pepys as secretary to Edward Montague (the future Earl of Sandwich), Sparrow to General-at-sea Richard Deane as a collector of prize goods. Both had an appetite for domestic news, foreign affairs and travellers' accounts. Both possessed well-stocked libraries, purchasing custom bound works directly through their contacts in the London book trade (Pepys proudly displayed his collection to selected guests while Sparrow loaned items to certain acquaintances). Both liked music and were skilled linguists (Pepys read French, Spanish and Italian, while besides his expertise in German, Sparrow also mastered French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew). Furthermore, both shared an interest in mathematics, geometry, and engineering, as well as being fascinated by scientific instruments, inventions and experiments. Pepys would be elected president of the Royal Society in 1684 while Sparrow was an 'intimate acquaintance' of Henry Oldenburg, the Society's first secretary, and if never a fellow of that institution (he seemed to balk at paying the fees) then still a noted well-wisher. After much of London's destruction by fire in September 1666 both discussed detailed plans for the city's rebuilding. And both unusually sought out and spoke with Jews, who had tacitly been readmitted to England with Oliver Cromwell's connivance only in 1656, and of whom at the Restoration there were still less than about 200 openly living in London. Sparrow, moreover, has much to say about quack medicine, faith healing and the Irish 'stroker' Valentine Greatrakes; apocalyptic predictions and the fevered reaction among English millenarians to news of the Jewish pseudo-messiah Sabbatai Sevi's exploits in 1666. Indeed, a number of entries in Sparrow's diary are sufficiently detailed giving the day of the week together with the date (notably for the years 1665, 1666 and 1667), that they can profitably be read side by side with the corresponding entry in Pepys.

Yet it is the mundane details recorded in Holman's extracts from Sparrow's diaries that are most revealing: his antiquarian pursuits – notably visits to nearby churches to record architectural features and heraldic monuments; sociable dining with friends and regular visits to his neighbours' fine homes; their marriage alliances, land transactions and schemes for estate improvement; and his own fluctuating finances. For they suggest that Sparrow's preoccupation with Boehme did not result in ostracism. Quite the contrary: he was a respected figure enjoying the trappings of gentility, a person firmly integrated in the upper echelon of local society. What set the translator apart from many members of his social class was not mysticism but politics. His fortunes had waxed with the advent of the English republic but waned during the twilight of the Protectorate and with the recall of the Rump Parliament. In June 1659 fourteen articles were presented against Sparrow and the five other collectors of prize goods accusing them of corruption.¹⁰⁷ Following the restoration of the Stuart monarch the charges were revived and in January 1661 Sparrow and two of the others were accused in the Court of Exchequer of embezzling the staggering amount of £110,632-7s.-10¼d. The evidence may have been fabricated, or at the very least embellished, but the defendants were found guilty nonetheless.¹⁰⁸ According to Holman, Sparrow's colleagues escaped to Holland leaving him 'a sacrifice to some Hungry Courtiers'. The price of his liberty was apparently set at £4000, which was 'a great Deale of money for him to part with', especially considering his sizeable

¹⁰⁷ *CSPD 1657–58*, 174, 264, 356; BL, Add. MS 5500, fols. 1r-v, 5r, 13r, 19r, 27r, 29v.

¹⁰⁸ *CJ*, vol. 8, 72; TNA: PRO, SP 29/16 fol. 15; *CSPD 1660–61*, 268; BL, MS Egerton 2979 fols. 60r–64v, 70r–71v, 74r, 88v; *CSPD 1661–62*, 133, 198; TNA: PRO, SP 29/67 fol. 319; *CSPD 1663–64*, 2, 36.

family.¹⁰⁹ Eventually his debts proved so crippling that on 20 November 1667 Sparrow was obliged to sell his manor house at Dynes Hall in Great Maplestead for £6,490.¹¹⁰ Having drawn up his will and bequeathed his soul ‘up unto the Omnipresent, Omnipotent God who filleth me and all things throughout One God the Father Word and Spirit’, Sparrow was buried at Gestingthorpe ‘with his Ancestors’ on 8 December 1670.¹¹¹

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The ‘ingenious’ John Sparrow was a seventeenth-century polyglot and polymath.¹¹² The Irish alchemist and Helmontian physician Benjamin Worsley (c.1620–1673) praised him for his ‘not inconsiderable’ judgment, ‘Parts, learninge & Integrity’, believing him to be ‘a Civil person & a man of honest Christian principles’.¹¹³ Had it not been for the loss of Sparrow’s correspondence, library and diaries – all of which were consulted within fifty years of his death by Holman in the course of his research for a planned but never completed history of Essex – we would know as much if not more about him than many of his contemporaries whose records have survived. All the same, at least now we know something more about Boehme’s foremost English translator and his wider accomplishments.

¹⁰⁹ Essex RO, D/Y 1/3/68 (vi); Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 223r-v.

¹¹⁰ Essex RO, D/DHt T 114/1, 2, 3; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 223v.

¹¹¹ TNA: PRO, Prob 11/335 fol. 312r-v; Essex RO, D/P 85/1/1, ‘Johannes Sparrow Armiger Sepultus suit octavo die Decembris Anno Domini 1670’; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 223v.

¹¹² Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 22, fol. 225r.

¹¹³ SUL, HP 42/1/9B; SUL, HP 33/2/11B.