‘Fishing after News’ and the *Ars Apodemica*: The Intelligencing Role of the Educational Traveller in the Late Sixteenth Century

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The subject of this chapter is the sending of news and information from English travellers abroad to the governing circles of late Elizabethan England. A stay abroad carried with it an expectation that casual travellers, to protect and evidence their moral, spiritual and physical health, would make themselves useful, and thus loyal, servants of their domestic government: I will argue that one key method of doing so was by transmitting news and information. Immediately, this invites questions regarding what and who exactly is being discussed. Although I will not fully explore here the complexities of what is meant by ‘news’, ‘knowledge’ and (political) ‘intelligence’, rough distinctions between these terms are implicated in the primary focus of this chapter. These distinctions and the associations they carry bear directly on how we and contemporaries regard the individual who gathers information. This is because the intention and motivation for travel define and justify the traveller: the inflection of their information-gathering activity matters. The crux is that there is an indistinctness surrounding who the traveller is and what they are travelling for; a blurred status or lack of definition that means that the traveller provides a valuable opportunity for access (to news, to people, to places), but also that they are at risk of suspicion and the accusation of immorality, whether they present as the nobleman or gentleman, the ambitious scholar or the employed agent, the youth or the tutor. I would argue that this ambiguity pivots on the kind of information the individual is expected or is seen to gather: in reductive terms, whether it is perceived as defensible learning, infective intelligence or common news.

In an activity where even the humanist traveller or the accredited diplomat could be branded with ‘the hellish Judas name of an Intelligencer’, role, intention and perception are as important as action.\(^1\)

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1. That this can be difficult to ascertain, uncertain or obscured, both then and now, does not negate the point.
2. Thomas Nashe, *Have With you to Saffron-Walden. Or, Gabriell Harveys hunt is up Containing a full answere to the eldest sonne of the halter-maker. Or, Nashe his confutation of the sinfull*
To begin with the contemporary literature, the many didactic treatises in the humanist tradition of the *ars apodemica*—a genre that grew rapidly in popularity in the late sixteenth century—all lay emphasis on travel's educative function, and on how knowledge gained by it should be put towards the good of the common weal. Beyond the rhetoric, however, travel could be about more than civic or humanistic virtue and self-improvement; the traveller could be a valuable node in the news-gathering network, able to send information back to patrons or potential patrons in domestic government. The literary tradition is composed of original, copied and circulated manuscript letters and, from the 1570s, of printed pamphlets, essays and treatises offering travel advice and guidance, adjoined to which is a counter-current of warning and chastisement by critics including Roger Ascham, Joseph Hall and Richard Mulcaster. There is a self-conscious balance maintained in travel advice texts between practical dealing and moral display; a focus on method, on civic duty, and on absorbing and recording information, employing a rhetoric of usefulness for both individual and state that acts as a counter to the critics of leisurely travelling for its own sake. I contend that this more moral and literary edge to the genre can mask—or protect—travellers' involvement in news and intelligence gathering.

William Bourne's *A booke called the Treasure for Traueliers* (1578) is one of the first printed expressions in English of the humanist ideal of aiding the country through self-development as a reason for travel:

> they are very necessary members in the common weale in divers respectes, that are travaylers into other Countries, and they are able to profyt theyr owne Countrie in divers respectes: for that hee is able to geve judgement by his owne Countrie of other, whether it bee as touching the governement of the common weale, in the executing of their lawes of the manner of traffick, and in the usage and nature of the people, bothe...