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Abstract

This essay examines the letters of the Elizabethan intelligencer William Herle during a period of intelligence-gathering in the Low Countries in 1582. Writing to his patrons Lord Burghley and Sir Francis Walsingham, Herle's letters offer a rich landscape of detail and information. Yet these are not simply 'administrative' letters devoid of emotive expression, but display epistolary structures designed to maintain patronage, and attempting to recreate the distance between correspondent and recipient. While Herle was in Antwerp, there was an assassination attempt against William of Orange. Herle was keen to convey 'breaking news' as quickly as possible, and bridge the geographical distance between the English court and Delft, where the attempt occurred. In anticipation of pitfalls in postage, and to ensure that each of his recipients received the same intelligence at the same time, Herle increasingly opted to send 'verbatim' letters: duplicate copies of important correspondence. Letter-writers could also employ diverse methods to avoid interception and perusal, such as ciphers and the accompaniment of bearers. In this way, the letter might travel unnoticed, or under protection. These ideas of envoys and letters disseminating through porous membranes, ideally, but not necessarily, authorised and endorsed by the authorities are tantalising. I explore this transmission and translation, and attempt to determine through his letters the relationship between Herle and his correspondents; writing from a location *without*, reinforcing his liminal status as both spy and informant, decentralized yet essential to the English political landscape.

A Most Secret Service: William Herle and the Circulation of Intelligence

"Wherwith humbly comendyng me to your Lords good favor, I take mi leve for this tyme, desyrows with mi harte, that ye wolld employe me yn somwhatt yn these parts, and therewith to yngrave yn her majesties gracyows oppynion, the remembrance of a zelows poore servant of hers."ⁱ

In the later half of the sixteenth century, England's ministers relied on unofficial and private information networks to supply information about foreign and domestic subjects. Among the admixture of these crown- and privately-funded networks were structures of communication and exchange built upon patronage relationships, and these societal bonds were constructed and maintained in part by the transmission of fresh and sensitive intelligence by letter and in person. Within Elizabeth I's Privy Council, William Cecil Lord Burghley, Sir Francis Walsingham, the Earl of Leicester and the Earl of Essex were the key ministers significantly responsible for compiling copious and diverse tranches of information, with an impressive geographical, political, religious and social scope. In this essay I propose to interrogate the relationships between these ministers and their agents, by examining the epistolary forms and strategies deployed in the intelligence letters of William Herle.ⁱⁱ I will focus on a particular sequence of Herle's correspondence addressed to Walsingham, Leicester and Burghley, written at a critical point in English intervention in the Low Countries conflict. I intend to use this cache of letters as a case-study, to see what Herle's epistolary legacy can reveal about the important role played by unofficial agents, intelligencers and spies in the diplomatic context.

William Herle was an agent of these three politically powerful figures. Inhabiting the grey area between diplomat, agent, intelligencer and spy, his letter-writing activity demonstrates the elastic and fluid nature of information gathering and exchange during this period. Although he was employed in official diplomatic work in the mid-1580s when he was sent as a special envoy to East Friesland on the northern borders of the Netherlands and Germany, Herle's more typical pursuits were located at the polar end of licensed diplomatic function, rarely possessing official remit or instructions but rather having unofficial, tacit endorsement to visit, discuss or

negotiate with foreign sovereigns and statesmen.ⁱⁱⁱ Herle's 'agency' was based firmly upon this collection and dissemination of information, but seems also to have extended to communication with ministers and leading figures in the Low Countries. This activity, endorsed by the English ministers responsible for steering foreign and domestic policy, reveals an alternative, more informal 'tier' of contact and correspondence with friendly nations than that of the ceremonial envoy or ambassador, who was constrained to adhere to the protocols and processes by which formal negotiation was required to proceed.

Herle's background is cloudy; no letters from him survive before 1558, and other than his letters, there are only rare glimpses of him in the historical record. A comment in a later letter to Burghley notes that he had been in the household of Sir William Garrard, a successful London merchant with strong links to the northern European cloth marts. There is some evidence that at around the time of Elizabeth's succession and in the years following, Herle was recruited by Cecil to act as an unofficial envoy to several northern European rulers in the guise of a merchant.^{iv} The evidence suggests that Herle was acting as Cecil's agent whilst employed by Garrard (it's likely that Herle was an apprentice or factor for the merchant), illustrating the convenient links between commerce and political information gathering for mobile members of society. Between this period in the fifteen-sixties and 1582, where this essay concentrates, Herle was, variously, a pirate, a prison spy, an unofficial envoy, and a seasoned gatherer of information. In this way, Herle undertook a self-modifying process, shaping his role to suit the occasion, and adapting to the grade of 'service' and function required of him in order to maintain favour with his politically heavyweight patrons. Aware that the ministers responsible for the security and active policy of England depended on a steady stream of fresh and fertile information, Herle

fixed his sights on being a source of intelligence in exchange for favour and preferment. Insolvent to the point of frequent imprisonment for debt, Herle's permanent objective was to secure gainful employment in the service of the crown. In order to establish his credentials, he performed activities that usually revolved around the pursuit of information pertaining to the health and security of the realm. It is my contention in this essay that there is a tension in the interstices of where this activity of information-gathering towards a political goal meets the aspiration for monetary reward.

Herle followed two of his patrons, Leicester and Walsingham, to the Low Countries in the winter of 1582. Departing from Sandwich harbour on the 8th of February, the two ministers were responsible for escorting Henri, Duke of Anjou to Antwerp, the city from where the Dutch revolt was being coordinated. Anjou, fresh from his unsuccessful courtship of Queen Elizabeth, was preparing to be invested as the new titular sovereign of the Netherlands, strengthening and leading the alliance between France, England and the Low Countries in the revolt against Spain. Arriving at Flushing in very rough seas, Herle left England's shores in order to escape his creditors and act as an intermediary for the profusion of information circulating in the region.^v Leicester and Walsingham returned to England at the end of February, and Herle remained in Antwerp. Upon their departure, Herle began a six-month campaign of sending regular intelligence letters to Burghley, Leicester and Walsingham, which survives as a mostly unilateral correspondence.^{vi} In his early letters Herle described Anjou's political progress: his formal reception by the representatives of the seven United Provinces of the Low Countries, the oath he was required to take, and disagreements arising from his insistence in openly inviting the Catholics of Brabant and Flanders to attend mass. Herle notified Leicester that he had instigated the

beginnings of his own private information network, the news from which would be disseminated back to England with regular dispatch,

I am entred into the familiaritie and nere fryndship of vi or vii of the principall state men of this Contrey, wherby I am hable to infforme my sellf of sondrie secretes, and of the knowledge of theyre state from time to tyme the more, to the good servyce of our Contreie, and the satisfactyon of her majestie and yow.^{vii}

By writing letters which ran to several folio pages in length, and which contained detailed news of military manoeuvres against the Spanish army, economic matters, intellectual developments and dynastic matches, Herle attempted to make himself invaluable to the administrative machine back at the English court.

His official position in Antwerp in relation to English interests is unclear. His letters describe meetings and conversations with leading statesmen in the Low Countries, including personal access to William, Prince of Orange, which would have not been possible without endorsement and letters of credence from the queen.^{viii} At this point, Elizabeth did not have a formal diplomatic representative in the Low Countries, maintaining that the voluntary military personnel active in the conflict with Spain were not connected to English foreign policy. George Gilpin, another intelligence agent based in Antwerp, was unsure of Herle's status. In a letter to Walsingham, Gilpin declared he was forwarding several letters that had arrived at his own desk (a common strategy of overseas agents which preserved their meagre resources), noting that Walsingham could test the veracity of the intelligence in the enclosed letters against those reports he would receive by other agents in the field, naming Herle as an example,

By the lettres herewith sent, the presente newes here will better appeare then I canne write, and yet as parte of my bounden dewtie, would not omitt to add hereunto that which I could learne, submitting the certaintie therof to the writing of others that have leasure and comme in place to understand the same. Amongst others Mr William Earle, who saieth himself to be left here as Agent for the Earle of Lecestre, and so is of somme reputed, though also otherwise suspected.^{ix}

Resident in Antwerp in a guise which was not immediately recognizable to another agent of his cadre (Gilpin was another member of the commercial agent turned intelligence-gatherer fraternity), it seems that soon after his arrival, Herle already had a reputation for being a portal for information.

Many intelligence letters from the period are simple reports, listing facts with little attempt to decorate the information with social niceties. Many are even anonymous, either at the time of dispatch, or because information pertaining to the correspondent (commonly on a separate cover letter or address leaf) has been lost. The content of some letters survive where the original letter has not, having been extracted and summarized at the time of receipt by the office of the Principal Secretary. Diplomatic correspondence sent by official delegates of the English crown tended to concentrate on the issue at hand, i.e. the special mission for which the envoy had been sent, or the ongoing negotiation of the resident ambassador, and adding items of intelligence on an intermittent basis.^x Herle's correspondence adheres to the social formulae of contemporary epistolarity, articulating florid, (if submissive), aspirational gestures towards employment, reward and service. Often placed directly after or linked to a particularly salacious item of news, or prior to subscription,

Herle's petitory requests and confirmation of ongoing service and loyalty to the crown were pronounced, especially during this period in 1582. In May, Herle requested to Walsingham that he intercede in a dispute over his debt to the Waad family, interposing information relating to Mary Queen of Scots,

The Bishop of Rosses genelogy and his booke withall in Latten of the scotish tytell to the Crown of England, hath byn grettlye axed for and solld at this Frankfords mart, which of mi knowledge I dare affirme, for I provyded my selff there of som few bookes, and had trew advertisment hereof. Wherwith I humblye fynissheng, do comend M^r Wades cawse and myne to your honorable decysyon, which I do pray yow to do somewhatt yn, for charitye sake.^{xi}

Herle's letters are richly studded with reports of continental affairs, in which he assembled information collated from personal conversations, his own correspondence, and forwarded lists and collections of his own gathering. The impulse behind such transmission is clearly articulated in his letters,

I wrytt to your Lord by these late postes, 5 or 6 lettres wheryn were conteyned sondrye advertysments and papers of collectyons, which I hope shall not mislyke your good Lord nor leave unexpressed the desyre I have to serve yow.^{xii}

As well as these lists, advertisements and digests of the current situation in Antwerp, Herle was keen to dispatch relevant printed material, as far as his pocket would allow. Books and pamphlets tracking the progress of the revolt, and even scribal duplicates of printed matter when copies were scarce made their way to the pulsing intelligence

centre of Elizabeth's Privy Council. Upon his arrival in Antwerp, Herle waited patiently for *La Joyeuse et Magnifique Entrée*, a book with extensive engravings and describing Anjou's symbolic entry into the city issued from the press of Christopher Plantin. He assured Leicester, Burghley and Walsingham that he would procure and send the books at his own expense as soon as they were available to purchase.^{xiii} On the 18th of March he wrote to Burghley,

when ytt comes furthe in prynte, your Lord shall have the fyrst Drawght that shalbe sene therof sent yow by me, yf I were riche (as these thinges do coste money) yow sholld have more thinges, butt your Lord will bere with this in the mene tyme, for I have no ayde here but God and my sellf and yow knowe best my habilitye.^{xiv}

Later the same evening, Antwerp was rocked by crisis. As William of Orange walked out of the dining hall after dinner at his palace in Antwerp, a man in the crowd of onlookers ran forward and shot him point blank in the face with a handgun.^{xv} The gun misfired and exploded in his hand, blowing the assailant's thumb clean off. The bullet entered William's cheek, the explosion of the bullet singeing his hair and setting fire to his ruff. In the panic and confusion, and as William was removed to another room, the would-be assassin was seized and beaten to death by Orange's bodyguards, a gruesome sight witnessed by William's young son Maurice.^{xvi} Examined in his chamber by a group of surgeons, they confirmed that the bullet had passed through his cheek and palate from left to right, grazing the maxillary artery and causing extensive loss of blood. In this confusion, rumours that the Prince was dead were flying around Antwerp. The corpse of the assailant, a stolid clerk by the

name of Jean Jaureguy, later found to be in the pay of the Spanish, was dragged into the main town square of Antwerp, and his body laid out to view.

When Herle learned of the attempt on William's life, he wasted little time in dispatching an advertisement – now lost – on the 19th of March reporting the recent climacteric events. The following day Herle sent a lengthy account of the state of the Low Countries as a result of the assault. In addition to the rumours circulating around the area that the Prince was dead, many believed that the Duke of Anjou was involved in the attack because the assailant had been dressed in the French style. This first surviving letter about the assassination attempt survives in two copies, one addressed each to Burghley and Leicester. Judging from his extant correspondence from this period, Herle registered that he was in an excellent position: having already situated himself in Antwerp as a vital node in the English intelligence network, and having an ear to the breaking news and developments within the political circles surrounding William of Orange, he was perfectly placed to report back with exigency the weighty consequences of the incident as they unfolded. He saw an opportunity to consolidate his unofficial position as intelligence-gatherer for the English crown with legitimate and prominent diplomatic activity which would invest him with a certain modicum of political gravity, and he accordingly took advantage of the situation as it developed. He wrote to Leicester,

Yf her majestie or ^{ani of} her cowncell in partycler, do wryte to condole this action with the prince, yt most be don presently and yf I be thowght fytt, I will discharge the office of delyveryng those lettres, and of the further servyce that I shalbe comanded. ^{xvii}

Herle reported that the survival of Orange was doubtful; the wound would not cease bleeding, his surgeons would not permit him to speak and insisted on personally holding a pad of lint to staunch the flow at all times of the day and night. Herle's accounts of the state of the wound were thorough, if alarmist. If William was to die, the delicate alliance between the Low Countries, England and France might disintegrate and be at the mercy of Spanish forces led by Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma. Up-to-the-minute news was vital to keep his ministerial patrons in command of the situation in order to swiftly implement decisive action should William perish of his wound.

Few reports of this incident from English agents survive in the archives. Herle was aware that his would not be the first account to reach his patrons; indeed, he would have realized that the incident warranted a special trip back home to impart the news in person. Walsingham's agent Etienne Lesieur assessed the communication landscape in equal measure, reporting

on the 18th between noon and 1 o'clock a strange rumour arose of the wounding of the Prince of Orange. The details of this I will excuse myself from writing to you, several gentlemen having been there who by this time are on your side, besides that I am sure you will hear it in detail from those who know how it all happened.^{xviii}

Colonel John Norris went further, making a brief report to Walsingham of the event and noting,

I persuade myself that ill newes flye faster then my letters cann passe; yet I could not but advertise your Honour of the villainous treason invented and executed against the Prince of Orange.^{xix}

Herle's letters following the assassination attempt record in detail the politically volatile situation, and demonstrate that Herle was keen to supply fresh information as the events unfolded, especially if Orange's condition changed. In the hasty dispatches sent back to England, there is a discernible note of uncertainty, of reporting the 'strange rumour' of the attack on Orange. Herle's position in Antwerp afforded him at least a passing chance at gathering intelligence which was endorsed by Orange's circle, and could therefore be classified as an accurate report of events. In a letter of the 21st of March he indicated that the medical practitioners supervising Orange's treatment were not confident of his recovery. He informed Leicester that Orange's condition was now looking especially grave,

In the general lettre written to your Lord yesterday, I thought good to omitt this that followith, as matter of more ymportance and secresye, to be cowched a parte.

Ytt is thowght by Gaspar the Surgyen, who hath charge (among others) of the Prynces wound, that he cannot escape, for that the Artherye is towched ... that make the cure owtt of hope. Therefore do I send this berer mi servant John Morgan of purpose, to ... her majestie by your Lords honorable menes, and will not fayll from ynstant to ynstant (having the ynsynuatyons that I have) to advertys whatt allteracyon, ether his person, or the matters of State do suffer here.^{xx}

In supporting the cost of his servant John Morgan as bearer, whose errand and journey would place pressure on his already diminished finances, Herle was committed to dispatching his servant to communicate the (prematurely) unfortunate news in person.^{xxi}

The ‘ymportance’ and ‘secresye’ with which Herle regarded as necessary the transmission of the latest diagnosis from the surgeon is a recurring refrain in his letters from this tumultuous period, and throughout his wider correspondence. Aware that the information in his letters was a precious commodity, and, from his own perspective, one which held the key to his ongoing favour and patronage with his politically powerful correspondents, Herle employed diverse measures to protect the information contained within the fragile and easily-intercepted letter packet. In the days following the assault on Orange, Herle took the opportunity to send exhaustive written accounts of the assassination attempt and the ensuing chaos which charged through Antwerp and the Low Countries beyond. One of these accounts, comprising four folio pages of cramped script, was sent to Leicester, with another copy to Burghley. In the cover letter enclosing the copy to Burghley, Herle noted,

I do send your Lorde herynclosed, the copies of my ii last lettres written to the Earl of Lecester verbatim.^{xxii}

Herle was diligent in scrupulously providing duplicate intelligence to his patrons, deploying a single bearer to deliver verbatim copies of letters along his route,

Att this present I do send this berer mi servant of purpose to my Lord of Lecester, with advertisments of ymportance, ynclosyng heryn the cople of

eche thyng that I do wryte to mi sayd Lord of Leicester *Verbatim, omitteng noe one syllable*.^{xxiii}

Herle's practice of sending 'verbatim' intelligence letters enabled his correspondents to consult and confer on information from a trusted source, and ensured maximum coverage between prominent members of Elizabeth's Privy Council. This method of communication, common among correspondents overseas or along unpredictable postal routes, provided an added layer of security to a postal system riddled with pitfalls and hazards. Should a letter be intercepted, lost in the channel crossing, or delayed along its route, a letter sent separately to a ministerial colleague had the chance of arriving safely, and the information could be shared towards a common purpose.

The verbatim letter offered more than simply the guarantee of delivery, however. In sending copies of his letters to Leicester to the hands of Burghley, Herle was making a point of offering Burghley the same information as he offered Leicester, situating himself as the point of contact between the two as a hub of information exchange. The tripartite readership engendered by the dispatch of a verbatim letter, with Herle as the principal (if distant) source, offered him the invaluable opportunity to simultaneously address the key ministers responsible for foreign policy. It is possible that Herle envisaged Burghley and Leicester using his letters as the main source of information about the matter of the Prince of Orange's doubtful recovery. His insistent and repeated employment of this strategy, one which served the dual purpose of conserving his own resources while broadcasting to a wider audience than the traditionally dyadic epistolary relationship, suggests that his correspondents responded positively to this method.^{xxiv} Herle's insistence on

duplicating the letters is significant. If the information included in a letter to one of Elizabeth's councillors was considered to be of sufficient import, it was likely to be summarized for, shared or broadcast at a council meeting or privately between ministers. That Herle considered it worthwhile to send verbatim copies suggests that he was at pains to extend and advertise his intelligence letters widely, rather than, say, merely providing extra copies of a standard digest of news in something other than an epistolary format. Herle's frequent practice of sending duplicated letters to multiple correspondents does suggest that despite his marginal and obscure status, (and being 'suspected' by fellow agents like Gilpin) the prominent figures governing foreign policy viewed Herle's intelligence letters, and letters from similarly placed agents, as central to the information network and the practical functioning of the Tudor regime.

In the above letter, Herle mentions using his servant as a bearer. The employment of a messenger known to either the letter-writer or recipient was a prudent and cost-effective measure which ensured – to a certain extent – the safety of the correspondence. To avoid unnecessary costs, it made sense to dispatch letters with a trusted individual who was already making the journey.^{xxv} The private carriage of letters was an obvious foil to the corrupt practices of postmasters in the pay of hostile forces or interested parties.^{xxvi} From the frequent subscriptions or notes describing and vouching for these bearers we get a sense of a group of people accustomed to the hazards of travelling and methods of outwitting conspirators and others with designs on the politically decisive correspondence. Furthermore, if the route travelled by post and person was extremely hazardous, the letter-writer had the option of entrusting the most sensitive parts of the news to the oral transmission by the bearer, a common method which sadly means that for the most part, the information imparted 'by mouth' is now lost.

Herle employed methods of securing his correspondence using *ad hoc* tactics where the occasion suited. Perceiving Orange's condition to be of such critical significance, as it required the utmost secrecy, Herle petitioned Burghley for the use of a cipher in order to protect the information in his letters even further,

Yf it may plesse your Lord to send me spedyllye a Cipher, which shalbe peculyer only to her majestie and your selff, I will under the sayd Cipher, advertys yow of a matter that consernes her majesties Crown and person ...
Butt trulye there most be non more acquainted with the sayd advertisments butt her majestie and your Lord alonely.^{xxvii}

In most cases, when leaving England on legation, diplomats would be provided with a provisional cipher. However, this did not guarantee the inviolable protection of the diplomatic correspondence. Indeed, those ciphers which were provided to diplomats and agents, were usually outdated, endlessly recycled, easily cracked or known by counter-intelligence organizations. In 1590, Thomas Bodley, English representative to the Council of State, was issued with a standard diplomatic cipher upon departing England.^{xxviii} However, when it came to reporting matters of sensitivity which fell outside the areas covered by the official cipher, Bodley was obliged to request of Burghley a more detailed code in which to make a sufficiently secure report. Burghley responded positively,

Wheare yowe require to have a Cipher, I doe at this present send yowe one, not verie curiouslie made for avoidinge of trowble to us both but yet sufficeint to serve our purpose, and maie be augmented as yowe see Cawse.^{xxix}

Encrypting letters, even only partially, was a time-consuming and cumbersome task requiring a significant outlay of time and resources. A survey of diplomatic correspondence suggests that it was only the particularly sensitive material within a letter which the writer would encipher, which inconveniently drew attention to and advertised the parts of the letter the writer wanted to protect. Herle's request for a cipher extends beyond the standard discourse of concern for the precarious carriage of information. His appeal for a private method of communication between only Burghley, Queen Elizabeth and himself is an extension of the scenario described above in the case of the verbatim letter. In Herle's fantasy, the private cipher, the key to which was only known to Burghley and Elizabeth, would create a restricted triad of correspondence and a valuable intimacy based upon the exchange of sensitive information.^{xxx} Indeed, Herle defers imparting the information to Burghley until the cipher has been dispatched, reversing the dynamic of power in the patron-client relationship. No evidence survives to suggest that Burghley complied with Herle's request, and the information Herle was at pains to conceal may have been assimilated into his letters (at which point the information blends with the other news and is difficult to separate) or sent by oral transmission with a bearer. Herle, as an unofficial agent (and here the distinctions are blurred between what constitutes a 'private' rather than a 'crown' intelligencer), would not have been a candidate for a royal cipher. Furthermore, it may be that Herle's request for a cipher is merely an indicator that he is fit for purpose, and that by appealing for this method of secret communication Herle emphasises his credibility and efficiency.^{xxxii}

In the aftermath of the assassination attempt, while the Low Countries anxiously awaited the outcome of William's injury, Herle concentrated on situating himself as the intermediary between English concerns directed through Burghley,

Leicester and Walsingham, and prominent figures in Antwerp. Interceding in the appointment of English soldiers, passing along messages from principal statesmen, and suggesting routes of policy to be adopted by Elizabeth and her ministers, Herle was, if only unofficially, 'our man' in Antwerp. For Herle, the opportunity to grease the passage to preferment for a fellow Englishman elevated his status to more than merely an informer. He endorsed the suit of Colonel Morgan who sought the command of his own regiment,

Your Lord most needes be good to Coronell morgan, who trewlye is a Tall sowdyor & an honest gentillman, asswell ynclyned to do your Lord service, as ani on that ever deppended of you. Yf you will vowchesave to allowe of his prefferment to a Regyment, I do fynde that bothe monsieur & the Prince of orange be well ynclyned ~~unto hym~~ to favor hym, therefore ye sholld do very honorable to comande me by 3 lynes wrytten ~~to your Lord~~ by your L. ~~to me~~ to sollicite with monsieur the Prince of orange, his advauncement before other yong fellowes that ar very busye to gett charges here, which will do nothyng elles butt sclander the service & natyon.^{xxxii}

Here, Herle bolsters his position, or at least he position to which he aspired, as the nucleus of English interests abroad in terms of the patronage network on which military appointments were made. Citing positive endorsements from Anjou and Orange (who was still unable to speak, and could only conduct the management of the revolt by writing directions on paper), he advertised what he saw as his significant political connections. Participating in this localized patronage system in a different role than his usual position in the hinterland of English hierarchy, Herle viewed the successful selection of Colonel [Thomas] Morgan as a move which would have

several positive outcomes. Orange and Anjou would receive the commander of their choice, England's interests would be served (in Herle's view, the appointment of the alternative candidates who were 'busye to gett charges' would be harmful) and Herle would have the satisfaction of having engineered the advantageous conclusion, which in itself might engender its own reward in the form of a gift from the successful party.

One month after the assassination attempt on Orange, Herle was keen to formalize his position as 'agent for the Earle of Lecestre'. In a letter which described the secret attitude to Queen Elizabeth of Pierre Loiseleur, Sieur de Villiers, adviser to the Prince of Orange, Herle suggested a route to preferment which would suit all parties,

For which & mani other resons that I understand, I do know that it is nott necessarye for her majestie to have any publick Agent here, Lest she sholld be openlye qwarrelled with, yett to yntertayne with a convenyent allowans underhand, on that sholld have vigilancye & nere dutye in hym, towards her servyce, methyncks (I speke it under favor) that it were most necessarye, wheryn remember me, your L. trew & faythfull follower.^{xxxiii}

Stoutly recommending himself for the service which he was already effectively performing, Herle's suggestion carried with it an implicit request for remuneration. A frequent tactic of Herle's was to couple a particularly sensitive and potent item of intelligence with a request that his situation might be made permanent, or at least salaried. The exchange of intelligence, in his eyes, could be reciprocated by a favourable advancement of his prospects. In the same letter in which he ruefully noted his reprimand for being too hasty in doubting the Prince of Orange's recovery, Herle robustly listed his credentials as an intelligencer, drawing attention to local negative

feeling towards English policy. He required a steady flow of monies in order to maintain and expand his sources,

I want only mayntenance & cowntenance, which her majestie might easelye supplye, yf she woldd be enclyned to ad som portyon towards the same. Wherof she hath more neede to looke unto than I, for bothe her States & person ar hated & envyed, & so be yow of her Cowncell, which will breke owtt yn practys & actyon, uppon the first occasyon, wherof when it shall plese her majestie I will give her more partyculer ynfformatyon.^{xxxiv}

Here, Herle characteristically defers the information until a later date, no doubt holding out for a promising elevation in his prospects or finances. Significantly, the financial aspect, ‘maintenance’, is figured as going hand-in-hand with official recognition of his service, ‘cowntenance’, carrying with it a connotation of patronage and support.^{xxxv}

This strategy of Herle’s, which juxtaposed information of serious political significance with requests and palpable hints at official profitable employment repeatedly failed in the middle period of Elizabeth’s reign. Disseminating information in order to maintain his patronage relationships, it is likely that the ‘valuable’ position in which he found himself, i.e. being perfectly and unofficially placed to elicit, digest and communicate information, denied him the prospect of moving into the higher, more professionalized echelons of the Elizabethan diplomatic corps. After several years of constant petition, Herle was finally awarded the post of special ambassador to East Friesland, (an assignment that left him significantly financially straitened). Herle recognized that for his individual circumstances it was through the careful

regulation of political information, whether by the careful transmission of intelligence or the satisfactory negotiation with foreign princes, that he would be able to obtain employment closer to the centre of political power, i.e. a clerkship or officer for the crown.

This route to preferment was a growing trend in Tudor bureaucracy. Clerical credentials were established in the diplomatic arena where legates displaying an equal measure of patriotic and organizational enthusiasm were ideally placed to move into lucrative positions within government upon returning from their successful embassy. While diplomatic employment was not an end to remuneration itself (indeed, far from it), it supplied the Tudor government with a dedicated coterie of skilled bureaucrats who, upon their return home, could contribute to the ceaseless administrative machine. Those involved in diplomatic affairs, from varying areas of the social spectrum, provided a sympathetic and well-connected group of proficient men on whom the Elizabethan authorities could draw for further employment upon their return home.^{xxxvi} The quotidian activity of the embassy, comprising of heavily paper-based tasks, including making surveys of affairs, summary letters, frank letters of opinion, suggesting alignments towards alliances and writing papers and reports all lent themselves well towards the kind of duties expected in a government office upon return home to England.^{xxxvii} Despite being a training-ground for lucrative government appointment upon their return home, most diplomats and official envoys bemoaned the time spent away from home. Ironically, despite the training for professional life and political acumen obtained during the embassy, they complained of the geographical distance between their patrons and themselves, which had a detrimental effect on their career prospects.^{xxxviii}

Herle's correspondence from this period exhibits the standard epistolary formulae inherent in Elizabethan letters. The bald facts and figures – the administrative elements of the letters – collated from several months spent on the continent, are juxtaposed and dressed with codified and conventional expressions of service, humility and friendship,

My lettre Right honorable, dated the 28 of Aprill, and ment to have byn sent by the post to your honor, was stayed upon som occasyon tyll now, which this berer shall delyver yow and a booke therewith: besekyng that thoughh ytt com late, ye will nott yett despise the humble menyng I have, which is to do yow ani service I can with mi harte.^{xxxix}

Founded upon textual affect, attempting to recreate the distance between correspondent and recipient, the letters were Herle's sole method of communication when separated from his patrons. They sought to compensate for the distance between correspondents. These letters were transactions - 'gifts' of knowledge in exchange for the stalling of debts, the granting of offices or official service to the crown – and their content of political intelligence made them extremely valuable.^{xl} For Herle, his letters to the political triumvirate of Leicester, Burghley and Walsingham were vehicles for his patron-client bond, a bond given impetus and currency by the exchange of information. For Elizabeth's ministers, Herle's letters were political tools, stuffed with potent intelligence, and for whom the delicately wrought (yet standard) epistolary forms designed to convey intimacy and friendship were a conventional, but decidedly secondary, requirement.

Herle's position in Antwerp was ostensibly as an agent of Leicester, yet his divided trajectories of intelligence reports suggest that his role was founded upon a

split patron-client relationship, with the incentive to supply Leicester, Burghley and Walsingham with equivalent numbers of letters. Herle supposed that the efficient, well-tested and regular stream of information might lead to a more formal engagement, whether at home or abroad. He aspired to extend his 'agency' further, to consolidate the multiple features of his work in Antwerp and to shape a protean role which included the diligent and pragmatic collection and dissemination of news and information in a secure and efficient manner. His intention to win preferment through the judicious exchange of time-sensitive information crucial to the ongoing safety of English interests was managed through the pragmatic and assiduous collation, digestion and dissemination of intelligence. Through the careful communication of sensitive news and potentially inflammatory information, Herle signalled his ability to safeguard secrets in accordance with the leading guidelines on the administration of state information of the time.^{xli}

William Herle offers the scholar a useful example of how agency was figured and configured in the early modern period. The boundary between 'official' diplomatic activity and intelligencing for profit, however deferred, was porous and elastic. Moving away from the unhelpful and vague term 'spy' (although, of all the handles given to these figures in the period, 'spy' or 'espyall' would probably feature most often, and carrying a pejorative sense), a focus on these men like Herle, who operated on the fringes of government activity, enables us to begin to anatomize the amorphous private and crown Elizabethan information networks of the early modern period. The group of agents who sent select items of news to appropriate ministers or court figures with whom they had a connection (however tenuous), whom we may also term intelligencers or informers, fed and fortified the decision-making process of statesmen. Herle's status as a conduit through which informal correspondence and

negotiation could occur between prominent English and Low Countries statesmen suggests that essential diplomatic activity was not limited to those sent out of England with instructions issued by the Queen and Privy Council. Reward for diplomatic work was not limited to high status figures, as the skills acquired on legation were eminently transferable to a government administrative department upon return home.

Agents like Herle operated on behalf of England's ministers, through the transmission of information, discussion with local officers or even conversation with the host monarch. Patriotic zeal and religious fervour aside, for many agents, the impulse for collecting information was basic – to ensure the means of subsistence. Intelligencing for personal profit, albeit through the service of the crown, could call the agent's allegiance into question. The repeated affirmations of loyalty and humble service with which information-gatherers like Herle's correspondence is flecked, suggest that the agent's visible interconnectedness within the endorsed patronage structures of early modern England went some way to mitigate this economic tension.^{xlii} Uniting the dual impulses of protecting Elizabeth and her realm and advancing his own prospects, Herle's letters open to wider view the methods and technologies of the communication of intelligence, founded upon and driven by a sophisticated and intricate patronage network.

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ⁱ British Library (hereafter BL) MS Lansdowne 36 fols. 181r-182v. 17 June 1582,

ⁱⁱ For the full edition of Herle's letters in English, see *The Letters of William Herle* ed. R Adams, (2006) Centre for Editing Lives and Letters, <http://www.livesandletters.ac.uk/herle/index.html>. For Herle's ideas of service based upon the transfer of intelligence, see R Adams, (2009) 'A Spy on the Payroll? William Herle and the mid-Elizabethan Polity' in *Historical Research* (early view), and (2009) 'Signs of Intelligence: William Herle's report of the Dutch Situation, 1573' in *Lives and Letters*, I, April. For discussions of ministerial intelligence networks of the later sixteenth century, see S Alford, (2008) *Burghley: William Cecil at the Court of Elizabeth I* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press), esp. p.167, 319, and P J Hammer, (1999) *The Polarization of Elizabethan Politics: the Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-97* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

ⁱⁱⁱ Herle was sent to negotiate a loan from Germany in the 1560s. Several copies of instructions survive for this journey; however, no instructions survive for Herle's numerous other journeys.

^{iv} BL MS Lansdowne 54, fols.150r-v, 152r-v, 6 August 1587, William Herle to Lord Burghley. O de Smedt describes Herle as a 'servant' and 'skilled businessman' of Garrard, (1954) *De Engelse natie te Antwerpen in de 16e eeuw, 1496-1582* (Antwerp), p.213; R Ehrenberg, (1896) *Hamburg und England im Zeitalter der Konigin Elisabeth* (Jena), p.61.

^v Herle had been in debt to the Wade family since at least the 1570s.

^{vi} These letters are located primarily in the State Papers (Holland and Flanders) at The National Archives, London, and in the British Library, in the Cotton collection.

^{vii} The National Archives (hereafter TNA) State Papers (hereafter SP) 83 15/36.a fol.77r-82v. 3rd March 1582. William Herle to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

^{viii} I am grateful to Dr Jan Broadway for pointing out (in relation to a separate episode in Herle's quasi-diplomatic career) that Herle would require some kind of official endorsement from the English authorities, even if his 'mission' was not a formal one.

^{ix} TNA SP 83 15/39, fols. 94r-95v. 4th March 1582, George Gilpin to Sir Francis Walsingham. Herle was not in receipt of a regular stipend during his residence in

Antwerp, see TNA SP 83 15/74, fols. 167r-168v. 21st March 1582, William Herle to Lord Burghley.

^x See, for example, Thomas Bodley's voluminous diplomatic correspondence between Cecil and the Privy Council between the years 1588-97, *The Diplomatic Correspondence of Thomas Bodley*, ed. Robyn Adams, (2009) Centre for Editing Lives and Letters, <http://www.livesandletters.ac.uk/bodley/bodley.html>.

^{xi} TNA SP 83 16/3 fols. 2r-5v. 5th May 1582, William Herle to Sir Francis Walsingham.

^{xii} TNA SP 83 15/68, fols. 148r-152v. 18th March 1582, William Herle to Lord Burghley.

^{xiii} The *Joyeuse Entrée* cost 30 stuivers to buy from the shop attached to the Plantin printing house. Herle could have opted to send his patrons the cheaper quarto edition which lacked the engravings and etchings for which the folio version is well known, only retailing at 2 stuivers. A stuiver was equivalent to roughly 30 English pence. L Voet, (1980) *The Plantin Press, (1585-1589): A Bibliography of the Works Printed and Published by Christopher Plantin at Antwerp and Leiden* 6 volumes, (Amsterdam: Van Hoeve), vol.2, p.953. *La Joyeuse et Magnifique entrée*, (1582) (Antwerp: Christopher Plantin). See also Emily Peters, (2008) 'Printing Ritual: the performance of community in Christopher Plantin's La Joyeuse & Magnifique Entrée de Monseigneur Francoys ... d'Anjou' in *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 61, no.2 pp 370-413.

^{xiv} TNA SP 83 15/68, fols. 148r-152v.

^{xv} For a detailed account of the two assassination attempts upon William of Orange, (the second one successful) see Lisa Jardine, (2005) *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent: the First Assassination of a Head of State with a Handgun* (London: HarperCollins).

^{xvi} Jardine, (2005), p.65. Jardine notes that many printed accounts state that Maurice participated in the reprisal on the assailant.

^{xvii} TNA SP 83 15/73 fols.163r-166v. 21st March 1582, William Herle to the Earl of Leicester.

^{xviii} A J Butler, (1907) ed. *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign*, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office) 1581-2, Vol.15, number 617. Etienne Lesieur to Sir Francis Walsingham, 19th March 1582.

^{xix} TNA SP 83 15//72 fol.72r-73v. John Norris to Sir Francis Walsingham, 20th March 1582.

^{xx} TNA SP 83 15/73 fols.163r-166v.

^{xxi} BL Cotton Galba C VII fols. 226r-227v, suggests that Herle was reprimanded for his bleak report on the 'unlikely' survival of Orange, 'that I sholld be so hastye in advertiseng things for understanding, that nether were assured nor lykelye'. 14th April 1582, William Herle to the Earl of Leicester.

^{xxii} TNA SP 83 15/87 fols. 191r-192v. 1st April 1582, William Herle to Lord Burghley.

^{xxiii} TNA SP 83 15/74 fols. 167r-168v. 21st March 1582, William Herle to Lord Burghley. (My) italics denote marginalia by Herle.

^{xxiv} Indeed, the practice was familiar to Burghley. In February 1590, Burghley sent a letter to Thomas Bodley indicating that he had sent a copy under separate cover, 'And bicawse a former letter of mine with the said Project might miscarry; I have *verbatim* cawsed both to be dowbled, for more suretie, and for *your* direcion thearein', (my italics), BL MS Harleian 287 fols.188r-189v.

^{xxv} For more on early modern postal systems, including those constructed for the carriage of diplomatic mail, see Alan Stewart, (2008) *Shakespeare's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), esp. chapter 7. See also Philip Beale, (2005) *England's Mail: Two Millennia of Letter Writing* (Stroud: History Press).

^{xxvi} See Nadine Akkerman's essay in this volume.

^{xxvii} TNA SP 83 15/87 fols. 191r-192v.

^{xxviii} BL MS Cotton Galba D III fols.273r-274v. Thomas Bodley's cipher, endorsed 28th November 1588.

^{xxix} BL MS Cotton Galba D VII fol. 345r-v. Lord Burghley to Thomas Bodley, 24th December 1590. Bodley's supplementary cipher is BL MS Harleian 287 fol. 187r-v. For a brief survey of the provision of diplomatic codes and ciphers, see Alan Haynes, (1992) *The Elizabethan Secret Service* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing).

^{xxx} It is difficult to credit that the queen would be presented with a letter that had not been deciphered for her survey of the contents.

^{xxx} See Nicole Greenspan, (2005) 'News, Intelligence and Espionage at the Exiled Court at Cologne: the Case of Henry Manning' in *Media History* 11:1/2, 105-25.

^{xxxii} BL Cotton Galba C VII, fols. 211r-212v. 31st March, 1582, William Herle to the Earl of Leicester. See also TNA SP 83/15/88 fols. 193r - 194v, for a scribal copy. Colonel Morgan is probably Sir Thomas Morgan, see *ODNB*.

^{xxxiii} BL MS Cotton Galba C VII f. 222r - 223v. 14th April 1582, William Herle to the Earl of Leicester.

^{xxxiv} BL MS Cotton Galba C VII f. 226r - 227v.

^{xxxv} See *OED*, 'cowntenance', *n.* 8, 'Patronage; appearance of favour'.

^{xxxvi} David Potter, 'Mid-Tudor Foreign Policy and Diplomacy', in Susan Brigden and Glenn Richardson, (2005), eds. 'Tudor England and its Neighbours' (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave), pp.106-38, p.110.

^{xxxvii} Potter, p.109.

^{xxxviii} Jeremy Black, (1997) *The Diplomacy of a Rising World Power: Britain 1603–1800* (Diplomatic Studies Programme: University of Leicester), p.7.

^{xxxix} TNA SP 83 16/3 fols. 2r-5v.

^{xl} For 'knowledge transactions', see Lisa Jardine, (1996) *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London & New York: Routledge), esp. ch.6, 'Alien Intelligence: Mercantile exchange and knowledge transactions in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*'.

^{xli} Robert Beale, *A Treatise of the Office of a Councillor and Principall Secretarie to her Majestie* in Conyers Read, (1925) *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press).

^{xlii} Greenspan, pp.117-118.