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Chapter 7

Researching Transnational/Transatlantic Connections:

The 1865 Atlantic Cable Expedition

Catherine Waters

Research on developments in nineteenth-century transnational and transatlantic media relations has been given impetus in recent years by new digital resources.

Methodologies for researching this vast field are various, and the essays by Jane Chapman and Bob Nicholson in the *Routledge Handbook* outline some of the approaches taken to date.¹ These range from the long-standing use of periodicals as a source for primary historical material on transnational themes (like modernism) to the digital exploration of developments in cultural transmission from a quantitative perspective.

My own work has drawn upon a number of the research techniques they mention, including comparative analysis of the same reported events and attention to the widespread culture of reprinting. In my current project, I examine the transnational and transatlantic connections entailed in the movement of the Victorian special correspondent and the writing he produced (special correspondents until late in the century were mostly men). I employ close reading as a fundamental critical method for engagement with the primary text, together with relevant approaches derived from literary, media, and cultural studies. In my interpretative procedures, I acknowledge nineteenth-century journalism as an industry; at the same time, I analyze the aesthetic

¹ A recent addition to the field is Andrew Griffiths's *The New Journalism, the New Imperialism and the Fiction of Empire, 1870-1900*, which includes study of the role of special correspondents in the late Victorian expansion of empire.

and rhetorical qualities that made special correspondence so culturally resonant in order to provide a “thick description” of the genre.² I have identified six broad topics typically covered by “specials”: war, exhibitions, pageantry, crime, transport, technology, and investigative journalism. This has enabled me to survey those journalists who worked in this role and to provide an account of the development of special correspondence over the course of the nineteenth century. It is the task of researching the last of these topics that I describe here as a case study in transnational/transatlantic connections.

I came to the study of Victorian special correspondence from earlier work on Dickens’s journalism, specifically Water Bagehot’s comment in an 1858 *National Review* essay that Dickens “describes London like a special correspondent for posterity.”³ In addition to acknowledging the novelist’s skill in depicting the city, Bagehot’s remark identifies a distinctive intermingling of literature and journalism that was embodied in *Household Words*, the journal Dickens “conducted” throughout the 1850s. It is just such a hybrid form of writing that distinguishes the roving reportage of the Victorian special correspondent. The employment of foreign correspondents for the *Times* dates from the early nineteenth century, and Henry Mayhew’s reports on London labour and the London poor were published in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849–50. However, use of the by-line “From our Special Correspondent” really began with the famous Crimean War reports of William Howard Russell for the *Times* at the end of 1854. The by-line henceforth was used to refer to the peripatetic journalist sent out to report on particular events. George Augustus Sala wryly described the demands placed upon special correspondents in 1871: “It is expected from them that they should be able

² I adopt the term from Geertz’s influential “Thick Description”.

³ [Bagehot], “Charles Dickens,” 394.

to start for the World's End at a moment's notice; to go to Russia in January and to India in July; to explore a district where typhus and small-pox are raging with the same equanimity as they displayed when they attended the marriage of the Prince of Wales."⁴ In the midst of such exigencies, the special correspondent was required to "wield a graphic pen, and a swift pen as well."⁵

Dispatched to report events from across the globe, special correspondents were inevitably involved in the formation of transnational and/or transatlantic connections. They developed professional relationships with foreign sources and fellow journalists, and they participated in a pervasive culture of reprinting in the years before copyright was enforced. They were also part of the process by which the British press was Americanized.⁶ The correspondence itself used graphic language to transport readers at home to the scene described abroad. Amongst the diverse range of topics covered by special correspondents, the Atlantic telegraph cable linking Britain and America serves as a useful case study for researching transatlantic connections in nineteenth-century journalism. The successive attempts to lay the cable in 1857, 1858, and 1865, before the connection was finally secured in 1866, were widely reported in the press. But which of these expeditions would provide the most fruitful focus for a study of Victorian special correspondence and the journalists who wrote it?

On August 26, 1865, the *Illustrated London News* opened with a striking article about the failure of what turned out to be the penultimate attempt to lay an Atlantic telegraph cable. As it had already reported the previous week, the failure of the *Great*

⁴ Sala, "Special Correspondent," 220–21.

⁵ MacDonagh, "Our Special Correspondent," 91.

⁶ Wiener, *Americanization of the British Press*.

Eastern to complete the cable-laying was “scarcely any news, but the story of that failure [was] full of interest.”⁷ And it was the publication of this story in the press that the paper now acclaimed: “Who has not seen it? Whose pulse has not fluttered in unison with the vicissitudes which its brief story exhibits? Who has not uttered a deep-drawn sigh at its mournful close—a sigh nevertheless, having in it none of the bitterness with which we bury dead hopes out of our sight? What ‘sensational novel’ ever swayed our emotions to and fro as this simple record has had power to do?”⁸ The subject of these effusions was the “Diary of the Cable”: William Howard Russell’s daily chronicle of events on board the *Great Eastern* that was eventually dispatched to newspapers in Britain and North America following the loss of the cable and abandonment of the voyage. Already famous as a special correspondent for the *Times*, Russell was working freelance in this case, having accepted an offer from the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company to provide a history of the expedition. In addition to writing his commissioned book, Russell kept a manuscript diary of the voyage that not only appeared in the *Times* and a host of other British newspapers on August 19, but also was published in American newspapers the following week.

My decision to focus upon the third Atlantic cable expedition of 1865 was determined by the discovery of Russell’s involvement. I made this serendipitous find when I happened upon a valuable website run by Bill Burns devoted to the history of the Atlantic cable and undersea communications.⁹ There, amongst an extensive digital archive of documents and images related to all of the expeditions, I learnt of Russell’s

⁷ “Atlantic Telegraph: Arrival of the Great Eastern,” 3.

⁸ “Diary of the Cable,” 1.

⁹ Burns, “History of the Atlantic Cable.”

part in the 1865 voyage as its official chronicler. Having selected this expedition as a focus, I needed to situate it in relation to the history of the telegraph in nineteenth-century journalism, and this required both searching for primary sources in databases of historical newspapers and periodicals—such as the *19th Century British Library Newspapers*—and surveying contemporary histories of the press.

In “Modern Newspaper Enterprise,” published in *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1876, a decade after the Atlantic cable had successfully been laid, Wemyss Reid argued that the telegraph had wrought a “marvellous revolution”: “The newspaper of today tells us everything at first hand. Ere the flames of yonder great fire in the Western city have died away, the English public has heard of the destruction of Chicago; and it knows of poor Lord Mayo’s assassination hours before the sad intelligence has been allowed to leak out at Calcutta itself.”¹⁰ But the projectors of the scheme made five attempts before this revolutionary outcome was achieved. As John Picker notes, by the mid-1860s, telegraphy and its cables were not new to the Victorians, but an Atlantic cable joining Britain and America was the most ambitious of these telecommunications projects to date.¹¹ It clearly held great promise for facilitating communication and improving relationships between the “old” world and the “new.” *The Illustrated London News* had observed on July 1, 1865, that the “immediate benefits to England and America likely to follow upon the establishment of telegraphic communication between them” included not only “peace” but a “large increase of trade intercourse” conducted “at much less risk and with much less of that wear and tear of the spirits which suspense so inevitably

¹⁰ Reid, “Modern Newspaper Enterprise,” 701–2.

¹¹ Picker, “Atlantic Cable.”

entails.”¹² The article further argues that “out of increased commerce springs increased amity. People whose mutual interests demand frequent exercise towards one another of consideration, forbearance, confidence, and a regard to honour, get to respect one another, to appreciate one another’s excellences, and to esteem one another’s character. Let these friendships be multiplied—as they will be by the telegraphic cable—and the ties which will bind the two nations together will be multiplied in the same proportion.”¹³ The American press, however, was less enthusiastic about this latest attempt to lay an Atlantic cable, its relations with Britain having cooled over the latter’s involvement with the Confederacy during the Civil War. Indeed, in an editorial titled “American Indifference to the Cable,” published on August 19, the *New York Times* decried the British as “fair-weather friends,” further declaring that Americans “have now [*sic*] cared little for the cable, because they are not now well-affected toward the land to which it was designed to connect them.”¹⁴

Notwithstanding these differences in national feeling in 1865, the expansion of the telegraph was undoubtedly one of the most significant developments for the transmission of news in the second half of the nineteenth century. Telegraphy was embraced earlier in the United States than in Great Britain, but that situation changed from the 1870s, when the British government nationalized the telegraph system, leading to gradual cost reductions.¹⁵ Moreover, the premium placed upon speed was given

¹² “Atlantic Telegraph Cable,” 2.

¹³ “Atlantic Telegraph Cable,” 2.

¹⁴ “American Indifference to the Cable,” 4.

¹⁵ Joel Wiener argues that it had “less of an immediate impact on journalism in Britain in part because London newspapers such as the *Times* and *Daily News*, while seeking to disseminate news at speed, were not engaged in as intense a competitive rivalry for control of the print market.” *Americanization of the British Press*, 67.

impetus by the success of Archibald Forbes, special correspondent for the *Daily News* during the Franco-Prussian War, who repeatedly scooped his fellow special correspondents in his reports from the seat of the action sent by telegraph. Later in the century, one of his rivals, William Beatty-Kingston, special correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, lamented the change wrought by the telegraph, remarking that “long letters, learned, thoughtful, descriptive, or humorous, frequently masterpieces of literature and delightful reading, had had their day and were relegated to the limbo of discarded superfluities.”¹⁶ The correspondent, he wrote, “is becoming a collecting-clerk in the news trade, attached for so many hours or minutes *per diem* to the tail of a telegraph wire.”¹⁷ Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the speed with which the “latest intelligence” could be relayed would increasingly trump the discursive elaboration and picturesque reporting of events that had been the hallmark of the special correspondent’s letter from the 1850s.

Indeed, the special correspondent for the *New York Tribune* was candid about the likely impact of the telegraph on his own work, even as he acknowledged the doubt hanging over its prospects for success. In a letter dated “LONDON, August 5, 1865,” he writes,

I hope with all my heart, that before the arrival of this letter ... the appearance of a copy of THE TRIBUNE with half a column of titles announcing the successful attachment of your end of the great cable to the younger half of the world, will have stultified the half of this epistle—and this in spite of its inevitable heavy discount upon the future labors of such as myself—but it doesn’t look like it at present.¹⁸

¹⁶ Beatty-Kingston, *A Journalist’s Jottings*, 2:361.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:360.

¹⁸ “From Our Special Correspondent, London,” 1.

However, the advent of the telegraph did not transform the collection and reporting of news overnight. As I discovered, this third Atlantic cable expedition provides a more complicated picture of the relationship between old and new communication technologies in the development of nineteenth-century journalism than is commonly supposed.

In researching the 1865 expedition, my aim was to use newspaper accounts of its progress to illustrate the role and significance of special correspondence in the context of changing communication technologies in general and the attempt to establish a new transatlantic connection in particular. I hoped to address some of the research questions of my larger project on the special correspondent and Victorian print culture: What formal and thematic features characterize their writing? How does special correspondence relate to the New Journalism? What role did it play in the discursive formations of literature and journalism in the second half of the nineteenth century? I wanted to explore the strategies British journalists used to put readers at the scene of the action as the Atlantic cable crossed the ocean on board the *Great Eastern*. To begin with, I conducted a keyword search for “Atlantic telegraph” in Gale Cengage’s *Newsvault*, which cross-searches a range of relevant databases, including *19th Century British Library Newspapers*, *British Periodicals*, *The Illustrated London News Historical Archive*, and *The Times Digital Archive*. Since the expedition began from the Nore in the Thames Estuary on Saturday, July 15, 1865, and ended with the loss of the cable sometime around Friday, August 11, I initially delimited the results by date (from July 1 to September 30) so as to capture any discussion of the expedition immediately before and after it took place. I also restricted my search by section (“Editorial and Commentary” and “News”), which nevertheless produced over 300 results. Since

provincial newspapers were unable to finance their own special correspondents at this time and relied on reprinting reports from the London press, to narrow the focus further, within these results I selected major metropolitan newspapers where special correspondents had been dispatched to cover the launch of the cable expedition: the *Daily News*, *Morning Post*, *Standard*, and *Times*. *The Illustrated London News* published sketches by a special artist with some accompanying letterpress that would be relevant to my analysis. Since the *Daily Telegraph* had not at that time been digitized, I realized that I would have to access it using microfilm. I postponed this stage of my research until I had searched the digital newspaper resources, which would enable me to refine the dates that would be most relevant for my investigation. Coming to this project from a background in literary studies, another unsettling factor was that I had no way of identifying the journalists writing under the by-line “From our Special Correspondent.” While the *Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals* provides details of correspondents who worked for particular newspapers, identifying the special correspondent responsible for any given letter in the *Times* or the *Standard* is another matter altogether because of the policy of anonymity that lasted in some titles until the end of the century.

I was particularly interested to know whether Russell was responsible for the anonymous letters about the expedition “From our Special Correspondent” that appeared in the London *Times* throughout July and into August. As I discovered when I looked at the online archives for US newspapers published at the same time, a number of these letters were reprinted in the American press and attributed to Russell. For example, the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* of August 2, 1865 (accessed in Gale Cengage’s *19th Century US Newspapers*), reprints the special correspondence of the London *Times*

dated July 14, reporting that this account of the voyage of the *Great Eastern* from the Thames Estuary to Valentia was written by Russell. However, Russell's diary (which I subsequently accessed at the News Ltd Archive in London) indicates he was already in Ireland on the date of the ship's departure. The only newspaper report that I have been able to establish as having been definitively written by Russell is the "Diary of the Cable" that was published in the *Times* on August 19, 1865.

The first task was to read through all of the special correspondence about the cable expedition in the newspaper titles I had selected, with a view to analyzing its significance. I was initially puzzled to find that the coverage only ran from the departure of the *Great Eastern* from the Nore until it left Valentia (on the west coast of Ireland) to commence laying the cable. I could not discover a reason for this until I eventually came across a note in a *Times* report of June 30, 1865, remarking that "none not connected with the business of laying the cable will be allowed on board the *Great Eastern*."¹⁹ However, I could not discern when this decision was taken or how it was announced. I found another reference in a July 28 letter "From our Special Correspondent" in the *Daily News* that referred to the "pains taken by the Telegraph Construction directors to exclude representatives of the press from the *Great Eastern* during her voyage from Valentia to Newfoundland," thus tacitly confirming that Russell had been given exclusive rights to chronicle the expedition.²⁰ I would have expected this restriction on their freedom to elicit some criticism from the members of the press, yet I found no record of discontent in British newspapers. However, the *New York Times* was unequivocal in its condemnation of the policy, providing another indication

¹⁹ "Atlantic Telegraph," June 30, 1865, 9.

²⁰ "Atlantic Telegraph Expedition," July 28, 1865, 6.

of the differences in point of view that marked transatlantic responses to this latest cable expedition. On July 13, the *New York Times* argued that the decision to exclude the press was “at variance with honest and reputable management,” noting that a “cooked report” on the expedition by an official chronicler was of little value.²¹ It further claimed that “in determining to be the reporters of their own doings,” the directors of the telegraph company had not only “[interfered] with the free and natural current of intelligence” but were attempting to conceal the actual carrying capacity of the line.²² The article continued: “Any ‘unauthorized’ report of these results, presenting the facts in a popular form, would give the public an insight into the financial policy of the directors which these gentlemen have evidently determined to prevent, by excluding the representatives of the press from the *Great Eastern*.”²³ Subsequent reports referred to a “private letter from Mr Cyrus W. Field,” one of the founders of the Atlantic Telegraph Company, which explained that the exclusion was necessary because “some members of the press might enter into conversation with the engineers, and thus distract their attention from their highly important duties.”²⁴ These reports were widely reprinted but did nothing to lessen the *New York Times*’s disapproval.

While British and American newspapers showed contrasting reactions to the exclusion of journalists from the *Great Eastern*, the reports of the special correspondents that appeared in the press at both ends of the voyage similarly employed the sort of graphic description that distinguishes the genre. The *Great Eastern*

²¹ “Atlantic Telegraph—A Bad Beginning,” 4.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ “Atlantic Cable—the Great Eastern,” 5.

commenced her journey from the Nore in the Thames Estuary at noon on Saturday, July 15, and the special correspondents from the London newspapers on board were unable to dispatch further reports until she reached Berehaven harbour off the coast of Ireland on Thursday, July 20. Upon their arrival at Valentia to watch the laying of the shore end of the cable, however, the special correspondents dispatched graphic accounts of what they saw. On July 24, the *Daily News* published a telegram sent by its special correspondent announcing that the *Great Eastern* had commenced “picking up the shore end, and is beginning to make the splice. Signals have been sent through the shore end that all is well.”²⁵ There was a significant difference in length and style between what could be reported by telegraph and what could be transmitted by handwritten dispatch at this time. The special correspondent’s laconic telegraphic message stood in contrast to his loquacious letter to the *Daily News*, which was reprinted a week later in the *New York Times* (August 7, 1865). He describes the scene of the successful laying of the shore end of the cable as a “tableau for an artist”:

The spectator who, after drinking in the beauties before him from the heights, scrambled down the rugged path and stood among the men hauling the cable on shore ... was ... in a magnificent natural amphitheatre, with toiling peasants, earnest *savans*, excited seamen, and eager capitalists for his actors ... and the broad Atlantic for his stage. Mr Creswick never surpassed the rich hues and bright tints of the rocks and vegetation around; Frith never painted brighter eyes, more supple figures, or more picturesquely artistic costumes than those of the barefooted nymphs. ... Stanfield never transferred to canvas a more beautiful and varied sea-piece than the one before us.²⁶

²⁵ “Atlantic Telegraph Expedition,” July 24, 1865, 5.

²⁶ “Atlantic Telegraph Expedition,” July 25, 1865, 6.

Such word-painting was not possible by telegraph. While the bare fact of the shore-end of the cable having been successfully landed was reported in a series of telegrams reprinted in London on July 24 and in New York on August 6, the description of its hauling over an improvised pontoon of small boats before a crowd of admiring spectators required the discursiveness and graphic power of the special correspondent's letter. Even though readers were no doubt transported by such vivid accounts, they received them only after a transatlantic time-lag which demonstrated the limitations of tying communication to vehicular transport and underlined the rationale for the expedition.

So far as the laying of the shore-end of the cable in Valentia was concerned, the American newspapers were content to reprint the reports of special correspondents from the London dailies. For example, the *New York Times* of August 7 reprinted reports from the special correspondent of the *London Times* of July 23 and 24, together with the report from the special correspondent of the *Daily News* mentioned above.²⁷ Once the *Great Eastern* commenced her voyage westwards, both British and American newspapers had to rely upon the telegrams dispatched from the ship via the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company in Valentia. As news of faults and repairs came out intermittently, brief reports were supplemented with discursive accounts (presumably written by staff writers) speculating on the fate of the cable.

A search through online newspapers in the *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* database enabled me to discover that the *New York Tribune* had sent a special correspondent to meet the cable at its destined landing-place in Heart's

²⁷ The letter was dated 'Valentia, SUNDAY, July 23,' but published in the *Daily News* on July 25.

Content, Newfoundland. Comparison of his report with letters sent by special correspondents for the London newspapers from Valentia shows that his correspondence for the *New York Tribune*, while not so distinguished by self-consciously picturesque flourishes as theirs, displays similar rhetorical strategies for involving the reader through the use of the second-person pronoun and personal anecdotes.

His first letter from Heart's Content, a small fishing village on the eastern shore of Trinity Bay, dated August 8, recounts the journey from New York including whimsical descriptions of being attacked by "very dirty small boys" in Portugal Cove with "boiled lobsters at a cent each"; being overcharged on the steamer to Carbonier; and finding that a horse-drawn transport from thence to Heart's Content was available only "if you will walk up the hills."²⁸ "This you are weak enough to consent to do," he notes, "for consequence, you walk nearly the entire distance, reaching your destination with anything but a contented heart and very tired feet."²⁹ The habit of turning (mis)adventures into a lively letter characterises the writing of special correspondents on both sides of the Atlantic. Forced to find something to write about while waiting for the arrival of the cable, the special correspondent's letter of August 9 details his tour of the office shared by the Atlantic and Newfoundland Telegraph companies. He recounts a "sort of a lecture" by Mr Lundy of the Atlantic company on the operation of the telegraph apparatus, and he describes the fear among the company's employees that "some disaster may occur during the laying of the cable, from the fact that efforts were made, during its construction, to destroy the insulation, and so render the cable

²⁸ "Cable," 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

imperfect.”³⁰ On August 11, he reports “still no Great Eastern,” noting that the “food (codfish) is becoming tiresome—for consequence, the Bohemian fraternity are going about hungry.”³¹ Then he reports the arrival of a schooner on August 13 bringing bad news from the *Terrible* (the ship of war acting as tender to the *Great Eastern*) that the cable had broken. This was followed by the arrival of the *Terrible* itself on August 15 carrying Russell’s “Diary of the Cable”. The correspondent explains that he has dispatched this “Diary” with his letter of August 16. The *Tribune* reprinted the “Diary” in the same issue, dated August 28, in which all of these variously-dated letters from its special correspondent appear.

As recorded in Russell’s “Diary,” the drama of the expedition began on the first day as the *Great Eastern* turned westward, with the discovery of a fault in the cable after only eighty-four miles had been laid. Russell describes the “feeling of gloom [that] for some time spread over the ship” as company employees tried to discover the location of the defect and observed the difficult and tedious operation of hauling the cable back in with machinery inadequate to the task.³² The next day, the fault was discovered to be a piece of iron wire stuck through the cable. Spliced, joined, and tested, the laying of the cable recommenced—only to be stopped again on Saturday July 29 in the early hours of the morning when a second fault occurred. When the defective portion of the cable came on board and was repaired at 11:15 p.m., Greenwich Time, Russell wrote, “it was impossible to resist the irritating and sorrowful conviction that such an injury was the work of some hired cable assassin, or some purposeless

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Diary of the Atlantic Cable,” 9.

malefactor.”³³ It was resolved that a watch should be set on the tank as a precaution against further sabotage, and then the laying of the cable recommenced once more.

Four days later, however, another serious flaw was detected. Russell describes in painstaking detail the difficulties of retrieving the fault this time and the dismay felt on board when “just as the cable reached the dynamometer, it parted, 30 feet from the bow, and with one bound leaped, as it were, over and flashed into the sea.”³⁴ Mr. Canning, the chief engineer, resolved—“all but egregious folly as it seemed—to seek for the cable at the bottom of the Atlantic.”³⁵ Russell’s description of this fishing expedition is a tour de force:

At first the iron sank but slowly, but soon the momentum of descent increased so as to lay great stress on the picking-up machinery, now available to lowering the novel messenger we were sending down armed with warrant of search for the fugitive hidden in mysterious caverns beneath. Length flew after length over cog-wheel and drum, till the iron wires, warming with work, heated at last so as to convert the water thrown upon the machinery into clouds of steam. The time passed heavily indeed, all life had died out in the vessel, and no noise was heard except the dull grating of the wire cable over the wheels at the bows. The ocean was indeed insatiable. “More” and “More” cried the daughter of horseleech from the black night of waters, and still the rope descended. 1,000 fathoms, 1,500 fathoms, 2,000 fathoms, hundreds again mounting up, till at last, at 5 6 pm [*sic*], the strain was diminished, and at 2,500 fathoms, or 15,000 feet, the grapnel reached the bed of the Atlantic and set to its task of finding and holding the cable.³⁶

The rhetorical effects of this passage—its artful repetitions and its animation of the inanimate—suggest why the *Illustrated London News* saw Russell’s diary as rivalling

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

the sensation novel in its emotional appeal. From August 3 to 11, this peculiar form of deep-sea fishing with grapnels was pursued and the cable was caught and hooked again repeatedly, but on each occasion the lifting apparatus gave way and the grapnel and retrieval rope were lost. The effort to fish up the cable was not finally relinquished until the morning of Friday, August 11, when the remaining rope for retrieving it ran out. With the abandonment of the expedition, the *Great Eastern* left on her return voyage to Britain.

How did Russell's "Diary of the Cable" make its way into the British and American newspapers, I wondered, and what does this tell us about transatlantic print culture at this time? The circulation of the "Diary" clearly demonstrates the widespread practice of reprinting—on both sides of the Atlantic. An article in the *Mechanics Magazine* of August 25, 1865, explains that Russell's diary had been handwritten and reproduced on board the *Great Eastern* using lithography.³⁷ Comparison of this article with contemporary newspaper reports led me to discover that the *Mechanics Magazine* had copied its information from the *Daily News*'s letter from its special correspondent, which was written "On board the *Great Eastern*, off Sheerness, Sunday" and published on August 21:

A lithographic workman with stone and press, had one of the ordinary ship's cabins given up to him. Every morning the diary of the preceding day was written by Dr. Russell and copied by Mr. John C. Deane. . . . The slip was then lithographed and a hundred copies struck off. Meanwhile, envelopes addressed to the editors of 25 American journals, and to the editors of 65 published in England, Scotland, and Ireland, were kept in readiness, and as each day's news was told off it

³⁷ "Atlantic Cable Gossip," 15.

was added to the stock already folded for posting. By this means the letters were sent off simultaneously, and without a moment's unnecessary delay.³⁸

It would be interesting to know the titles of these twenty-five American and sixty-five British newspapers. Although the letters were sent off at the same time, the vicissitudes of transatlantic travel clearly prevented their simultaneous publication and, as noted above, the "Diary" appeared in London newspapers on August 19 and a week later in the American press. This temporal disjunction also produced a variation in the final entries of the "Diary" as it was published. As the special correspondent of the *Daily News* explained, "The Terrible took the American bag, and would forward it from Newfoundland, and as on the rough day on which she parted company with the *Great Eastern* it was impossible to keep her boat alongside while the final sheet of diary was lithographed, all the letters but one were sealed without it, Dr. Russell writing to the agent of the Associated Press at New York, to telegraph the last part of the news to the 24 journals unsupplied."³⁹ As a result, even though the American newspapers carried Russell's diary entries for August 10 and 11, they were truncated versions of the text that was published in full in the London dailies.

Meanwhile, when the *Great Eastern* reached Crookhaven on the southwest coast of Ireland on Thursday, August 17, Russell disembarked and presumably telegraphed a brief summary of the expedition and an announcement of the ship's safe return, which appeared in the London *Times* on Friday, August 18. The "Diary" was published in full the following day in the major metropolitan newspapers. How Russell's copy could have been transmitted so quickly to London is unclear. As Bill Burns argues, Russell's

³⁸ "Atlantic Telegraph," August 21, 1865, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

account, at over 12,000 words and filling eight columns of the *Times*, seems too long to have been telegraphed in full. Although the “importance of the story would certainly have justified the time and cost involved, ... the transmission would have taken many hours and would have been subject to errors.”⁴⁰ A more feasible explanation, he suggests, is that the diary may have been sent via a canister dropped from the *Great Eastern* to a waiting steam-tug as she passed off Plymouth on Friday and then transported by express train, or possibly a special train hired by the *Times*, to London.

The time lag in the transatlantic publication of Russell’s diary highlights the temporal disjunction that the laying of the Atlantic cable was designed to obviate. The telegraph separated communication from transportation, freeing the transmission of information from the constraints of geographic distance.⁴¹ Its use in American journalism from the 1840s onwards made speed in the collection and distribution of news its “most striking feature, ... while in Britain both newspapers and magazines demonstrated a greater predilection for experimentation in the area of pictorial journalism,” according to Wiener.⁴² Other differences revealed by a comparison of the publication of Russell’s diary in London and New York newspapers include the featuring of news rather than advertising on the front page, use of headlines and cross heads, and typographical boldness—all of which developed later in Britain as part of the New Journalism. In the *New York Times* (as reprinted from the *Boston Post*), cross heads were used to punctuate Russell’s narrative. It was preceded by an editorial

⁴⁰ “1865 Great Eastern Diary.”

⁴¹ See James W. Carey’s seminal essay on the development of telegraphy, “Technology and Ideology,” in *Communication as Culture*, 203.

⁴² Wiener, *Americanization of the British Press*, 71.

comment that perhaps reflects continuing concern in the American press about the exclusivity of Russell's access to the expedition: "Mr Russell ... enjoyed unusual facilities for obtaining full and authentic particulars of all that was important on the voyage. It is written in his usual brilliant style, and will be found to be quite interesting."⁴³

If this was grudging praise, the *Daily National Intelligencer*, reprinting from the *New York Express* on August 30, was more generous:

Dr. Russell's official account of the Great Eastern's voyage, and the abortive attempt to lay the cable, has found its way into the journals—but the public interest in it has been in great measure anticipated by the record of results previously published. The Doctor, however, brings his clever pen into play, and he tells the whole story with the vividness of a real artist, who knows how to invest even the driest scientific technicalities with a melo-dramatic [*sic*] attractiveness that is certain to arrest the public attention.⁴⁴

And arresting it was—on both sides of the Atlantic—as we have seen in the enthusiastic reception afforded by the *Illustrated London News*. While the Atlantic cable was successfully laid in 1866, it would be a few years before special correspondence written in Russell's "brilliant style" would finally be superseded by the development of other new media.

⁴³ "Atlantic Cable," 1.

⁴⁴ "Cable—Mr. Russell's Story," 1.