

Transnational Exchanges

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‘The new owner of the newspaper asked who that man was in the corner. ‘The exchange editor,’ he was informed. ‘Well, fire him,’ said he. ‘all he seems to do is sit there and read all day’’ (Mosher 1932).

In his 2001 study of global information networks, Yrkö Kaukiainen lamented that it ‘is commonly believed that not much happened in the transmission of information before the introduction of the electric telegraph, which has even been regarded as the start of a communications revolution’ (Kaukiainen 2001: 2). This contention has been reinforced by both popular and scholarly histories of nineteenth-century news: both Standage’s *The Victorian Internet* (1999) and Howe’s *What Hath God Wrought* (2007) give titular prominence to the technology, while Silberstein-Loeb’s *The International Distribution of News* centres around the device, noting its socio-economic role in equalising access to overseas news (Silberstein-Loeb 2014: 111). Joel H. Wiener referred to the device as ‘one of the supreme milestones in press history’, claiming that it ‘broke down existing temporal barriers to news acquisition and transmission, nurtured wire agencies into existence, and accelerated stylistic and typographical changes in reporting’ (Wiener 2011: 65). Although he concedes that these changes were not immediate, he concludes that ‘no other breakthrough in technology has affected the press as profoundly, prior to the Internet revolution of our own age’ (Wiener 2011: 66).

For studies of the British periodical press, there is something very enticing about the confluence of the dawning of the Victorian Age and the introduction of telegraphy in 1837—a convenient turning point for journalistic method and style. Yet, another contemporaneous event, the beginning of regular transatlantic steamship conveyance in 1838, receives far less notice despite its critical importance in expanding access to overseas content (Cranfield 1978: 165). The

evolution of the international post (Robinson 1964, 189), and the implementation of fast, global mail steamers (Shulman 2015, 218-9; Wiener 2011: 64), are rarely discussed in studies of the British press beyond noting editorial complaints that foreign newspapers were often delayed by an incompetent or uncooperative postal service (Williams 1959: 48). Conversely, discussions of colonial news systems, long detached from electronic networks, do weave narratives of electronic and postal communication together more tightly (Finch 1965: 99; Harvey 2002: 21; Joshi 2017: 8; Lampe 249-250; Lester 2005: 6). This disparity in the literature suggests that the British press was dominated by electronic communication, while the colonies remained trapped in a pre-telegraphic, steamship economy, rather than acknowledge that both were part of a global information network that integrated steam, rail and wire into traditional news gathering processes.

This chapter contends that the increasing use of the electronic telegraphy after 1840 represents neither a fundamental nor immediate turning point in the process of transnational news exchange. Instead, the ways in which overseas news was acquired and presented by British newspapers evolved slowly over the course of the nineteenth century, aligned to similar but less public exchanges of commercial and financial information by merchants with overseas connections. Building directly upon early modern epistolary practices, nineteenth-century editors continued to rely upon personal relationships with international news gatherers, as well as on abstract connections within the community of editors and their readers, to collect and synthesise relevant overseas information. The introduction of electronic telegraphy gradually affected the practical and stylistic implementation of this system, but did not dismantle or supersede the underlying human network that sustained transnational exchange before, during, and beyond the nineteenth century. What follows is therefore an examination of the underlying

consistency of transnational news exchange across the century and the specific and limited ways in which electronic communication influenced this system.

Epistolary Networks

Epistolary networks, as developed in the early modern period, served as the bedrock of transnational exchange in the printed newspaper of the nineteenth century. Earlier distribution methods and stylistic conventions remained visible and largely consistent throughout the period, not only in the printing of manuscript letters, but also in typographical and editorial decisions surrounding reportage. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the paths by which overseas news came to Britain were well worn. In the seventeenth century, private courier networks stretched across the continent, traversing the Holy Roman Empire from Sweden to Naples, wending along the central roads of France and the Netherlands, fanning through Britain, and bridging the Mediterranean to either the Ottoman Empire in the east or to Spain and the New World in the west (Schobesberger 2016: 62). These loosely defined pathways are difficult to map precisely—the most direct routes were often delayed by military movements, disease, or unreliable couriers (Rolfe 2016: 569-70)—and experienced news gatherers might send or obtain information through routes that were geographically longer but reliably faster or more cost effective (Sheila Barker 2016: 718-20). Moreover, as Europe, and particularly Britain, expanded its military and economic reach, such pathways linked to new branches in North America, Africa, Asia and Australasia, each with their own overlapping political, trading and domestic communication networks.

As with continental land routes, nineteenth-century shipping faced temporary blockades, natural disasters and seasonal weather in the quest to relay news to Britain through the most efficient hubs of existing correspondence networks. For example, despite regular direct

shipping between Glasgow and Jamaica, and similar connections between Saint-Domingue and Nantes, news of Haiti's revolutionary constitution came to the *Glasgow Advertiser* through neither of these channels. Instead, the document declaring Haitian independence was translated and printed in Washington's *National Intelligencer* (14 August 1801), and reprinted, heavily edited, by *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* in Philadelphia (9 October 1801). A copy of the *Advertiser* was then carried aboard an American trading vessel to France, where it was retranslated for a September issue of *L'Echo de Bourdeaux*. A copy of the *L'Echo* then made its way to the United Kingdom, where it was again translated, most likely by a London daily, before journeying northward to feature in John and Thomas Mennons's *Advertiser*, marred by grammatical infelicities but having made an efficient journey of just seven weeks. Thus, despite occasional detours, the major hubs and edges between European nations were well established by the turn of the nineteenth century, augmented rather than upended by expanding domestic postal networks and colonial shipping routes (Haffemayer 2016: 805; Segal 2014: 472-3).

The layering of overlapping but discrete correspondence networks, catering to international commerce, interstate diplomacy, colonial governance and domestic communication, decentralised the dissemination of news and allowed for multiple narratives of an event to develop and evolve as it travelled across and beyond Europe (Dillon 2016: 836). In Britain, this decentralisation and divergence was accompanied by a curatorial style that presented readers with 'a composite, even contradictory picture of an event; it was [the reader's] task—or their right—to interpret for themselves what they read' (Brownlees 2016: 403). This tradition of intermixing manuscript correspondence, printed newssheets, pamphlets, and word of mouth was evident from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth century. Private correspondence between business partners, family members (Beals 2011: *passim*), or state officials (Sheila Barker 2016: 737-8; Peacey 2016: 420-1), frequently referenced newspaper

material to confirm or dispel rumours. Likewise, newspapers throughout the Anglophone world referenced and transcribed letters from abroad to provide another, arguably more authentic, perspective from which their readers could divine the true state of international events (Beals 2016: 152, Hamilton 2004: 303; Markovits 2008: 559; Potter 2007: 628).

That nineteenth-century newspapers would use and build upon existing correspondence networks is unsurprising, given the fundamentally similar modes of transporting news, or rather the news bearers, via carriage and ship. However, maintaining the stylistic and typographical form of the letter in an increasingly institutionalised printed news industry was less certain. Over the century, newspaper editors responded to changing costs, reader expectations, and competition in a variety of ways, but most continued to include a broad mix of local gossip, editorial commentary, international reportage, literary prose and poetry, numerical tables, comic or horrifying illustrations and advertising notices. How they chose to order and present this hodgepodge demonstrates the continuing influence of the early modern news letter format and its adaptation to technological and social change.

Information derived from manuscript sources, namely letters directed or forwarded to the printer, appeared in newspapers in one of two ways. The contents of the letter could be summarised, intermixed with news gathered from other sources, and prefaced with indicator phrases such as ‘letters and papers have been received’, along with the dates of the correspondence, their routes, and the degree to which the accounts differed (*The Age*, 16 April 1826). In the latter half of the century, telegraphic dispatches continued to reference epistolary networks with comments such as ‘letters have been received from Pembrokeshire to the 10th inst’ (*Western Mail*, 11 January 1870). In some cases, editors simply listed up to a score of geographically related snippets, one or two sentences in length, with little or no

acknowledgement of the different sources being presented, mirroring the cadence of quayside gossip, which was often the source of at least some of the material. Letters could also be transcribed directly, with varying degrees of truncation, under heading such as ‘Parisian Correspondence’. Within these letters, a range of sources might be referenced, such as the letter appearing in the 12 July 1830 issue of *The Bull*, which noted that ‘I have before me a packet of letters which I have received from Sidi-Ferruch. Some are three weeks old, and others as recent as the 26th of June. I will give you their substance, and incorporate with them the intelligence communicated in the *Montieur* of this day’.

In both transcription and summary, overseas news was headed not with date and location of the action described but with those of the correspondent, indicating when the information was conveyed rather than when the event occurred. It was also presented to readers in the order received by the printer, providing them with neither a chronology of the events nor of the discovery of those events by the original correspondents (Beals 2016: 161). This non-linear style mirrored that of a manuscript letter, where the newest information was appended to the end, the letter growing until the exhaustion of the paper or the requirement of dispatch terminated the narrative. Thus, overseas reportage within nineteenth-century newspapers resembled traditional newsletters not only in their dissemination pathways but also in their organisational style.

Those who composed the text for the newspaper likewise retained the personal authority associated with early modern news gatherers. Although the curatorial role of the editor applied to all aspects of the newspaper, transnational exchanges required close attention to interpersonal connections—both abroad and within the local readership. Lengthy editorial commentaries on international news were relatively rare, appearing most prominently in

discussion-laden newspapers such as *The Examiner*, and particularly about stately or diplomatic matters with domestic implications (Matheson 2000: 563). Even here, editors occasionally felt remiss in expressing themselves too boldly. ‘We are so little in the habit in this country on being taken into the confidence of the Government during negotiations with foreign Powers’, noted *The Hampshire Advertiser*, ‘that we feel some embarrassment in availing ourselves of the liberty of criticism which is thus offered’ (27 June 1863). Instead, most texts were left to speak for themselves through either the analysis provided by the correspondent or the purposeful omission or highlighting of facts within reprinted material.

In other cases, commentary was inserted later in the issue, physically detaching it from the direct reportage. The role of the editor in these circumstances was not to provide lengthy discussions of foreign occurrences, but to curate the most reliable assortment of information for their readers, just as their predecessors had done (Heyd 2012: 35-8; Petitjean 2016: 185; Sara Barker 2016: 329). To curate effectively, editors and printers also had to maintain personal relationships with the local community, making themselves available in person or by post to obtain a much wider selection of letters than their own contacts might have warranted. Alongside domestic ‘letters to the editor’, personal correspondence from colonial settlements and military engagements were occasionally forwarded to editors, and their publication prompted other readers to send in corroboratory or contradictory accounts of their own (*The Kelso Mail*, Mail, 15 July 1830; McDonald 1999, 114). Editors rarely offered explicit critiques of the content, instead suggesting the authority and relevance of the letter via the relationship of the author or recipient to the community and the ‘respectability’ or trustworthiness of their character (*The Preston Guardian*, 15 January 1848).

Depending on the diversity of the readership, these irregular networks provided newspapers, particularly smaller provincial newspapers, with a dynamic range of overseas news that could rival or occasionally exceed competitors capable of employing regular or special foreign correspondents (Beals 2016: 152-4; Chalaby 1996: 307; Potter 2007: 628). Yet, even formalised relationships grew out of informal personal and business communication with advertisers, distributors and partners in overseas ventures. For example, as colonial settlements began to provide employment opportunities to Britain's journeyman printers, transnational exchanges with former employees or partners became an inexpensive means of obtaining experienced and well-placed correspondents in the distant corners of the Anglophone world (Hamilton 2004: 306; Potter 2003: 120-1). As the century progressed, foreign correspondents evolved from *ad hoc* reports by individual contacts to semi-professional or contracted writers: whereas letters describing foreign uprisings or military engagements were frequently included in the first decades of the century, true war correspondents, akin to modern reporters and local stringers parachuted into war zones, only came to prominence after mid-century, and only for a small number of well-coined publications (Markovits 2008: 559, 562-3; Potter 2007: 635).

Moreover, the individuals sent or recruited from a conflict were still supported by a 'barrage of letters to the editor', which Markovits refers to as 'participatory journalism', stemming from a national pride and sense of duty to contribute to a robust and free press (Markovits 2008: 561). Institutional foreign bureaus and the permanent stationing of staff abroad are more accurately seen as developments of the 20th century—which are now falling victim to reduced revenue streams and the return to citizen reporting through social media (Hamilton 2004: 303). Thus, overseas news coverage, in its dissemination, form and character, was built upon a series of densely interwoven personal connections, traditional correspondence networks, and epistolary and conversational, rather than encyclopaedic, modes of discourse.

Scissors-and-Paste

Although the evolution from personal correspondent to foreign correspondent was largely straightforward, correspondence was never the exclusive form or means of overseas reportage; alongside transcriptions and summaries of letters, and direct reportage, were reprintings and retellings of material from overseas periodicals, ephemera and books. Scissors-and-paste journalism, also referred to as reprinting or textual reuse, described the process wherein one periodical printed, in part or in whole, the text of another one, with or without specific attribution and a without a formal syndication agreement. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nearly all newspapers employed this method to obtain content, especially international content, for their publications.

For smaller newspapers, especially where the editor and printer were one and the same, obtaining and curating texts from other publications was part of the daily work of the general editor. As staff sizes increased, newspapers employed specific exchange editors, at entry-level, to sift through incoming subscriptions and prepare them for insertion (Garvey 2013: 213). As the number of newspapers and exchanges increased, the job of selecting the most relevant and interesting texts became more difficult. An American exchange editor, reflecting on his employment, noted that ‘He reads and mutilates newspapers from nine o’clock in the morning till six in the evening. The Tribune and Herald have enormous exchange lists. It is as much as one can do to glance over a day’s mail in a day’ (McKivigan 2008: 6). Although the mechanics of obtaining, selecting and setting printed texts may appear wholly different to those of direct correspondence, especially in the crowded marketplace of the late-nineteenth century, scissors-and-paste journalism reflected both a continuation and a gradual evolution of early modern

correspondence networks, an adaption of traditional methods to modern communication technology.

This consistency is first seen in way editors sent or obtained this material. In both Britain and the United States, newspaper exchanges were considered a public good, allowing for the widest possible dissemination of information, and therefore worthy of governmental support; newspapers could be sent between editors, as courtesy subscriptions, through the public postal system either *gratis* or at a heavily subsidized rate, and copyright was not applied to newspaper material until the end of the century (Seville 2011: 249). Although this system was occasionally abused, with old newspapers being used to send correspondence, and papers such as the *Thief* being derived wholly from reprinted material (Feeley 2014), it was remarkably robust. In 1800, an article printed in London could be dispatched, received, selected, set, and printed in Aberdeen within a week, with most time-sensitive news being distributed across the British Isles, regardless of the port of entry, within ten days (Beals 2017). Whether Britain exported this practice alongside its surplus printers, or it evolved from similar market pressures, it was present throughout the empire, though the size of certain colonies could increase the acceptable shelf-life of a locally produced text to over a month (Green 1936: 95-6; Clark and Wetherell 1989: 294-5; Joshi 2017: 8).

Overseas news was more complex. Whether letters to and from the colonies would enjoy the same rates as post within Britain was long debated, but the imperial rate for a newspaper, while not free, remained heavily subsidised at 1d, a fraction of the standard rate by weight and further evidence of the value placed on news dissemination. Extra-imperial postage, on the other hand, was contracted through private companies, with steam ship rates to New York ranging between 2 to 4d per pound of newspapers by the second half of the century (Robinson 1964, 248-9, 253-

4, 261). Private agreements, alongside variations in the frequencies of different postal routes, unevenly affected the speed and cost of obtaining transnational news for metropolitan, port and inland editors. Moreover, newspapers with a larger international circulation generally dispatched them in packets, rather than single issues, and a significant percentage chose to employ private freight services similar to the practice of private 'ship letters'. In the second half of 1844, for example, Sydney received over 63,732 overseas newspaper issues, nine per cent of which came by private conveyance (Robinson 1964, 189). An editor's selection of publications was therefore heavily influenced by the same forces dictating the delivery of traditional correspondence: the routes and schedules of commercial shipping and terrestrial couriers, international postal agreements, inclement weather, and piracy.

It was also constrained by the limited number of periodicals from certain parts of the Anglophone world. Until the 1820s, there was only one newspaper published in New South Wales; by mid-century southern Africa remained primarily represented by the three main Cape newspapers (Potter 2004, 45-6), and South America saw a handful of Anglophone titles published for the benefit of local English immigrants, though these included 'a good deal of material translated from the local Spanish-language press' (Desbordes 2008: 131). Within these options, newspapers tended to make use of material from others within their ideological network. Chris Holdridge (2011) has demonstrated how overseas exchange between Australian and African newspapers was shaped by a shared ideology concerning indigenous peoples, and how the critical inclusion of articles from select British newspapers helped justify feelings of abandonment and misunderstanding by the metropolis. Political networks were equally evident when the material was uncontroversial. In the first half of the century, as Australia's newspaper press slowly expanded, the specific texts that appeared in Britain were often dictated not by the content of article but by the political affiliation of the first British publication to include it, with

Whig and Tory newspapers typically circulating reprints within rather than between their political compatriots (Beals 2016: 153, Potter 2004, 57).

Ethnic and national bonds also influenced the curation of overseas content. Provincial newspapers in Scotland, Wales and Ireland frequently reprinted articles that discussed emigrants from their respective nations (*Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* 19 August 1840; *Caledonian Mercury* 17 July 1843; *Wrexham and Denbighshire Advertiser, and Cheshire, Shropshire and North Wales Register* 29 December 1860), while *The Scotsman* and *Caledonian Mercury* provided regular updates on Port Phillip because they (spuriously) considered it ‘essentially a Scotch Colony’ (7 November 1840). Once a packet of newspapers arrived, the editor determined which texts would be inserted and the extent to which they would be truncated or otherwise amended. Miscellaneous material, particularly humorous or sensationalised accounts, could be set aside and inserted as required—sometimes years after their arrival. Among news reports, editors had to select both the specific articles they would transcribe or summarise, and the order in which they would appear over several upcoming issues. Part of this decision was practical, a judicious balancing between providing the latest and most relevant news items within the physical space available.

To support scissors-and-paste exchange, and encourage use of their content over that of their competitors, overseas newspapers often summarised several weeks or months of news within the issue that immediately preceded the departure of a mail packet (Potter 2004, 47). After its debut in the British press, it might then be reprinted dozens of times, moving in waves across national print news outlets, and into Europe. Indeed, London’s role as a clearing house for international news was so prominent that by the end of the century journalists in Europe and the United States began to complain of France’s unseemly ‘plagiarism’ of the British press

(Chalaby 1996: 307-8). Considering the near-universal engagement with scissors-and-paste throughout the century and across linguistic borders, this accusation may reflect a shifting perception of the practice by the twentieth century, further suggested by more restrictive interpretations of copyright law (Alexander 2010: 249; Bannerman 2016: 80-98). It may also simply suggest the scale at which the practice was being implemented by century's end. Scissors-and-paste thus represented a kind of extended public correspondence, a significantly larger range of content from a much wider network of depersonalised correspondents arriving through well-worn dissemination pathways alongside rather than in place of epistolary content. Having been obtained, reprinted materials continued compositional traditions associated with letters, such as minimal analysis or commentary, and implicit connections between author and action locations. They also continued to act as independent accounts, of uncertain veracity, rather than as parts of an established institutional narrative. On 26 September 1800, for example, the *Glasgow Advertiser* printed a report that Thomas Jefferson had died from a malignant fever, then raging across New York and Philadelphia. His death was not remarked upon further but, two months later, the *Advertiser* predicted that Mr Jefferson, presumably having risen from the grave, would win the upcoming election. Such errors in overseas reprints were rarely given explicit retraction or correction in subsequent issues, and instead were simply overtaken by more recent or authoritative accounts.

Despite similarities in the selection and presentation of manuscript and printed sources, attribution practices were distinct. The nature of placing personal correspondence in the public sphere, particularly if discussing sensitive or controversial topics, made explicit identification of authors extremely rare in the first half of the century, though a gradual rise in the number of domestic by-lines was mirrored by an increasing number of named overseas correspondents. In most cases, a pseudonym or editorial designation such as 'our correspondent' or 'a

respectable gentleman' from a specific location was used. In contrast, printed materials often receive no introduction or attribution, with several articles appearing in rapid succession with neither text nor decoration to differentiate source materials. When they were attributed, it typically took one of three forms: a headline indicating the postal location from which the publication had arrived; an in-text attribution to the original source location of publication such as 'New York papers'; or a lead-in or closing tag that indicated the specific publication from which the text was taken.

Subsequent reprints often retained the latter two designations, suggesting that attributing the original source was preferable to acknowledging the intermediate publication from which they had obtained the material. However, this form of geographical attribution, clearly connected with epistolary tradition, fell out of favour by the end of the century.

Before 1850, headlines such as 'Ireland', 'The West Indies', and 'Van Diemen's Land', informed readers of the source of reprinted material, with the discussion often only having a tangential connection to the location mentioned. This declaration of provenance allowed informed readers to infer accuracy and recency through personal correlations. Moreover, by comparing the headline location with in-text attributions to the original publication and the event location, readers were informed of the routes by which the news was obtained, adding further contextual information regarding the reliability of the information. Whether this was consciously understood by contemporary readers, the consistency with which it was included by metropolitan and provincial newspapers, and the extent to which such clues were retained over multiple reprintings, indicates that they were an accepted typographical convention well into the Victorian era.

After mid-century, technological changes, the expansion of steam shipping and the increasing reach of submarine telegraph lines, as well as wider trends in journalistic prose, began to change how reprinted material was presented (Chalaby 1996: 311). Topical headlines, previously omitted or placed below geographic ones, became more common, and references to the site of newsgathering and its route to Britain becoming increasingly obscure, regardless of the means of transmission. Contrast, for example, the following three articles on the West Indies:

‘*THE WEST INDIES*. KINGSTON (JAMAICA), SEPT. 20.—We copy the following from the *Barbadian* of the 11th of June:— ‘We have called upon our own countrymen to make an effort to support the character of the island at this important crisis; we would also appeal to the leading men in all the British West India Colonies to unite, with heart and hand, to counteract the mischievous tendency of writers in England, who are striving, with most persevering malignity, to make us appear infamous in the eyes of Europe, and who will never rest without some speedy and decided exertion on our parts, until they have thrown us out of the pale of British protection. [...]’ (*The Morning Chronicle* 2 December 1823)

Here, the text is headed with an epistolary dateline, despite originating from a printed publication, and the conversational tone is retained, providing readers with a seemingly direct connection to the original writer. After 1850, rapid steam-ship conveyance of newspapers across the Atlantic, and around the Cape, gave port town editors a greater volume and variety of texts to choose from, a variety that rippled throughout the domestic exchange network as different transnational networks merged inland. Conglomerated single-paragraph summaries of multiple sources became more common, replacing the series of one-sentence paragraphs that

had been characteristic in the first decades of the century. Indeed, both exporters and importers of overseas news began to package news into digestible, easily transmittable units (Finch 1965: 99-100). The lineage of postal transmission remained, though, with geographical headings and in-text route attributions continuing to appear in most publications.

‘THE WEST INDIES. The West India and Pacific Steamship Company’s steamer Hayti arrived in the Mersey yesterday, with dates from Puerto Cabello to September 22. With the exception of some local disturbances, Venezuela was free from Civil War. On account of untimely heavy rains, the coffee crop will be anything but abundant next year. [...]’ (*Liverpool Mercury* 17 October 1865)

By the 1890s, references to dissemination pathways became increasingly rare, and the voice of overseas reporting shifted from local witnesses to disembodied and unmappable narrators. Moreover, as domestic competition reached its height, editors sought to repackage and sensationalise reprints, extending the shelf-life of cyclical and distant events that served “to remind us, however inadequately, of the existence of perennial themes” (Mayer 1964: 93).

‘AWFUL DISASTER IN THE WEST INDIES. A BRIDGE SWEEP AWAY. EIGHTY PERSONS DROWNED. A terrible calamity has occurred in Hayti through the collapse of a bridge over the St. Marc, whereby eighty persons who were crossing at the time lost their lives. The sad affair took place on Friday last. The recent storms had swelled the mountain streams considerably, and the River St. Marc overflowed its banks, thereby undermining the foundations of the bridge of St. Marc. [...]’ (*Northern Echo* 19 August 1891).

Although epistolary datelines, topical headlines, and summarised texts appeared throughout the century, these extracts illustrate general shifts in the way overseas reprints and summaries were formatted. They suggest that despite newspapers building upon an existing correspondence network that presented manuscript and printed material in fundamentally similar ways, and despite their continued use of private correspondence and printed texts to fill pages and deepen narratives, an increasing supply of overseas content and the introduction of short, disembodied telegraphic dispatches pulled journalistic discourse in a new direction.

Telegraphic Transmissions

Following the introduction of the Cooke and Wheatstone and Morse systems in the 1840s, telegraphic networks grew rapidly, spurred on by the need for up-to-the-minute military and financial intelligence. In Britain, the telegraph gained particular prominence in the last quarter of the century, after the nationalisation of the Electric and International Telegraph Company (Hobbs 2009: 31), at which point it appears to have disturbed the flow of overseas news, and encouraged the use of telegraphese, compressed and comparatively plain text, in all forms of journalistic prose (Matheson 2000: 561).

Yet, telegraphic news was only ever one component of a wider international system, with dispatches enriching and influencing but never fully displacing earlier systems of transnational exchange. Despite telegraphic news dispatches being a common sight in both metropolitan and provincial papers by the 1850s, in comparison with other forms of exchange, electronically transmitted news had a relatively small number of column inches. The *Caledonian Mercury* of 16 June 1859, for example, only included half a column from Reuters, compared to six columns of correspondence and reprinted material under the heading of 'Foreign intelligence' on the previous page. A contemporary issue of *The Times* (21 June 1859), offered a similarly paltry

number of inches, though European dispatches were scattered throughout and North American telegrams were referenced in transatlantic correspondence. The practical reasons for this brevity were obvious: the cost of international dispatches was high, especially for those being transmitted across the Atlantic. In 1866, use of the cable stood at a staggering \$10-a-word, compared to 4d to ship a packet of newspapers from New York, or 6d to send a letter from anywhere in the British Empire (Robinson 1964: 260), although the cost of maintaining writers abroad could also add up quickly (Chalaby 1996: 307). Even if material was obtained via an agency—for example Reuters (Desbordes 2008: 124)—telegraphic news could only ever supply a small portion of the text needed for a daily publication. Understanding the telegraph's role in transnational exchange must therefore consider both its genuine ability to compress the news cycle, and its more nuanced effects on discourse and dissemination.

Throughout the century, epistolary and printed materials travelled at different rates between different nations, sped or delayed not only by Euclidean distance but also by the quality of roads, the support or hindrance of local governments, the frequency of mail packets and commercial shipping, and seasonal changes to travel times. Despite attempts by the Press Association to pool resources, the introduction of telegraphic communication did not serve as an effective equaliser even within Britain. Instead, the uneven spread of global telegraphic cables, and their varied ownership, reshaped news networks in new but also fundamentally conventional ways. Taking an Anglocentric perspective, cables were laid in recognisable circles from the English metropolis, first within Britain, then across the channel in 1851, and then across the Irish Sea the following year. Lines began to stretch across the Mediterranean in 1854, and across the Atlantic a decade later. This imperial network was enlarged in the 1870s with connections first between Britain and India and then with Australasia.

This official network expansion, however, sat alongside dozens of other terrestrial and submarine cables laid across the world by private and public ventures. Each one allowed not only for direct communication between those locations, but also for rerouting or indirect recirculation of information between distant corners of the world, giving new prominence to locations that hosted telegraph stations and the physical transportation networks that fed and drew from them. Connections between Ceylon and India in 1857, or Havana and Key West in 1868, allowed for a consolidation and packaging of news before it was transmitted by postal networks, rerouting, however marginally, the flow of information. It also led to the economic development of these new communication hubs, as seen by the growth of Darwin, Australia after the laying of the Banjoewangie-Darwin cable in 1871—and the subsequent discovery of gold nearby. In most cases, however, telegraphic communications were layered and intermixed with other forms of news, just as reprint texts had been intermixed with private correspondence. For example, between 1870 and 1872, news from Britain could take 10 to 14 days to reach Australasia through purchasing printed copies of telegraphic dispatches sent to Bombay and then forwarding these to Australia by ship. Practices such as this, along with the sheer size of the continent itself, made Australian papers a peculiar assortment of letters, newspaper reprints, telegraphic dispatches from within the continent, and printed telegrams arriving by mail packet or overland route.

Nor was this problem specific to the colonies. Synchronism zones, offsets between the original date of a report and the date of its publication in Britain, had previously been defined by geography and access to major commercial or political centres. With the advent of telegraphy, these continued to be influenced by distance but were mediated by the number and connectivity of telegraph lines and, most importantly, the type of news being transmitted. At its start, the telegraph had been primarily a commercial tool, used for the smooth running of the railways

and the transmission of commercial intelligence, pushing financial news out of alignment with its political and environmental context. War reporting soon became an obvious genre to benefit from telegraphic speed, but military officials (unsuccessfully) protested the use of telegraph lines for informing the general public of the current position of British troops (Markovits 2008: 563), and the brevity of these reports often required supplementary correspondence in the days and weeks that followed, leading to the printing of posthumous reports and news items made obsolete by more recent telegraphic news (Potter 2004: 50-1).

The telegraph also pushed some regions to the edges of the public consciousness. Correspondence from imperial settlement communities had long been a staple of the British press, a bilateral exchange between subjects at home and abroad, with Australian newspapers referring to British letters as 'home correspondence'. Although less frequent than accounts from Europe, the United States and India, through the 1860s, imperial settlement communities commanded a significant number of column inches when letters or printed accounts arrived by packet and, by extension, a considerable level of detail. By placing an increasing emphasis on immediacy, however, the telegraph devalued (even if it did not supplant) slower forms of communication, particularly discursive and time insensitive accounts on the socio-economic progress of the dominions and global regions not yet connected through electronic communication (Potter 2003: 111). With the arrival of printed news in the early modern period, many queried how newspapers could be 'new' if you had time to set and print the content. In the same way, a generation of rapid communication via the telegraph had made long-form reporting seem less like 'news' than other formats. Thus, by the 1890s, peacetime news from Antipodean settlements were typically short, descriptive telegraphs of political appointments and market prices, with reflective accounts such as the two-column 'Views of a Banffshire

Man' on 'The Situation in Johannesburg' (*Aberdeen Weekly Journal* 25 July 1896) a rare echo of what had been a staple of imperial reportage.

Journalistic discourse likewise evolved alongside the growth of instantaneous communication. The general formula of telegraphic news, with its staccato and highly formulaic style, was clearly a fundamental departure from the traditional, long form presentation of overseas news. Yet, in the first decades of its use, it largely retained the tropes of printed correspondence. With a growing domestic and European telegraph network at its disposal, but nearly a decade before the first transatlantic cable, *The Morning Post* of 7 June 1850 introduced a column of American news as follows:

THE UNITED STATES.
(THE OFFICES OF THE EUROPEAN AND
AMERICAN TELEGRAPH COMPANY.)
(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

LIVERPOOL, Friday Morning.

The American steam-ship Pacific has just arrived here
with one day's later intelligence from the United
States than that received by way of Halifax and
Niagara. [...]

Here we see an unwieldy blending of old and new styles: a header referring to the place of action rather than the source, an attribution to both the telegraph office and a company correspondent, and a narrative describing the physical route by which the content had come before being domestically wired to London. The provenance of news obtained entirely by telegraph was more directly stated. The aforementioned dispatches in the *Times* were presented as:

The following telegrams were received at Mr. Reuter's
office, June 20:--

‘TRIESTE, MONDAY, JUNE 20.

‘According to reports current, the Austrian vessel
Buona, of the class No. 2, which has been captured by
the French, has been given up as free, because its
proprietor and its captain are Venetians.’ [...]

In its introduction and style, it is indistinguishable from manuscript correspondence, save its mentioning of Reuter, who is styled as a personal recipient rather than an institution. By the 1870s—following the creation of the Press Association, the nationalisation of the telegraph, and the establishment of a flat domestic rate for telegraphic messaging—news reports had gradually transformed from epistolary forms into brief summaries associated with news obtained from overseas periodicals, with geographical headings replaced with phrases such as ‘NEWS BY ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH’, or notes establishing the office of transmission (Rantanen 1997: 613; Rantanen 2003: 444).

By century's end, transnational telegraphs bore little resemblance to long-standing forms of overseas news. Short, encapsulated stories with topical headlines, padded with relatively generous whitespace and horizontal rules to signal discrete reports. Moreover, across a given page, there was little to distinguish telegraphic reports from those transcribed from manuscript or printed sources, beyond headline attributions and their relative brevity. Despite the many avenues by which news continued to reach editors, the wide-spread use of the telegraph coincided with a new discourse in British journalism. The now classic reverse pyramid structure of news reporting, whereby the most important news is situated in the first lines, followed by background of decreasing importance and relevancy, is thought to have

originated from the frequent faults in telegraph cables cutting off a correspondent mid story. Information arriving by ship began to be reframed as background, memorial or corrective accounts of events that had already been reported by telegraph and that had largely faded from public consciousness; this is reminiscent of the earlier practice of typesetting information as it arrived, regardless of contradictory or anachronistic data, though efforts were now made to frame these as a qualitatively different type of content. Thus, by the end of the century, international news coverage had evolved to incorporate telegraphic communication into the existing epistolary system, providing British readers with information obtained in a variety of ways, but presented in an increasingly homogenised, modern form.

Conclusion

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the British public was offered a selection of printed documents of differing lengths, periodicities, and styles, containing a medley of local, national, and global news, commentary and literary content, formatted and framed by an evolving set of expectations and supported by a flexible, long-standing correspondence network that not only allowed but promoted transnational news exchange. This chapter has argued that three principal sources of overseas news content—correspondence, scissors-and-paste reportage, and telegraphic dispatches—did not supersede each other but instead provided a layered, multifaceted and corroboratory image of the world in the same manner as manuscript and printed news had worked in tandem in the early modern world (Belo 2016: 377).

Epistolary content formed the core of transnational news exchange. Drawing directly from the early modern precedent of the manuscript newsletter, nineteenth-century editors originally presented transcribed and summarised correspondence as the most up-to-date, detailed and authoritative accounts of overseas events. When printed, they retained the physical hallmarks

of their manuscript origins: the correspondent's location, the date of dispatch, and the route by which the letter was obtained. Unlike manuscripts, specific authorship was often obscured, but the status associated with being a private correspondent, with a verified character and privileged access to information, was implicitly retained, providing a sense of direct access and personal connection to an otherwise depersonalised product for mass consumption. More real than illusory, an editor's access to a broad range of overseas correspondents, whether directly or through interaction with readers, determined the extent to which their publication could provide a competitive selection of content. As the century progressed, *ad hoc* communications were supplemented through regular arrangements with individuals abroad, including fellow editors and paid special correspondents. The development of global transportation networks allowed not only frequent postal dispatches but also enabled press organisations to commission and send temporary correspondents to places of interest, knowing their communiques would be sent swiftly through relevant communication systems. Likewise, the growth of empires and a general increase in human migration provided Anglophone newspapers an ever-shifting supply of enthusiastic if untrained amateur correspondents. In the end, although specific routes and means of transportation evolved over the course of the century, the core mechanisms by which early modern exchange took place continued in nineteenth-century practices, with letters playing a consistent role in the gathering and presenting of overseas news through to the twentieth century.

Scissors-and-paste journalism, in its most accepted and praised form, enhanced and expanded these epistolary networks by providing editors with a much broader, if less personal, range of content. Political and economic competition in the nineteenth century spurred the development of ever more robust and sprawling postal networks (Segal 2014, 472; Kaukiainen 2001, 17). These increased the effectiveness of existing correspondence networks but, more importantly,

privileged the dispersal of printed news content by subsidizing the international exchange of newspapers. Yet, editors continued to attribute reprinted texts in the same way as they had correspondence, through spatiotemporal markers, and suggest their direct authority through limited editorial commentary. Curating news would become a significant part of editorial practice and activity. Reprints, like printed correspondence and manuscript newsletters before them, were part of the avalanche of news information packaged up into newspaper columns.

Not all of it was verifiable but taken together it provided the reader with the ability to map his or her own view of the current state of world affairs. As perceptions of recentness shifted, so, too, did Victorian journalistic discourse shift: manuscript correspondence would be redefined and altered from reflective commentary into a telegraphic 'news' style. Such subtle changes to the form in which newspapers summarised printed content demonstrate the growing influence that electronic communication had on the presentation of transnational news, even as the majority of column inches continued to be gathered through improved but fundamentally traditional manual exchange.

That telegraphic communication helped shape the development of international news in the nineteenth century is undeniable. Nonetheless, as this discussion has shown, telegraphic news was likewise influenced by previous epistolary practices, framing staccato, geographically disembodied texts in traditional epistolary forms. 'Our correspondent', as they were often styled, retained a visible and implicitly personal role in the final years of the century, however linguistically detached they had become from the text. Stating the geographical location of the transmission station likewise echoed geographical headlines and datelines common to the first decades of the century. Most important of all was the layering effect of electronic communication on overseas news. By 1900, newspapers were filled with mixed content, not

only via the different types of text they printed but also the extent to which such texts had themselves been created from multiple news sources—the letter containing telegraphic news, the reprint of a letter, the dispatch commenting on a newspaper report. At no stage did one system or technology supplant another entirely or evolve unidirectionally from an archaic to a modern form of journalism. Instead, in the practical dissemination of content as well as its presentation, direct correspondence, reprinting, and telegraphic dispatches layered and worked collaboratively within previous systems, influenced by and influencing traditions in British overseas news gathering.