



Wired Love

Ella Cheever Thayer

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Wired Love

Ella Cheever Thayer

Wired Love Ella Cheever Thayer

This book published in 1879 mulls what how authentic a romance can be that is mediated over the wire by two telegraph operators.

An excerpt from the book:But a very significant noise to Miss Nathalie Rogers, or Nattie, as she was usually abbreviated; a noise that caused her to lay aside her book, and jump up hastily, exclaiming, with a gesture of impatience:--"Somebody always 'calls' me in the middle of every entertaining chapter!" For that noise, that little clatter, like, and yet too irregular to be the ticking of a clock, expressed to Nattie these four mystic letters:--"B m--X n;" which same four mystic letters, interpreted, meant that the name, or, to use the technical word, "call," of the telegraph office over which she was present sole presiding genius, was "B m," and that "Bm" was wanted by another office on the wire, designated as "X n." A little, out-of-the-way, country office, some fifty miles down the line, was "X n," and, as Nattie signaled in reply to the "call" her readiness to receive any communications therefrom, she was conscious of holding in some slight contempt the possible abilities of the human portion of its machinery. For who but an operator very green in the profession would stay there? Consequently, she was quite unprepared for the velocity with which the telegraph alphabet of sounds in dots and dashes rattled over the instrument, appropriately termed a "sounder," upon which messages are received, and found herself wholly unable to write down the words as fast as they came.

Wired Love Details

Date : Published February 20th 2009 by Dodo Press (first published 1879)

ISBN : 9781409963226

Author : Ella Cheever Thayer

Format : Paperback 172 pages

Genre : Romance, Fiction, Classics, Historical

 [Download Wired Love ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Wired Love ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Wired Love Ella Cheever Thayer

From Reader Review Wired Love for online ebook

Jane says

Many stories have been told over the years, of couples who meet and correspond without – or before – ever coming face to face. ‘Wired Love’ is a particularly lovely example of that type of story, and – given that it was published in 1879 – a strikingly modern story.

Nattie – Miss Nathalie Rogers – was making her own way in the world. She was bright, she was independent, she hoped to become a writer one day; and she had secured a room in a respectable boarding house and employment in the small, local telegraph office. I liked her from the start, and oh how I empathised with her when she had a difficult day.

She was trying to take down a message that was being sent far too quickly for her to transcribe, she was being interrupted by a customer asking foolish questions, and then she upsets a bottle of ink all over herself. Of course she had to ask “C” – who was sending that message from another telegraph office – to stop and repeat quite a few times. “C” lost patience with her, but when “N” stood up for herself and explained exactly what she was having to deal with “C” understood. The pair went on chatting over the wire – in Morse code – whenever things were quiet in their respective offices..

The relationship between “C” and “N” grew beautifully. They weren’t really supposed to chat on the wire, but the other operators in their circuit were tolerant, and curious about what might happen. They knew that “C” was a man, and Nattie knew too but he was so easy to talk to, she never expected to never meet him in person, and so she was maybe a little more open than she should have been.

“C” and “N” did meet – of course they did – and Nattie’s friend Cynthia, who was intrigued by the relationship that grew on the wire, drew him into their social circle. But things didn’t play out as Cynthia hoped. “N” was shy with “C” in real life, and quite sure that he would fall in love with Cynthia. And “C” was sure that “N” had another admirer; she did, but she could never see him as more than a friend.

The story played out perfectly, with a lovely mixture of comedy, drama and romance. The characters were beautifully drawn, and I particularly liked the way that Ella Cheever Thayer presented Nattie and Cynthia as modern, independent young women, with ambitions beyond matrimony, without pushing things too far.

Their friendship was beautifully drawn, and the pair brought out the best in each other.

The story was engaging, a likeable cast was well managed, and I wasn’t at all surprised to learn that the author was a playwright – this seems to have been her only novel – that she had worked as a telegraph operator. The story lived and breathed, and it rang true.

It was, at times, wonderfully prescient:

“Ah well then the young woman was only in advance of the age,” said Miss Archer; “and what with that and the telephone, and that dreadful phonograph that bottles up all one says and disgorges at inconvenient times, we will soon be able to do everything by electricity; who knows but some genius will invent something for the especial use of lovers? Something, for instance, to carry in their pockets, so when they are far away from each other, and pine for a sound of ‘that beloved voice,’ they will have only to take up this electrical apparatus, put it to their ears, and be happy. Ah, blissful lovers of the future!”

My only concern was how we were going to get to the inevitable ending, which was also the ending I

wanted.

It came, of course, via the telegraph

Agnieszka says

Usually when I review a book from previous centuries, I have to preface it with warnings about the bits that are dated, weird, or offensive to modern sensibilities. No such preamble is needed here.

The book is a bit prescient in that it presents that unfolding of a romance between two people who first meet as operators over a telegraph wire. Maybe that's dated again because now when people meet online they often do know what each looks like. Still, the story, including the fascination of the unknown others, seemed to speak to experiences I've had with online friendships and would-be romances.

The structure of the story is the classic comedy-romance with multiple couples, mistaken intentions, mistaken identity, interfering others, and a happy ending. If you've read, for example, PG Wodehouse, the plot structure will feel familiar. I don't mean this to say it's boring, but rather that the structure (unlike in many older books) is pretty accessible to a modern reader.

The last important thing worth mentioning is the main character, Nattie. Nattie works as a telegraph operator, lives on her own in a rented apartment, is not particularly pretty, and has aspirations to be a writer. Most of the story is from a close 3rd person view of Nattie, and Nattie is an excellent character. The narrator, speaking from Nattie's close view, has some sharp things to say about women's limitations in society in some places, and Nattie's very existence as a working and ambitious woman are a statement about women's changing place in society.

Read this book for its delightful story line, its prescience about online friendships, its view into Victorian society, and its progressive view of women's role in society.

Kathryn says

This was a joyful surprise. I was immediately drawn in by the similarities of the long distance communication via telegraph and today's chat rooms, as well as other comments concerning technology. The author had a wonderful grasp of where technology (cell phones!) was headed. And then the characters grabbed hold of me. The various personalities and the situations they found themselves had me laughing out loud through the grand majority of the book. It was such a fun, light read.

Alisha says

Tremendously cute. The type of story in the "Shop Around the Corner" and "You've Got Mail" genre, although this one pre-dates both.

Nattie, a young woman who has obtained a post in a telegraph office, is having a particularly bad few minutes. The telegrapher on the other end is sending way too fast for her to decipher, a customer is asking

stupid questions, and then she upsets a bottle of ink all over herself. These things cause her to interrupt "C" (the telegrapher on the other end) several times and ask for a repeat of the message, until "C" loses patience with her and gets a little sarcastic. Nattie (who signs as "N") retorts back and also attempts to explain what was going on to cause her to be so inefficient. "C" mellows out, and the two "converse" in Morse code over the wire whenever they get a few moments the rest of the day.

"C" and "N" find over the weeks that follow that they are developing a unique friendship, and Nattie is satisfied to find out, as she soon does, that "C" is a man. She expects to never meet him in person, and so allows herself a greater degree of openness than she normally would. Of course, all this is: A) extremely UNPROFESSIONAL, and B) risky due to the possibility of deception. (This is why it feels kind of modern in places...technology has changed, but the pitfalls are the same.) Anyway, half of the story is their friendship over the wire, and the second half is their friendship in person, which actually gets MORE complicated than the formerly anonymous relationship, because Nattie finds herself tongue-tied when she's away from her telegrapher's key, and gets convinced that "C" is actually in love with her best friend.

Anyone who likes the aforementioned movies will probably like this book.

Kathryn says

Ah, telegraphy, the text messages of yesteryear! ;-)

I so wanted to love this novel but it fell short of my expectations. I see it has garnered a surprising number of reviews here for what I had assumed was a fairly obscure little novel from the 1879, many more glowing in their praise than mine would be, so I will make mine brief. I really love the premise and feel that it's surprisingly contemporary in our age of internet chat groups, emails, texting and online dating. If you fall for someone "over the wires" (or internet, whatever) will the flesh-and-blood version be as wonderful as words and daydreams have painted them, or will they be a devastating disappointment? I really enjoyed the first part of the novel, in which Nattie and "C" form their acquaintance and build their affections in the form of dots-and-dashes. It was really sweet and charming and fun, and I also appreciated the glimpse into how telegraphy worked -- I mean, I already knew about Morse code and telegrams, of course, but it was interesting to hear about the "key" and "sounder" and all the little intricacies and day-to-day aspects that only telegraph operators would know about (Thayer having been one herself). However, I became increasingly annoyed with both story and characters as the book progressed and various misunderstandings ensued. The characters never really won me over, either. I found Nattie to be a rather inscrutable heroine, and her supposed desire to be a writer never rang true (and the idea that she needed either great love or great disappointment to precipitate her career nettled me). Oh, there was nothing wrong with Nattie, but I just never felt that I really understood her or could be "chums" if I met her in real life. I liked "C" well enough on the whole. Quimby, ah, Quimby! I could see an actor like Jimmy Stewart making him really adorable and lovable but I'm sorry to say that on the page I mostly found him extremely annoying. Cyn and Jo and Celeste felt a bit too stock-character for me. And, by the end of the book, though I am no supporter of corporal punishment, I found myself wanting to slap some sense into a few of the characters. I suppose Thayer succeeded in surprising me as I did not expect some of the relationships/romances to end the way that they did. Unfortunately, I just wasn't too satisfied with the way some did work out. I'm curious to know how this book was received when it was originally published, since it is rather "Bohemian" and I imagine the Miss Klings of the public were a bit scandalized ;-). Anyway, read some of the other reviews from readers who loved the book. If the premise sounds interesting, give it a whirl. It's free on Project Gutenberg and I'm glad I read it as it did afford several chapters that were very pleasing and some insights into the era that I greatly appreciated.

A rather prophetic paragraph that I couldn't help but share! ;-)

"What with [telegraph and fac-simile] and the telephone, and that dreadful phonograph that bottles up all one says and disgorges at inconvenient times, we will soon be able to do everything by electricity; who knows but some genius will invent something for the especial use of lovers? something, for instance, to carry in their pockets, so when they are far away from each other, and pine for a sound of 'that beloved voice,' they will have only to take up this electrical apparatus, put it to their ears, and be happy. Ah! blissful lovers of the future!"

Bettie? says

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b099xpwg>

Description: *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes*, published in 1879, was a ground breaking book about a long-distance romance conducted over the telegraph wire - aptly termed *The Victorian Internet*. Written by the previously unknown Ella Cheever Thayer, *Wired Love's* Manhattan publisher trumpeted it as "a bright little telegraphic novel" that told "the old, old story - in a new, new way". But Thayer's story was grounded in Victorian reality. Men and women alike worked as telegraph operators, with predictable results. At least one wedding was conducted over the wires and *Electrical World* magazine even warned of "the dangers of wired love".

Presenter Lucy Hawking looks at how the invention of the telegraph led to social changes in the role of women as well as providing the inspiration for this first on-line romance novel, published over 100 years before the internet. Finding parallels in today's e-mail world she profiles the life of Ella Cheever Thayer, discusses the appeal of the novel and talks to Laura Otis, Britt Peterson and Thomas C Jepson, about the revolutionary technology and the social changes it encouraged.

Laura says

From BBC Radio 4:

A Romance of Dots and Dashes, published in 1879, was a ground breaking book about a long-distance romance conducted over the telegraph wire - aptly termed *The Victorian Internet*. Written by the previously unknown Ella Cheever Thayer, *Wired Love's* Manhattan publisher trumpeted it as "a bright little telegraphic novel" that told "the old, old story - in a new, new way". But Thayer's story was grounded in Victorian reality. Men and women alike worked as telegraph operators, with predictable results. At least one wedding was conducted over the wires and *Electrical World* magazine even warned of "the dangers of wired love".

Presenter Lucy Hawking looks at how the invention of the telegraph led to social changes in the role of women as well as providing the inspiration for this first on-line romance novel, published over 100 years before the internet. Finding parallels in today's e-mail world she profiles the life of Ella Cheever Thayer, discusses the appeal of the novel and talks to Laura Otis, Britt Peterson and Thomas C Jepson, about the revolutionary technology and the social changes it encouraged.

Presenter: Lucy Hawking

Drama adapted by Danny Westgate

Performers: Samantha Dakin, Tom Bevan and Anna Farnworth.

Sound Design: Nick Romero

Producer: Julian Mayers

A Sweet Talk production for BBC Radio 4.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b099xpwg>

J. Boo says

Ella Thayer was a former telegraph operator who carefully followed the adage "write what you know" for this romantic novel. And thus, in *Wired Love*, Nattie Rogers is a telegraph operator who strikes up a friendship -- unseen, of course -- with fellow telegraph operator, "C".

I had thought this was a Great Independent Discovery of mine, but there are numerous appreciations all over the Internet. This makes sense, because it's jaw-droppingly modern. Replace the telegraph lines with an IRC chatroom and this 1880 work would not be out of place set in the 1980s through early 2000s, any time between the beginning of the internet revolution and the emergence of cheap digital cameras.

I'm not sure the book is that great in and of itself, but the eerie modernity definitely raises it to a full four stars.

Lou says

The version I read was free through the google play store.

This was a light, entertaining read. The setting and plot is fun, and it started out pretty well. Almost all of the characters are insufferable though, and every single male character unreasonable. None of them know when to back off, or how to accept 'no' or 'not interested' no matter how many times it is said. I really enjoyed the close friendship formed between Cyn and Nattie, and that their support of each other is prevalent throughout the book. After a point in the story, though, everyone just stops being able to communicate effectively like actual adults. This makes the second half of the book increasingly frustrating to read and rapidly whittled down the likable members of the cast to one or two.

This book wasn't particularly awful, but it is a lot like eating M&Ms. You get them because you think they'll taste good, and they do, but after eating them for a bit they start to taste a little gross.

Rachael says

For all that it was written in 1880, Ella Thayer's "Wired Love" is still remarkably apt today. Two telegraph operators N (Natty) and C (Clem) meet over a wire while sending messages to each other; they flirt and become friends, but without actually meeting, there is no way to prove they are what they say they are - they just have each other's word - and living seventy miles apart, it is unlikely they will meet face-to-face. Via facebook and chat rooms we can meet people and strike up a romance - but without meeting in person, can we guarantee that that college girl is not really a middle aged man? Or that his body is really so buff as his picture implies? Funnily enough, Thayer even foretells the cell phone - "something to carry in their pockets, so when they are far away from each other and pine for a sound of 'that beloved voice,' they will only have to take up this electrical apparatus, put it to their ears, and be happy . . ."

Tangled knots of love abound as the young renters of the building become closer and closer friends. Pegging the couples wasn't hard, but I was surprised at how the story ended for a couple of them. Using Morse code

as a secret language of the lovers is a romantic addition. The differences between the two landladies and how they use their authority was an interesting commentary on apartments in general - on one hand, there is the lady who needs the money and will let every room available to her and make an effort to keep renters she likes; on the other hand is the lady who completely holds the power and knows it, perfectly willing and able to kick the renter out if she is dissatisfied.

The romance was sweet, the historical tidbits fascinating, and the writing witty - a clean, delightful love story that Jane Austen fans should thoroughly enjoy.

The public domain kindle version from Amazon has some formatting and typing errors, but it does not badly detract from the story.

J.M. says

"We will soon be able to do everything by electricity; who knows but some genius will invent something for the especial use of lovers? something, for instance, to carry in their pockets, so when they are far away from each other, and pine for the sound of 'that beloved voice,' they will have only to take up this electrical apparatus, put it to their ears, and be happy. Ah! blissful lovers of the future!"

A nicely-crafted little melodrama. Funny (even 130some years after publication) and moving, with some genuinely frustrating obstacles thrown in the path of romance. I think most readers will guess early on how it'll turn out, and there might have been too much repetition of certain 'catch phrases' for the character of Quimby, but this was a fun read, regardless. Perfect for reading on an invention the author predicted a century in advance.

Darcie says

I need to read a nice little book, a book that did not include chopped-off wrists (*The One I Left Behind* by Jennifer McMahon, which we read for book group last week) or terrible people who deserve the misery they sow for each other (*Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn, also read for book group). This book did the trick.

Gwern says

I read this on the strength of Clive Thompson's review *Wired Love: A tale of catfishing, OK Cupid, and sexting ...* from 1880; I downloaded & read the Google Books version.

Thompson summarizes it:

...Nattie is at work one day when a telegraph operator in another city, who calls himself "C", begins chatting her up. They engage in a virtual courtship, things get funny and romantic, until suddenly things take a *most puzzling and mysterious turn*.

It's all quite nuttily modern. *Wired Love* anticipates everything we live with in today's online, Iphoned courtship: Assessing whether someone you've met online is what they say they are;

the misunderstandings of tone and substance that come from communicating in rapid-fire, conversational bursts of text; or even the fact that you might not really be sure of the gender/nationality/species of the person you're flirting with.

And also teens mooning over their cellphones!

"...and what with that and the telephone and that dreadful phonograph that bottles up all one says and disgorges at inconvenient times, we will soon be able to do everything by electricity; who knows but some genius will invent something for the especial use of lovers? something, for instance, to carry in their pockets, so when they are far away from each other, and pine for a sound of 'that beloved voice', they will have only to take up this electrical apparatus, and be happy. Ah! blissful lovers of the future!"

As promised, this was a very amusing Victorian novel, an easy read (perhaps a night's worth), and the telegraphs were fascinatingly Internet-chat-like.?

Shala Howell says

In all honesty, I have to point out that I actually read the scanned version of this book available (for free) for download through Google Books. I've long been intrigued by the similarities between our times and the 1880s, and this book points out another connection. It tells the story of an early online romance conducted between telegraph operators. The relationship progresses much as you would expect it to if it were conducted using say, Match.com, today. Pitfalls are recognizable to anyone who's used an online dating network, chat rooms, instant messaging, or email to strike up a new relationship (or friendship) with someone else online.

And that connection described in language that is clearly true to its time makes it (at least for me) a fun fun read.

Ben says

I believe this could very well be the first "Internet Romance" novel ever written!!! Published in 1880, it describes the romance between two telegraph operators: Nellie and an operator known only to her as "C". Our heroine is a young woman just gaining her independence and earning her way in a very male dominated field of work. Through a bit of serendipity, our protagonist meets "on the wire", the object of her growing affections, an unseen male operator in a distant town, who she becomes ever more enamored with while sending a receiving short messages between her one woman station and "C"'s remote outpost station some 70 miles distant. Neither of them have much hope of ever seeing each other due to the distances between them in a pre-automobile age but they slowly come to build a friendship that becomes something more than either ever expected. There is an interesting cast of secondary characters that adds depth and no small amount of humor (in a very 19th century vein...). The descriptions of life, love and customs of society at that time, as well as the limits of technology are very evident in the story. The author was in fact herself a telegraph operator as well as a writer so we get to hear in some authoritative detail about the work involved and descriptions of the equipment and the limits imposed on those who use it which adds a bit of authenticity to

many situations. The only warnings I would issue to potential readers is that it is not a quick, easy read as the language is a bit archaic (not in a Shakespearean way mind you) and arcane, but still understandable for the most part. Most of the differences are in how sentences are structured and in word usage. The vocabulary can be a bit of a challenge too as some words used in this story mean something very different today. It is a story written by a woman of that time describing romance in a way that is decidedly more genteel and proper than the "bodice rippers" one finds on the book racks in the local supermarkets today.

JM says

Nattie rather enjoys her work as a telegraph operator: it's sometimes monotonous and her little office is rather confined, but there's a romance to those messages flying up and down the wire. Then she strikes up a friendship with another operator further down the wire, who signs himself "C", and even though C and Nattie only communicate in dots and dashes, their conversations become the highlight of Nattie's day.

This is a fairly sweet but unremarkable romance, other than the telegraph-age internet relationship thing. It is interesting to get a view into the telegraphic technology and culture of the time and place - this was published in 1879, so commercial electronic telegraphy was about forty years old. So it wasn't new technology but it was new enough that apparently only operators knew how it worked, and Nattie is constantly fielding ignorant questions from the public.

The period is kind of interesting to me, as well - I think the only other things I've read that are set in the US at about that time are children's books: *Little Women* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and such. Nattie and her friends are a bit bohemian and are scornful of the prissier social norms embodied by Nattie's bitter gossip landlady, and there's some intergenerational social conflict as a result. The careful quote marks around special telegraphy terms and slang read as quite fussy now, but they must have been cool youthful jargon at the time. Apparently Ella Cheever Thayer was a suffragette, too.

Kaion says

It's just another day in the office when Nattie begins chatting with "C@Xn" over a customer service snafu. Soon enough, conversations with the witty "C" are the highlight of her day — a highlight for which she comes to work early and leaves late. Until the day he suggests that "C" and "N" should meet.

Ella Cheever Thayer has written the most topical book of 1999, a charming romcom that combines the cyber-pals of *You've Got Mail* with the urban-twenty-somethings-living-in-the-same-building of *Friends*.

Except that "N" and "C" are telegraph operators. And **Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes** was published in 1880.

"There certainly is something romantic in talking to a mysterious person, unseen, and miles away!" thought Nattie, as she put on her hat. "But I would really like to know whether my new friend employs a tailor or a dressmaker!"

The results are flipping adorable, as much as they are highly uncanny. Thayer largely anticipates the pratfalls of digital connection, including catfishing and the *different* intimacy created over anonymous communication [Clive Thompson]. And she does so in a tale that involves all the romantic misunderstandings, amusing repartee, and slapstick a fan of screwball could ask for.

One of my groups was discussing the extreme maleness (and whiteness) of the Guardian's recently unveiled 100 Best Novels Written in English as chosen by Robert McCrum, despite the fact that 90% were chosen from the 19th and 20th centuries. One member argued that while there were plenty of female novelists in the 1800s, there was a "[lack of] very good ones."

This is when I stopped giving fucks, and went back to reading *Wired Love*.

Because when I think of novels from the 1870s, or novels about the 1870s, I think of stodgy moral tales—*Far from the Madding Crowd*, or on the opposite end *The Age of Innocence*— that embody a lost way of life fairly alien to my own experience.

Wired Love is pretty much the opposite of that. Its pop sensibility rends it ripe for a movie adaptation*; the title page already provides the perfect tagline. ("*The old, old story,*"—*in a new, new way.*) Imagine it now... Nattie idly aspires to be a writer one day, but is working at the telegraph office for now. Her androgynously-named friends (Jo, Cyn, Quimby) are a breed of young urbanites whose romantic connections are highly incestuous to the friend group. They're highly obsessed with food, and spend a lot of time getting it around their nosy landladies.

I don't say how much of this familiarity comes from the setting, or if indeed some of it reflects more of Thayer's prescience. I can't find much on Ella Cheever Thayer at all, other than that she was a suffragette and playwright, and penned the suffragette play "The Lords of Creation".

And I'd like to. I'd love to know more about what the androgyny says about technology mediating change in social relations, or what the comparison between indomitable opera-singer Cyn and reserved, bookish Nattie represents.

Wired Love shows how little we know and understand about relatively recent writing. That even basically forgotten midlist novels and one-shot wonders can offer something new. (I normally wouldn't have thought to consider gendered communication in the 19th century in the modernist framework of [wo]man's relationship to machine.)

That's why I can't prescribe to notions of a canonicity, or the idea of "timeless" value based on "objective" standards of aesthetics. Works should be re-experienced as objectively timeless, but rediscovered each time. They should be experienced again because they are timely, again and again. *Rating: 3.5 stars*

*I would totally watch that. Suggestions for director/screenwriter/cast accepted in the comments.

**Apparently stories of telegraphic romance were a fascination in industry publications of the time. An 1891 article in *Western Electrician* titled "Romances of the Telegraph" tells the true story of John Stansbury, who planned a camping trip with a fellow operator he'd sparked a long-distance friendship with, only--

'Mat!' I said, for I was completely beaten. Then it flashed upon me. She was the operator at Banning, and I, like a fool, had always taken it for granted that she was a man.

and it seems several magazines had similar serials (The Victorian Internet).

Janell Sutherland says

This review also posted on Red Hot Books.

Miss Nathalie Rogers, aka Nattie, is a telegraph operator in the 1870s. She is eighteen and lives in a boarding hotel, having left her family so that they won't have to support her. She is independent, smart, and aspires to be a writer someday, once she finds the time.

One day, at work, another telegraph operator some sixty miles away begins to chat with her through Morse code. They begin telling stories, laughing ("the circumstance being conveyed to her understanding in the usual way, by the two letters 'H a!'",) and keeping each other company.

It soon slips that the other operator, "C," is a man named Clem, and Nattie finds herself wondering what he looks like. She knows it's silly to even think about him romantically, since "she was not the kind of girl to sit down and wait for someone to come along and marry her." Still, she goes to work early and stays late just to have uninterrupted conversations with him.

One day, C takes the day off, and then surprises Nattie by showing up at her station. Unfortunately he has greasy red hair, wears big, fake jewelry, and has a musky odor. She is shocked and disappointed, and manages to ignore him over the wire after that.

Allow me to interject here and say that this was probably a lot of young women's experience in the early 1990s, am I right? Meeting someone over the telephone line connected to your computer? Chatting and emailing with someone you haven't seen, perhaps snail-mailing photographs to each other? The first picture I received of that sort was kind of a shock, in an older-and-baldier-than-I-expected way, so I felt for our heroine here. Dreams dashed, alas!

A few weeks later, C leaves his job permanently. Then, when Nattie and her opera singer friend Cyn are having a bohemian picnic in Cyn's small parlor, their neighbor Quimby drops by with friend. The friend turns out to be the real Clem, heartbroken from Nattie's unexplained brushoff. Nat is delighted that he's not really greasy and musky (an eavesdropper on the telegraph line was the impostor), but then she finds it difficult to relate to him in the real world among other people. "It is nicer talking on the wire, isn't it?" he agrees.

Would anyone else like to share their contemporary-world parallels here? Me again? The second picture I received from a different online friend was a vast improvement from the first (I may have exclaimed, "He's not ugly!" to my roommates). Then we managed to meet up in person, and it wasn't terrible but it didn't have the free-flowing, friendly banter that a romance novel would predict. It ended, well, awkwardly, and then he found a girlfriend in his own city and we lost touch. Dammit, someday I'm going to write that novel but with a much better ending!

So, anyway, Nattie and Clem and their group of wacky friends hang out and party, but Nattie begins to believe that Clem has fallen for her friend Cyn. Note to Clem: if you're in love with a girl, you should maybe try to spend some time alone with her, okay? Nat gives Clem the cold shoulder again, and he almost gives up hope, until a well-timed comment from a nosy landlady gets him to finally profess his love — in Morse code — and Nat gets her romantic ending.

This is a cute, quirky book, and the characters are fun although one-dimensional. It's interesting to compare their unsupervised lives with those of youthful aristocracy across the pond, who couldn't be alone with someone of the opposite sex. I was surprised that Nattie, a young woman, could have such a respectable job at a young age, and aspirations beyond her telegraph office.

The most surprising fact, though, is that this book was published in 1880 by a thirty-year-old woman who was herself a former telegraph operator and a suffragette. It was a bestseller for ten years, and resurfaced

about five years ago thanks to Project Gutenberg. It's free! You can read it and feel pompous that you are reading "classic" literature that was also popular at the time and also happens to be a romance! Plus, the author uses the word "ejaculate" as a dialogue tag over and over, which will make you giggle. Go on, give it a whirl!

Grade: B

Chan says

I really enjoyed this! Very unexpected. I'm beginning to actually enjoy historical romances.

I'm sure if I was reading this during the time it was written my emotions and reactions would have been much stronger.

I was enthralled by the sweet pursuit of love. Expressing our interest in someone is so different today.

Very refreshing read.

rogue says

Whenever I start to forget that times change but people stay the same, a book like this comes along to remind me how much we have in common with the past. We've all asked ourselves, "How would someone from the 1800s react if you stuck them through a time machine and brought them to today?" Well--Ella Cheever Thayer and her characters would survive this experiment perfectly intact.

"Wired Love" is a fresh and modern sounding book, with ambitious go-getting women (Nattie, Cyn) who don't allow themselves to indulge in to sentimentality. People are reading thrillers on the job and getting interrupted by "calls." It's so modern that there's even a mention of cellular phones of the future. Alas, since we aren't there yet, Ella Cheever Thayer's excitement is focused on the tech of the time, the telegraph. She's cute, and she goes through a lot of pains to sneak in explanations for all the "terms" in case her reader is behind the times and doesn't know about "sounders" and "keys" and all that lingo. It's funny -- I don't think she realized that all her "definitions" would help people of the future, not the past.

Outside of the technology, this is a charming story with a great opening and a lot of cute humor: good (and bad) puns, funny little portraits, knifelike observations on life, and a writer who keeps on throwing a literary banana peel under Quimby's feet. I laughed all throughout the first half of this book.

Unfortunately, after the halfway point, it goes sharply downhill. The characters, instead of deepening, flatten into caricature, especially poor Quimby. I wanted more for everyone. But Ella Cleever Thayer couldn't be completely ahead of her times. She succumbs instead to pop trends: mixups, matchmaking, four weddings and a funeral (well, almost). I'm sure it was hilarious then, but it doesn't connect so well now. Still a great read and ahead of its time in other ways.
