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Author(s): Ellen Gruber Garvey

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# Reframing the Bicycle: Advertising-Supported Magazines and Scorching Women

ELLEN GRUBER GARVEY  
*Jersey City State College*

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Riding the wheel, our own powers are revealed to us, a new sense is seemingly created . . . you have conquered a new world, and exultingly you take possession of it.<sup>1</sup>

It would certainly not be desirable for a young woman to get her first ideas of her sex from a bicycle ride.<sup>2</sup>

WHEN THE SAFETY BICYCLE IN THE 1890S MADE BICYCLING ACCESSIBLE to women, wheelwomen found themselves riding through contested terrain. The bicycle offered new mobility: new freedoms that both attracted feminists and other women and made it the target of conservative attack. Both defense and attack took medicalized form: antibicyclers claimed that riding would ruin women's sexual health by promoting masturbation and would compromise gender definition as well, while probicyclers asserted that bicycling would strengthen women's bodies—and thereby make them more fit for motherhood. Such claims are familiar from a period in which many discourses were medicalized and issues as diverse as shoplifting and women's education were tied to reproductive health.<sup>3</sup> This article, however, focuses on the unfolding of these conflicts in the world of commerce as commercial interests negotiated with and within shifting ideas about women's bicycle riding. Specifically, I argue that the discourse of consumption constituted by the advertising, articles, and fiction within the developing mass-market magazine of the 1890s subsumed both feminist and

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Ellen Garvey is an assistant professor of English at Jersey City State College. She is the author of the forthcoming *Reading Consumer Culture: Gender, Fiction, and Advertising in American Magazines, 1880s to 1910s*.

conservative views in the interest of sales. In effect, these advertising-dependent magazines asserted a version of women's bicycling that reframed its apparent social risks as benefits.

According to advertising historians, 1890s–1910s advertising was dominated by rational appeals, with advertisements seeking to persuade chiefly by attracting readers' attention and informing them that goods were available. In this chronology, advertising argumentation does not sprout an associational dimension until the late 1910s, when graphics make goods “resonate with qualities desired by consumers—status, glamour, reduction of anxiety, happy families—as the social motivations for consumption.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, it was not until the 1920s that product mentions were woven into complex verbal narratives, as radio advertisements and their characters brought far more about the social context of consumption into the advertising strategy.<sup>5</sup>

But complicated narratives embedding products in a social context and associating them with romance, happiness, freedom, social acceptance, and socially approved behavior did appear in the 1890s—in fiction that appeared to serve no commercial purpose. We might think of such fiction as preparing a place that advertising was later to take up; it prefigures later strategies applied more deliberately by advertising, while it trained readers to appreciate and respond to the kinds of narratives that advertising later used. Product-focused stories do not endorse individual brands but, in effect, promote product categories. The mechanism of the advertising-dependent magazine harnessed this ability in the interests of advertisers. In the case of one product, bicycles, magazine fiction allayed a specific set of concerns about the mobility of women on bicycles and reframed women's bicycling as a trip that would end in married happiness.

### Gender and Bicycles

The safety bicycle or wheel—that is, the bicycle roughly as we know it now, with equal-sized wheels and inflated tires—was a popular novelty in the 1890s. It opened to the middle class kinds of travel that had previously been available only to those wealthy enough to keep a horse, while it posed new problems and opportunities for its makers and marketers. Its predecessor—the “ordinary” or high-wheel bicycle, with an enormous wheel in front driven directly by the pedals at its axle and a single small wheel in back—was dangerous and difficult to ride.

Notoriously, a bump in the road could send the rider over the handlebars. It was impossible to ride in skirts or even divided skirts, and riding it was specifically marked as a masculine pursuit.<sup>6</sup> Riders were a relatively small group of athletic young men.<sup>7</sup>

The high wheeler was put to use in already established fictional formulas about the man in the world and the woman at home. One such general formula appeared frequently in 1880s *Godey's Lady's Book* stories. In it, a man is knocked out or temporarily disabled to become a suitable husband. His injury obliges him to stay in one place while he sees how well some woman takes care of him ("You have been ill—very ill. . . . The doctor says you are not to lift your head for several days"<sup>8</sup>) and has a chance to fall in love with her. This formula enables courtship in a world in which women live circumscribed lives, their accomplishments largely invisible, while men are mobile. Retrieved from the highways and deposited in a woman's household, a man is kept still long enough to notice the tender womanly and housewifely arts she has cultivated.<sup>9</sup>

The high-wheel bicycle is appended to this formula as a handy emblem of male mobility in an 1888 *Godey's Lady's Book* story, Max Vander Weyde's "A Turn of the Wheel." In it, a high wheeler both represents and enables a man's mobility by opening worlds into which he would not otherwise be admitted. Here, a young American wheeling through Provence is so distracted by the sight of an immobile young woman who stands in a doorway and has "the unconscious trick of posing like a bisque statuette" that he takes a header over his handlebars and must be brought in and nursed, though Americans are forbidden in this household. (The statuette's father disappeared fighting on the Union side in the Civil War.) Even the high-wheel bicycle's drawback, its liability to throw riders over the handlebars, becomes a useful feature: the rider falls off the bicycle into a household where he falls in love. Later, evicted by her angry uncle, the American rides off to Paris and locates his love's long-lost father, whose permission enables the couple to marry. The man must be knocked off of his high wheeler to bring him within women's sphere and make him marriageable: he would go by too fast otherwise.

As long as such a man was on a high wheeler, he was definitively outside women's sphere. The safety bicycle's accessibility to both men and women, however, raised new social issues. Since riding a safety offered an enhanced version of the freedoms that riding a high wheeler

had allowed men, the act of riding, as well as the safety bicycle itself, was seen as essentially masculine. Women's riding therefore posed a threat to gender definition. It threatened women's sexual purity as well, as will be discussed below. And, when unmarried men and women rode together, cycling threatened chastity and order.

Manufacturers wished to sell bicycles to as many people—both men and women—as possible. Assurance that riding the new safety was appropriate to their gender could be important to female potential buyers and could allay either their own concerns or those of others who might object to their riding. So, since the safety, though apparently nongendered, was understood to be masculine, women's riding had to be made socially acceptable to sell safety bicycles to a larger market.

Manufacturers pursued a variety of strategies for gendering the safety bicycle—that is, asserting that a women's mode of riding was available and that riding need not be masculinizing. They quickly differentiated models of bicycles for men and women: the diamond-shaped frame (similar in shape to present-day men's bicycles) was presented as standard; the drop frame that allows riding in a skirt became the marked category, the women's version. (Because the diamond frame is structurally stronger, women's models were often ten pounds heavier than men's.) The notion that bicycles should be gendered soon extended beyond accommodating dresses. An 1895 advertisement for Columbia bicycles shows special diamond-frame women's bicycles for women who plan to ride in "zouave [bloomer] or knickerbocker costume." Although it appears no different in size or shape from the men's bicycles, the manufacturer gave it a distinctive name and sells it as a woman's bicycle. The form of the advertisement—a paper doll—itself asserts the gender appropriateness of women's riding and reformulates questions of appropriate dress as questions of style and fashion.<sup>10</sup> Manufacturers assigned separate model names to emphasize the genderedness of the bicycles: the ambassadorial Envoy for men and the birdlike Fleetwing for women and the Napoleon and Josephine, for example.<sup>11</sup>

### Advertising the Bicycle

Other forms of advertising linked bicycles with codes of femininity. Bicycle manufacturers were, according to one advertising historian, "trail-blazing pioneer[s]" in magazine advertisements in their use of

extensive space.<sup>12</sup> Designed by artists such as Maxfield Parrish and Will Bradley, the visual elements of the graphically sophisticated bicycle advertisements invested bicycles with glamour and the graphic associations of being up-to-date. Art nouveau's flowing curvilinear organic forms linked bicycles with the natural world and echoed themes of numerous magazine articles of the period in which bicycles provide city dwellers with easy touristic access to a countryside appreciated as scenic and picturesque. Although articles on bicycling into the countryside typically discuss the technicalities of the tourists' arrangements and issues of bicycle repair, traveling by bicycle is nonetheless framed as a "natural" experience, freeing the urbanite from such "mechanical" constraints as railroad schedules.<sup>13</sup> Bicycles within the advertising posters and magazine advertisements become design elements themselves, and the viewer is invited to become part of a harmonious or exotic picture by buying and riding the bicycle (Fig. 1). In these advertisements, as in the articles, the bicycle is imagined not as another machine in the garden but as part of the garden.

While cartoons in humor magazines such as *Life* and *Punch* satirized women bicyclists as mannishly dressed menaces and a few bicycle and accessory manufacturers' advertisements displayed very young women riding in daringly short skirts, the more naturalistic of the drawings in advertisements and catalogs provide constant visual reassurance that women could ride the bicycle with grace and even modesty.<sup>14</sup> In what amounts to a convention, such advertising art frequently shows women riding in skirts that cover their feet as they ride and appear as if they would drag on the ground if the figure in the drawing stood (Fig. 2). Both the naturalistic drawings and the stylized art nouveau productions demonstrate that bicycling women could be both decorative and decorous. The Victor advertisement in Figure 1, for example, highlights the curves of the drop frame on the middle bicycle and uses the netting of the rear-wheel dress guard on the furthest bicycle as an ornamental embellishment while emphasizing the three women riders themselves as flowing decorative elements.

The advertisements thus visually proclaim a suitable women's mode for riding on a suitably differentiated bicycle. The written copy of 1890s bicycle advertisements was less sophisticated than the graphics. Aside from fanciful and suggestive model names, such copy often restricts itself to simple declarations about price and speed as it advances information and pseudoinformation. But, like other advertisement copy

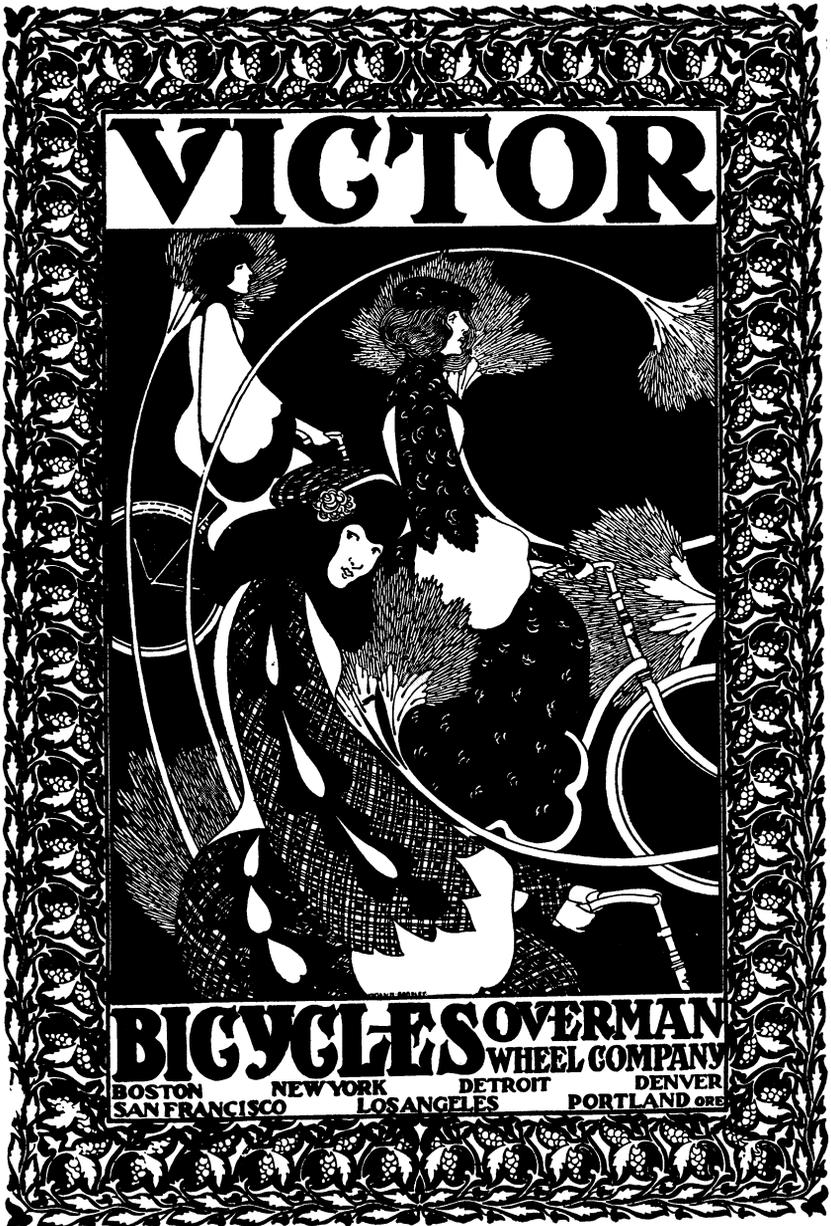


Figure 1. This 1895 advertisement for Victor bicycles, drawn by Will Bradley, appeared in many magazines, including *The Century* and *Harper's Monthly*.

of the period, bicycle advertising copy rarely embeds the product in a social scenario or suggests the social consequences following use of the product. That was to be left to magazine fiction.

### The Threat of the Mobile Woman

For women in particular, the new mobility the bicycle allowed offered freer movement in new spheres, outside the family and home—heady new freedoms that feminists celebrated. Suffragist and temperance leader Frances Willard called her bicycle an “implement of power” and “rejoiced . . . in perceiving the impetus that this uncompromising but fascinating and illimitably capable machine would give to that blessed ‘woman question.’”<sup>15</sup> Maria E. Ward’s 1896 manual *Bicycling for Ladies* hints at a connection between cycling and suffrage by linking riding to both autonomy and responsible citizenship:

Riding the wheel, our own powers are revealed to us . . . . You have conquered a new world, and exultingly you take possession of it. . . . You feel at once the keenest sense of responsibility. . . . You become alert, active, quick-sighted, and keenly alive as well to the rights of others as to what is due yourself. . . . To the many who wish to be actively at work in the world, the opportunity has come.<sup>16</sup>

The “New Woman on a bicycle . . . exercised power . . . changing the conventions of courtship and chaperonage, of marriage and travel,” Patricia Marks notes in her survey of the period.<sup>17</sup> In fact to some, the bicycle in itself seemed to offer a transcendent solution to women’s problems. As playwright Marguerite Merington wrote in “Woman and the Bicycle,” an 1895 *Scribner’s* article: “Now and again a complaint arises of the narrowness of woman’s sphere. For such disorder of the soul the sufferer can do no better than to flatten her sphere to a circle, mount it, and take to the road.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, for Willard, the bicycle was a means of access to a larger world, or was even that world itself: “I began to feel that myself plus the bicycle equaled myself plus the world, upon whose spinning wheel we must all learn to ride.” She explains in her memoir of learning to ride that she took up bicycling at age fifty-three in part so her example would “help women to a wider world.”<sup>19</sup>

Conservatives attacked women’s bicycling in correspondingly hyperbolic terms, as a force that would disrupt social roles by allowing women freedom of movement beyond family surveillance and outside

TERRESTRIAL FLIGHT.



WITH THE BIRDS AND SQUIRRELS.

"GREAT, SIR—DISTINCTLY GREAT."

THE

**AMERICAN RAMBLER  
BICYCLES.**

BEST AND MOST LUXURIOUS.

CATALOGUE ON APPLICATION.

**GORMULLY & JEFFERY  
MFG. CO.**



NEW YORK.

BOSTON.

CHICAGO.

WASHINGTON.

Figure 2. Drawings in advertising material often showed women riding in improbably long skirts. (*Cosmopolitan*, Nov. 1890; Sept. 1891.)

traditional gender roles. Like other attacks on women's opportunities for autonomy in this period, this one took sexual form. One way conservative fear of the disruptive potential of women's riding was articulated was through medical discourse that attacked bicycling as both masculinizing and a threat to sexual purity. Probicycling forces also used medical discourse to endorse women's riding.

The two sides of this medical discussion, those favoring and those opposing women's bicycling, had in common the notion that medical pronouncement on women's bicycling was necessary and called for—that pleasurable physical activity undertaken by women should come under medical authority. Nearly every book on bicycling from the period includes a discussion, citing medical authorities, of bicycling's effects on women's health. Special magazine issues on bicycling routinely include articles from physicians commenting on riding and women's health. Even Frances Willard follows this convention and interrupts her discussion of her own riding experiences to address what she believes to be an issue worrying the reader: "And now comes the question 'What do the doctors say?' Here follow several testimonials." The testimonials she chose unsurprisingly favor women's riding; their inclusion at all, however, demonstrates how pervasive was the assumption that medical sanction for or against women's riding was appropriate and even necessary.<sup>20</sup>

As we will see, both sides of the specifically medical discussion have in common an interest in keeping women within traditional roles. One line of antibicycling medical discourse classed women's riding with other athletic activity as entailing objectionable amounts of exertion. Riding was a threat to gender roles; while it would be safe for healthy men to do so, it would be dangerous for women to expend so much of their strength on physical activity. The other line of the argument against women's cycling framed its objections in terms of sexual health. Critics cloaked their concern in discussion of supposed problematic effects of bicycle saddles: as a result of the angle of the saddle, "[t]he bicycle teaches masturbation in women and girls."<sup>21</sup>

The whole question of riding astride anything was problematic for women to begin with. Discussing children's toys, Karin Calvert points out that "one of the cardinal rules of child-rearing in the nineteenth-century . . . forbade girls to straddle any object. Girls were prohibited from riding hobby horses, stick horses, bicycles, velocipedes, even seesaws, and a true lady learned to ride real horses side saddle. The

position, parents believed, threatened the sexual innocence of their young daughters.” The prohibition against girls using toys with straddle seats was part of the larger picture of rigidly separated spheres of play for girls and boys. “Playing the wrong game or with the wrong toys could prematurely awaken sexual feelings in children and destroy their natural purity,” Calvert notes. In other words, such play was a form of deviance that threatened both sexual innocence and gender definition. Not surprisingly, one physician calls riding astride “too mannish to be proper for a woman.”<sup>22</sup>

And yet, with the advent of the safety bicycle and its female ridership, straddling could no longer be avoided, and attention focused on details of its troubling implications. In an outpouring of numerous articles in medical journals, physicians went into extensive and virtually prurient detail about ways the bicycle saddle might produce sexual stimulation:

The saddle can be tilted in every bicycle as desired. . . . In this way a girl . . . could, by carrying the front peak or pommel high, or by relaxing the stretched leather in order to let it form a deep, hammock-like concavity which would fit itself snugly over the entire vulva and reach up in front, bring about constant friction over the clitoris and labia. This pressure would be much increased by stooping forward, and the warmth generated from vigorous exercise might further increase the feeling.

This physician reported the case of an “overwrought, emaciated girl of fifteen whose saddle was arranged so that the front pommel rode upward at an angle of about 35 degrees, who stooped forward noticeably in riding, and whose actions . . . strongly suggested . . . the indulgence of masturbation.”<sup>23</sup> Although the patient is evidently worn to a frazzle by her fevered indulgence, the imagery of this physician’s first passage seems to reflect concern that female masturbation is a kind of indolence or relinquishment of vigilance: the leather is “relaxed”; the vulva rests in that signal article of Victorian leisure furniture, a hammock. The tell-tale riding stoop of the second passage, however, raises a different issue: the “scorching” position—that is, the bent-over-the-handlebars posture adopted by speeders. In male riders, it might be criticized or mocked. But for women, fast riding was condemned; deviations from upright decorousness and graceful riding are more serious, and bicycle-riding posture could be a significant measure of propriety and sexual innocence.

Another physician complained that “except when one rides slowly

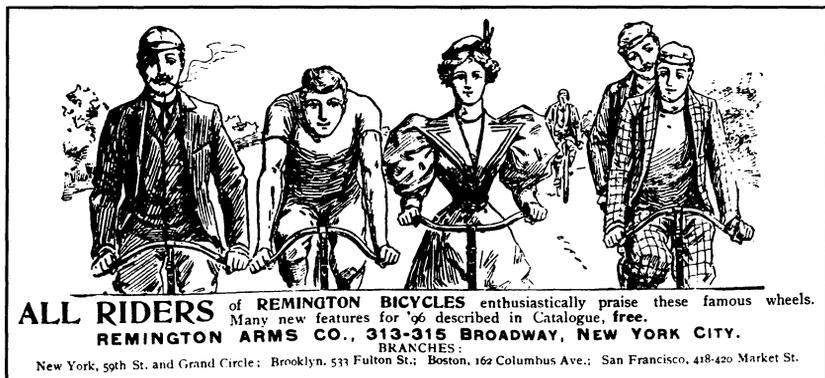
and erect” the “whole body’s weight . . . rests on the anterior half of the saddle.” Here, not only the saddle and its adjustment but also speed is at fault, and the punishment for stepping out of line is pain and pathology:

The moment speed is desired the body is bent forward in a characteristic curve and the body’s weight is transmitted to the narrow anterior half of the saddle, with all the weight pressing on the perineal region. . . . If a saddle is properly adjusted for slow riding and in an unusual effort at speed or hill climbing, the body is thrown forward, causing the clothing to press against the clitoris, thereby eliciting and arousing feelings hitherto unknown and unrealized by the young maiden

and painful and debilitating “granular erosion” or “polypoid growth” will result.<sup>24</sup>

Just as Sherlock Holmes’s keen eye in the 1903 story “The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist” can read the bicycling of his client Miss Violet Smith from “the slight roughening of the side of the sole caused by the friction of the edge of the pedal,”<sup>25</sup> an educated eye might detect wantonness in any deviation by a woman cyclist from an upright posture. Similarly, medical books had warned for years that the signs that girls “are addicted to such a vice . . . [are] only too plain to the physician”<sup>26</sup> and that the “habit” of masturbation left “its mark upon the face so that those who are wise may know what the girl is doing.”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, while bicycle advertisements might show men in a variety of riding positions, women are shown only seated upright, as in Figure 3. Moreover, perhaps in line with medical books’ concern that *telling* girls of such a vice would be in itself “dangerous” but should be unnecessary if other instructions were given properly,<sup>28</sup> guides for women cyclists do not mention masturbation but stress the importance of sitting upright. Even bicycle enthusiasts Adelia and Lina Beard dwell on the decorous upright posture: “our eyes rest with delight upon the trimly clad, graceful rider who, sitting erect, seems almost to stand on her pedals as she moves along.”<sup>29</sup> Manufacturers drew on this concern about posture verbally as well as in advertising graphics; Rambler’s catalog proclaims the handlebars of its woman’s model “so bent as to admit of an erect and graceful position, the secret of the well known fact that ladies when riding Ramlers present a more pleasing and attractive appearance than on any other machine.”<sup>30</sup> Riding posture could be enforced, too, by the alignment of the bicycle; setting the handlebars several inches higher for women than men, in accordance



*Figure 3.* This Remington advertisement displays the greater range of riding postures—including the scorching position of the second man from the left—allowed men. With the exception of a few advertisements in which women are shown coasting with their feet up, women are almost invariably depicted in the upright posture shown here. (*Harper's Weekly*, 13 June 1896.)

with instructions in one manual, prevented women from “scorching” (Fig. 3).<sup>31</sup>

The ultimate effect the rather appealing descriptions of bicycle saddles had on women’s interest in riding is not clear. As we have already seen, however, women were an important market for the bicycle manufacturers that had sprung up in great numbers during this period, and opposition to their riding was an obstacle to sales. While the bicycle saddle may not strike us as an ideal sex toy, manufacturers took the medical discussion about women’s bicycle saddles and masturbation literally and addressed it with a doggedly concrete and literal solution of yet another product: a modified saddle that eliminated the point of contact with genitals. Figure 4 shows advertisements for several crotchless cycle seats intended to circumvent possible saddle masturbation. Advertising copy for these seats typically warns of “injurious” or “harmful pressure exerted by other saddles” or declares their saddles “free of pressure against sensitive parts.”<sup>32</sup> One advertisement delicately explains, for example, that it “is especially desirable for ladies, for it holds the rider like a chair, the entire weight being supported by the bones of the pelvis, which alone touch the saddle.”<sup>33</sup> The connection between the euphemistic phrases and medical discussion of women’s masturbation is clear from the medical articles from which some of the endorsements are drawn.

Of course the manufacturers' solution does not get at what was really at issue: women's mobility and independence. The medicalized masturbation metaphor was a particularly compelling one because both the bicycling woman and the masturbating woman were out of male control and possibly doing damage to "the race." They were exciting new desires in themselves that would seem, following the fallen-women logic of downward trajectory, to roll them inevitably down the garden path as they explore their own new territory, their own new-found land; both were going off on their own, in solitary vice or potentially solitary recreation. Conservatives feared that "masculinized" bicycling women would move out of traditional roles in other respects, make marriages outside of parental supervision, and ride beyond the family and its control—issues soon to arise again in relation to the automobile. Certainly, as Merington's and Willard's celebrations of the bicycle as an escape from women's constricted sphere demonstrate, the possibility of doing so was part of the *attraction* bicycling held for women. The issues metaphorized in the medical attacks on bicycle masturbation are obviously too deep and complex to be addressed by changing the bicycle saddle.

### Benefiting the Race

No woman should ride a bicycle without first consulting her medical man.<sup>34</sup>

Antibicycling medical arguments were, by and large, restricted to the medical press and did not appear in the advertising-dependent general magazines; probicycling medical arguments appeared in both. The probicycling medical discourse was less likely to counter complaints about the saddle directly than to propose that bicycling might improve women's health by getting them into the fresh air. "Moderation," however, was crucial, and the physician was proposed as a key figure, monitoring and regulating the doses of riding, especially in anecdotes of women invalids helped by bicycling. One cycling book, for example, after cautioning that any woman in less than perfect health should consult her physician before taking up cycling, reports the success of physician-supervised cycling for a semi-invalid. For this insomniac musician, a physician prescribed a series of cures: "it got to such a pass that the doctor stopped her music, shut up the piano, and forbade any hearing of music. This did no good. They then sent her to the



mountains; this failed. The doctor prescribed a bicycle, but her mother would not consent, thinking something ought to be found less objectionable and just as powerful." When the doctor's variants of S. Weir Mitchell's famous rest cure fail, the doctor insists on the bicycle and threatens to drop the case otherwise; the mother, here in the classic female role of conservatively resisting male modern science, agrees. The doctor's progressive insistence on the bicycle produces a cure and a grateful family.<sup>35</sup> Advertisers, too, tap this discourse in copy that assures readers that "bicycling is a boon . . . especially to ailing women" and in copy that explicitly proposes the bicycle as a medical prescription (Fig. 5).<sup>36</sup>

More crucially, the medically approved version of women's athleticism was not only supervised but was often harnessed to a socially approved purpose: bicycling was commonly said to restore to health women whose invalidism and malingering made them unfit not only for musicianship but for motherhood; it did so, in part, by strengthening the uterus.<sup>37</sup> Frances Willard, for example, exults that "the physical development of humanity's mother-half would be wonderfully advanced by that universal introduction of the bicycle." Advertisers asserted a direct link between motherhood and riding in advertisements such as Columbia's in Figure 6.<sup>38</sup>

Redemption from invalidism into motherhood was a particular concern in a period of anxiety that white, nonimmigrant middle-class women were having too few babies. Given the high mid-1890s bicycle prices, these women constituted the female bicycle market. Proponents of women's riding drew on this argument, too, to further support their advocacy. As Marguerite Merington put it, bicycling is "a pursuit that adds joy and vigor to the dowry of the race."<sup>39</sup> The word *race* here is used as it often appears in the eugenics discourse of this period, where it ambiguously means both human and white native-born "race."<sup>40</sup> The Pope Company's name for its bicycles—Columbia, the United States's allegorical identity—and other companies' use of such names as the United States, the Patriot, the Charter Oak, the Eagle, and the Liberty ("America's Representative Bicycle"), already positioned bicycling as a particularly American, even patriotic, pursuit and made clear which group's fecundity would increase through riding—moderate riding. Other manufacturers associated their bicycles with England, the source of what were seen as "real" Americans, and named their bicycles Imperial, Waverly, Worcester, Windsor, Warwick, Raleigh, Royal, and Richmond.<sup>41</sup>



*An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Medical statistics show that on the average only one woman in a thousand is blest with perfect health. Is your wife an invalid? Are you constantly paying doctor's bills?*



**R**

Steel,  
Leather,  
Rubber,  
Flint:     as Q.S.  
Sigs.     Safety Bicycle No. 1.  
Use frequently as directed.

Physicians who will use this prescription will have no occasion to resort to Koch's lymph, cod-liver oil, etc.  
Dr. C. E. RICHARDS.

The judicious use of a bicycle by a lady will work wonders in the improvement of her health. In constructing our

## COLUMBIA LADIES' SAFETY

we have aimed to make it light, strong, and easy riding. The many testimonials we have received are the best evidence that we have succeeded in making a wheel perfectly satisfactory.

IT IS FITTED WITH

### Cushion or Pneumatic Tires.

The pneumatic tire absorbs vibration and makes riding on any surface pleasant and agreeable. The handle-bar allows the rider to assume a natural and graceful position.

This machine and the pneumatic tire are fully warranted.

Apply for a Catalogue at the nearest Columbia Agency, or it will be sent by mail for two 2-cent stamps.

**POPE MFG. CO.,**  
**221 Columbus Ave., Boston.**

12 WARREN STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y.

201 WABASH AVENUE,  
CHICAGO.

FACTORY,  
HARTFORD, CONN.

When you write, please mention "The Cosmopolitan."

Figure 5. This Columbia advertisement emphasizes the health benefits available to women through bicycling. (*Cosmopolitan*, Nov. 1891.)

### The Changing Magazine

Women's bicycling raised deeper and more complex fears than changing the bicycle saddle or proposing probicycling health arguments could counter. Strategies used by individual advertisers to demonstrate visually women's graceful, feminine riding were also insufficient counterweights. Instead, the threat bicycling seemed to pose was defused through another novelty of the 1890s, the advertising-dependent magazines addressed to middle-class readers. In this period, publishers of middle-class magazines stopped relying for profits on magazine sales and subscriptions and, by lowering their cover prices and increasing their circulations and advertising rates, began to rely on sales of advertising space. In other words, publishers shifted their transaction from the sale of a magazine to readers to the sale of readers to advertisers.<sup>42</sup> Other changes accompanied the birth of the mass-circulation, ten-cent magazines such as *Munsey's*, *McClure's*, and *Cosmopolitan*; even magazines that kept their prices at twenty-five or thirty-five cents, such as *Harper's* and *Scribner's*, were touched by the greater interest advertisers took in magazines.

The ascendent editors of the ten-cent magazines of this period, as Christopher Wilson has noted, no longer waited in genteel fashion for stories to drop in over the transom but actively solicited and commissioned topical, timely material.<sup>43</sup> Stories involving the new fad of bicycling appear frequently; many of them are in special bicycling issues. Tying magazine content to a fad lured advertisers; these special issues were filled both with bicycling stories and articles and with advertisements for bicycles, tires, cycling clothes, and of course saddles to such an extent that bicycle advertisements constituted 10 percent of national advertising in the 1890s.<sup>44</sup> Not only were magazines an attractive new advertising medium for a new product, but magazines and bicycles also shared other intimate connections, suggestive of the sympathy the new magazine publishers felt for the kinds of businesses likely to invest in advertising. Publisher S. S. McClure began his editorial career working for the Pope Manufacturing Company as the editor of *The Wheelman* (later renamed *Outing*). In turn, *McClure's* magazine showed unusual helpfulness to Pope. In 1897, *McClure's* ran a four-part series, under the heading "Great Business Enterprises: The Marvels of Bicycle Making," in which a *McClure's* writer tours factories of the Pope Manufacturing Company and reports in great

# COLUMBIA

BICYCLES SOURCE OF DELIGHT TO EVERYBODY

POPE MFG. CO. HARTFORD, CONN.

Figure 6. In line with concerns about linking physical fitness with reproduction, this Columbia advertisement links maternity and the bicycle. (*Ladies' Home Journal*, Aug. 1896.)

detail the care taken in all phases of the bicycle-making process. The layout is identical to that of other editorial matter in the magazine; only a headnote at the beginning of the first piece in the series and a small footnote at the end of the other pieces tells the reader that these glimpses “behind the scenes . . . [of] an advertisement” are paid for by Pope.<sup>45</sup>

Though, as in this example, they might partially blur it, even the ten-cent magazines maintained a spatial distinction between editorial and advertising material—or, as Richard Terdiman puts it, between articles (news and opinion) and “articles” (advertising).<sup>46</sup> And yet publishers and editors of the new magazines shared with their advertisers a common interest in the up-to-date world of commerce and industry and its new products—in this case, the bicycle.<sup>47</sup> The monthly magazine’s stake in timeliness pressed toward the discussion and incorporation of the new advertised products in articles and stories. Doing what advertisers could not do for themselves, magazines acted for advertisers in the aggregate. Their alignment and connections with industry encouraged favorable reflections on those products.

Because the fears women’s bicycling raised were social, fiction, with its articulation of social relationships, was better adapted than medical or other articles to taking the sting out of those fears by fictionally reconfiguring the relationships the bicycle seemed to be changing and by assigning new meanings to those changes. Fiction carried the burden of instructing the readers in the complexities of the bicycle’s social meaning, investing it with romance and glamour, and reassuring readers that riding would not disrupt social order. Like the realist fiction in which Amy Kaplan finds a “strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change,”<sup>48</sup> the formulaic stories examined here reassured readers that women on bicycles did not, in fact, threaten either the stability of the family or of just parental authority.

Bicycling did promote new forms of heterosexual sociability that modified the forms of parental authority. One commentator at the time heralded the “new social laws” the bicycle was bringing into being: “Parents who will not allow their daughters to accompany young men to the theatre without chaperonage allow them to go bicycle-riding alone with young men. This is considered perfectly proper. It seems to be one phase of the good comradeship which is so strong a feature of the pastime.” Although this commentator’s assertion that “every rider feels at liberty to accost or converse with every other rider” might be

read as a threatening aspect of bicycle mobility, he points to the bicycle itself as enforcing “the uniformly quiet, orderly, and decorous conduct of the great army of wheelmen.”<sup>49</sup> While formal introductions were usually considered a necessity in the genteel and gentility-aspiring classes, meeting on bicycles seems to have overridden that requirement—perhaps because, at least through the mid-1890s, riders could be assumed to be middle class. The bicycle functions almost as another character: a mutual acquaintance who legitimately makes the introduction. While one etiquette book suggests mounting a chaperone on a bicycle, this appears to have been rare both in practice and in the stories.<sup>50</sup> The stories instead assert that the new, seemingly less-controlled forms of heterosexual sociability enabled by the bicycle will produce at least as satisfactory a result as traditional courtship—and that the satisfactory result may even be caused by the bicycle.<sup>51</sup>

### Bicycling Formulas

Stories that incorporated bicycles within a courtship plot (and courtship stories were themselves ubiquitous in middle-class magazines) use formulas that defuse the threat of women’s bicycling. Bicycling in courtship stories frequently allows middle-class young people to meet; usually they turn out to share not only social class but also social connections and to be entirely suitable matches. In one such story, “Rosalind Awheel,” by Flora Lincoln Comstock, in *Godey’s Magazine’s* 1896 special bicycling issue, a girl resists her father’s disapproval of bicycling.<sup>52</sup> The story addresses and defuses the possibility that bicycling might be masculinizing. Although Ethel dresses as a boy to escape home on her bicycle tour, she is spotted by a fellow bicyclist, a socially suitable brother of a girlfriend. Revealing that he has long been interested in her, he insists on seeing her home “safe under [her] father’s roof.” This story ultimately recaptures Ethel but allows a reader to briefly enjoy with Ethel the pleasures of transgression without permanent consequences. It closes with Ethel safely back in girl’s clothes and her courtship with the right sort of fellow well underway.<sup>53</sup>

In another formulaic story, the desire for a bicycle enables romance and substitutes for longings toward more troublesome sorts of mobility. In the 1896 *Munsey’s* magazine courtship story “The Story of a Story,” by Adelaide L. Rouse, Elizabeth tries to sell a story to a magazine to

earn money for a bicycle.<sup>54</sup> The magazine's editor and assistant editor mock the young woman's story to one another and reject it, but the assistant editor begins courting her under the guise of teaching her to write, though he believes her incapable of it. The desire for either the freedom of the bicycle or the power of writing and earning money are here both subsumed into romance, and the story ends with the assistant editor's announcement to the editor that they are buying a tandem bicycle—here both a sign of betrothal in an attractively companionable marriage and a mobility specifically restricted for the woman to movement as a pair (the assistant editor already has his own bicycle). The bicycle story thus keeps an advertised item in the reader's eye while demonstrating the bicycle's multiple uses and containing the threat posed by woman's mobility—both literal and economic. And clearly, this young woman will not be riding off alone or, for that matter, making suspicious adjustments to her saddle. That threat has been undercut by watchful editorial control: both *Munsey's* magazine's and the betrothed editor's.

The editors complain that Elizabeth's stories are "prose idyl[s]," set in the vague realm of romance, full of such sentences as, "The sun was shedding his last rays upon a lowly cot, embowered by trees, behind which flowed a rivulet."<sup>55</sup> Unlike such work, Rouse's own story is in line with the tenets of realism that the two editors espouse in their conversation; it is full of the tangible life of the world. Its characters are understood through their relationship not only to one another but also to commodities such as typewriters and bicycles. These signal our presence in an up-to-date world that is definitively different from life with lowly cots and rivulets. One result of this brand of realism, with its deployment of props, is that objects in the story are not only in the same two-dimensional space, printed on the same paper as the magazine's advertisements, but are in the same register as well; they are familiar from the ordinary middle-class world of commerce. And yet Rouse's story, with its neatly tied courtship plot, is realism only in contrast to the romantic excesses of Elizabeth's writing. It depends both on this counter-example and on its assertion of commonality with the objects and advertising narratives in the magazine to claim and even insist on that status.

The events of Rouse's story are precipitated by a character's desire to buy a bicycle. The reader is invited to participate in the story's world of

interested consumers. At the same time, through their presence in stories, the objects in the advertisements are endowed with a larger social meaning and acquire significance or have it reinforced, including an association to courtship rather than to solitary, independent mobility. The bicycle links the two characters socially and mechanically. Elizabeth and her editor's mutual enjoyment of it points them toward new models of family life in which, according to one commentator, "whole families ride together, carrying with them wherever they go the spirit of the family circle." Because "husband and wife are able to enjoy this together, the result is a new bond of union."<sup>56</sup> The bicycle thus facilitates new expectations of heterosexual sociability in courtship and marriage, a version of middle-class marriage in which a failed writer is a suitable helpmate to a rising editor.

Rouse's story hints at endorsement of a new form of marriage in which the husband is less the absolute patriarch than the senior partner, still superior in knowledge and authority. Old-line patriarchal authority appears in other of these stories in the form of the father. When his authority is seemingly undercut by the daughter's bicycling, the daughter is shown to actually achieve a higher form of obedience to it. In one story, for example, an ailing young woman obeys the "prescription" of her brother, the doctor; defies her father, the minister; and takes up cycling. She gains renewed strength to apply to her father's housework.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, Harry St. Maur's 1897 "To Hymen on a Wheel" (the title alludes to the Greek god of marriage, not anatomy) emphasizes the old-fashioned unreasonableness of parental demands through its setting in a "wee village" in England, whose most "metropolitan" inhabitant is the postman who delivers mail on his bicycle. An obstinate, dialect-speaking father opposes his modern seventeen-year-old daughter Jenny's desire to marry Will; although he likes Will, the father wants her to wait until she is thirty, her parents' age at marriage. The father secretly reads Will's letter telling Jenny to meet him at noon to marry and then thwarts her efforts to get to town alone. When she invents an errand, he follows her to Tim the postman's house. Pointing out his bicycle, she says

"Have you heard, father, as how girls ride them things?" indicating Tim's bike—"in trousers and breeches like men."

"The brazen things. No gal o' mine shall ever ride one in any kind o' way. It aint commonly decent."

Jenny gets on it, of course, and rides off to the registrar's, "flying down the road peddling in great shape." In a moment we were not told about, though it seems to have had something to do with a group of American tourists awheel who stayed at her father's inn, Jenny had learned to ride.<sup>58</sup>

Here, the bicycle *does* undermine parental authority. But we are carefully told how unreasonable that authority is and that Jenny is obeying her father in almost every way—he approves of her choice of Will and even insists that her eventual marriage should be at the registrar's office. The father's opposition to women's bicycle riding becomes his final old-fashioned absurdity and affirms the righteousness of the daughter's move. Bicycling's liberating power is paired with an unambiguous situation. And—in an American magazine filled with advertisements for Columbia, Liberty, and United States bicycles—the cause of bicycling is positioned as a blow for American speed against old-world sluggishness.

The formula we saw earlier in the *Godey's Lady's Book* story "A Turn of the Wheel," in which the high-wheel rider is knocked from the world of male mobility in order to enter the female home and fall in love, is retooled for the safety bicycle in an 1893 story in the bicycling and outdoors magazine *Outing*. In John Seymour Wood's "A Dangerous Sidepath: A Story of the Wheel," Sam, a young, overworked lawyer, takes up riding after his doctor tells him he is "in danger of consumption." The story interrupts itself for a self-conscious testimonial: "today he is sound as a new dollar, his eye bright, his lungs healthy. But how this sounds like some medical 'ad'!"<sup>59</sup> It is not an advertisement, the narrator explains, since he does not promote a particular model. He goes on to tell Sam's courtship story.

On a week-long bicycle trip with two male friends, Sam rides on a small town's smooth sidewalk until stopped by a pretty young woman. She turns out to be Nathalie, the cousin of one of Sam's companions, in this town for the summer. Her family invites the three men to stay with them, but Sam, now enamored of Nathalie, declines. He walks past her house instead: "He saw a lady's wheel leaning against a pillar of the porch. Did *she* ride? Instantly he thought of her flying along under the elms, a vision of beauty on her wheel—for a pretty girl never looks so pretty as when wheeling." Unlike the young man on the high-wheeler who saw his statuette in Provence, Sam is transfixed by the vision of Nathalie in motion, and her motion is reformulated as yet another visual treat.<sup>60</sup>

Finally the opportunity to talk arrives:

“You are fond of riding?” asked Sam, astonished.  
 “I do nothing else.”<sup>61</sup>

And they have even more in common: both like to stop and read and dream along the way. They joke that they scorch downhill only.

The three travelers set out for a moonlit ride with Nathalie and her brothers. The visual pleasure of watching her cycle excites Sam’s admiration still further: Nathalie rides “to perfection, sitting very straight and running the wheel on a line.” She daringly leads the way across a stream on a single plank. The rest follow safely, but Sam, distracted by love, falls in and breaks his leg. Back at her house for the requisite nursing, Nathalie contritely ministers to him. Following the inevitable engagement, the couple “took their wedding journey on the latest of [bicycles] . . . and this summer, Sam Selover is wheeling, on the sidewalks of Farley—a baby carriage.”<sup>62</sup>

Although Nathalie is an active participant here and precipitates Sam’s fall into love, the stream, and her household, her role remains little different from that of the Provençal statuette. On the other hand, life beyond the boundaries of the formula is somewhat shifted: the two will continue to venture into the world on their bicycles, and it is not only the mother of the couple (her uterus no doubt strengthened by riding) who exchanges her bicycle for a baby carriage. The use of this formula, however, reassures the reader that women in motion on bicycles, rather than standing still in doorways, do not excessively disrupt convention, even literary convention.<sup>63</sup>

### Writing against the Formula

That the formula of the injured man rescued into marriage came to be considered something of a laughable cliché is suggested by an 1897 parody of the formula, “Willing Wheeler’s Wheeling: A Bicycle Story,” in which a man’s attempt to fake an injury and thus woo Miss Finlayson, “*a pretty girl on a bicycle!*” while being nursed goes awry. His plan has been fed by reading too many romances.<sup>64</sup>

Writers such as Merington and Willard show women reveling in the freedom afforded by bicycling. But, because letters to the editor rarely appeared in this period’s magazines, there is little direct evidence of readers’ responses to the formulaic stories. The threat the formulaic stories recontain had been articulated in terms of both women’s

sexuality and independence. An explicit awareness of and response to these formulas does appear in two stories that subvert, rather than simply parody, these formulas. Both were published in magazines that did not depend on bicycle advertisements. Here, the threat posed by women's cycling is suddenly visible.

The new athleticism for women and girls increasingly permitted and promoted in this period promised the new woman that she could leave behind the specter of invalidism, that is, her body's own potential for invalidism. And, in Kate Chopin's 1895 story "The Unexpected," the bicycle facilitates escape from an invalid body—externalized as someone else's invalid body. Rather than recontaining the threat to propriety and the established order implicit in women's bicycling, "The Unexpected" vividly dramatizes and celebrates it.

Randall and Dorothea are a passionate, engaged couple separated when Randall contracts a wasting disease. Dorothea ardently anticipates his visit on his way south to recover but finds herself appalled and repelled by his transformation. "This was not . . . the man she loved and had promised to marry. . . . The lips with which he had kissed her so hungrily, and with which he was kissing her now, were dry and parched, and his breath was feverish and tainted." Randall still asserts a hold on her, however: "All the strength of his body had concentrated in the clasp—the grasp with which he clung to her hand." He wants them to marry immediately so that she can come along and nurse him, or, alternatively have his money when he dies. Interrupted by a coughing fit, he is helped away by his attendant before she can answer. We feel her revulsion and understand that convention is about to close in on her: "she realized that there would soon be people appearing whom she would be forced to face and speak to." The expected outcome seems to be that she will do the proper and dutiful thing: set aside her own reactions, marry him, and go with him to nurse him. But the story takes an unexpected turn: "Fifteen minutes later Dorothea had changed her house gown and had mounted her 'wheel,' and was fleeing as if Death himself pursued her." She rides far:

She was alone with nature; her pulses beating in unison with its sensuous throb, . . . She had never spoken a word after bidding him good-bye; but now she seemed disposed to make confidants of the tremulous leaves, or the crawling and hopping insects, or the big sky into which she was staring.

"Never!" she whispered, "not for all his thousands. Never! never! not for millions!"<sup>65</sup>

Bicycling allows Dorothea to escape duty and self-sacrifice as well as strictly material considerations. Pressed to answer yes or no, she takes to her wheel and escapes the deathly embrace of marriage. She rides off, pulses beating, into sensuous, edenic solitude in which she can refuse the marriage. In this story, bicycling arrives in high gear, brakes off, as a threat to the social order. It allows a woman not only the right, which might elsewhere be developed in abstract discussion, but the wordless *power* to move beyond duty and affirm her physicality—here, set in opposition to the grasping deadly power of diseased marriage. It moves her far beyond the familiar trope of the woman as nurturing caretaker to a conclusion that takes the formula in an unexpected direction.

It is significant that “The Unexpected,” in which bicycling figures so unsettlingly, was published in *Vogue*, which at the time was less a fashion magazine than a society weekly, and often printed material that twitted conventional bourgeois views. Emily Toth’s discussion of Chopin’s publishing history suggests that *Vogue* took stories from Chopin that the more conventional *Century*, *Harper’s*, and *Scribner’s* would not accept.<sup>66</sup> Its circulation was small and, moreover, it did not depend heavily on advertising for its revenues; as one magazine historian wrote, “its advertising business had never been properly developed.”<sup>67</sup> The advertisements in *Vogue* were mainly for carriage-trade retailers—silversmiths, Louis Sherry, and carriage makers themselves—rather than for such manufacturers as bicycle makers, as were in the pages of *Munsey’s*, *McClure’s*, *Godey’s*, and other magazines that depended more heavily on advertising revenue or in *Outing*, which was subsidized by a bicycle manufacturer. As we have seen, these magazines printed fiction that defuses this apparent threat; this contrasts with *Vogue’s* willingness to flaunt the license accessible to women through bicycle riding.

The sense that bicycle advertising and the story are in the same register, however, is fleetingly present. Chopin’s story provides a reading of what we saw in Figure 2, a common image in bicycle magazine advertisements and catalogs—the woman riding off alone into the countryside. “The Unexpected” rereads and rearticulates the appeal of such images and plays out the fantasy of freedom that the advertising graphics invite the female viewer to enter; Chopin, however, does not make it safe for those who might disapprove of such independence by reassuring the reader that Dorothea’s costume covers

her toes. We do not know whether Dorothea sits very straight and “rides to perfection,” like Nathalie. Dorothea is not offered as the object of spectatorship, an image of appealingly decorative riding, or “a pretty girl on a bicycle” but as someone using the available technology to make a break for freedom. Chopin thus wrenches the advertising imagery from its lulling context and rereads both it and the threat of women’s riding as a heartening escape from constraint.

Chopin’s anticourtship story, in which a courtship is unraveled and only the woman rides off into solitary pleasure on her bicycle, draws on and celebrates the same metaphoric connection between women’s independence and women’s sexuality on the loose that the medical discourse about bicycling and masturbation found so alarming. An 1896 Willa Cather story, “Tommy the Unsentimental,” plays out the bicycling woman’s threat to gender definition.<sup>68</sup>

Unlike the cross-dressed Ethel of “Rosalind Awheel,” whose excursion leads both to reconfinement in her father’s home and a suitable match, or a character in another 1896 story, whose cross-dressed fast ride leads to embarrassment,<sup>69</sup> the ambiguously gendered Theodosia, called Tommy, uses her riding prowess to rescue Jay Ellington Harper, the ineffectual foppish young cashier from the East to whom she is ostensibly engaged.

Tommy is the no-nonsense daughter of a banker in the West, where “people rather expect some business ability in a girl . . . and they respect it immensely.” With her good sense and acumen, she repeatedly bails Jay out by doing his work for him, and the attentions he shows Tommy in exchange are attractive to her. And yet Jay clearly fails to appreciate her. The people who do are the “Old Boys,” her father’s old business friends. She reciprocates their feeling for her in her Western way by playing billiards with them, mixing their cocktails, and taking one herself occasionally. Jay, of course, disapproves of such acts, and the Old Boys disapprove of Jay.<sup>70</sup>

The story layers an alternative model of gender onto the conventional one. Here, whether people are male or female is sometimes less central to either their sexual preference or gender roles than whether they are Eastern or Western. The Western Old Boys, for example, have “rather taken her mother’s place.”<sup>71</sup>

When Jay’s father buys him a bank of his own twenty-five miles away, Tommy often bicycles over “to straighten out the young man’s

business for him.” The Old Boys are concerned when Tommy goes East to school for a year. “They did not like to see her gravitating toward the East; it was a sign of weakening, they said, and showed an inclination to experiment with another kind of life, Jay Ellington Harper’s kind.” Nonetheless, she does well at school with what counts for the folks back home—athletics—and returns acknowledging that Easterners are not her sort. But she brings back with her a prototypical Easterner, “a girl she had grown fond of at school, a dainty white, languid bit of a thing, who used violet perfumes and carried a sunshade.”<sup>72</sup>

Miss Jessica makes an impression on Jay, who evidently senses a kindred spirit. While Cather leaves ambiguous the question of whether Tommy will be losing Jessica to Jay, or Jay to Jessica if they get together, Tommy’s heroic bicycle ride at the climax of the story makes clear that the two Easterners are fit only for one another, and neither deserves Tommy.

When Jay telegraphs that he needs help by noon against a run on his bank, Tommy decides to bring him money to pay off his depositors, though the only way to do so is a difficult bicycle trip. Miss Jessica, seeking a grand gesture to impress Jay, comes too. But when Tommy refuses to stop and rest and drink water and instead “bent over her handle bars, . . . [i]t flashed upon Miss Jessica that Tommy was not only very unkind, but that she sat very badly on her wheel and looked aggressively masculine and professional when she bent her shoulders and pumped like that. . . .”<sup>73</sup> Miss Jessica drops out half-way along and asks Tommy to tell Jay that she would do anything to save him.

Miss Jessica sees in Tommy precisely the sort of riding that manuals warn women to avoid and that, we have seen, is associated with saddle masturbation. Tommy’s scorching posture and lack of moderation, however, bring results in an extraordinary riding feat. The 1896 record for men on racing bicycles on a paved flat track was twenty miles in forty-five minutes. Tommy rides twenty-five miles on a rough, unpaved, uphill road in the hot sun, not on a racing bike and carrying a heavy canvas bag, in seventy-five minutes.

She arrives in the nick of time, moneybag in hand, scolds Jay for his poor business practices, and tells him where he can find Miss Jessica. “I left her all bunched up by the road like a little white rabbit. . . . I’ll tend bank; you’d better get your wheel and go and look her up and comfort her. And as soon as it is convenient, Jay, I wish you’d marry her and be

done with it. I want to get this thing off my mind.” Jay is shocked; he thought he was engaged to Tommy. Masculinity once again becomes an operative term as he thanks Tommy for what she’s done for him:

“I didn’t believe any woman could be at once so kind and clever. You almost made a man of me.”

“Well I certainly didn’t succeed,”

she replies and sends him along.<sup>74</sup>

Tommy has played for a time the role familiar from the formulaic stories of helping out the immobilized man, here immobilized by his own shortcomings instead of by an accident. But she is not interested in reducing her sphere and bringing him into it, in entering a sphere as limited as his own, or in bringing both into the “spirit of the family circle.” A life of fast riding in the larger sphere of action and Westernness is clearly superior to either Jay’s world of incompetence or Miss Jessica’s adjoining world of decorum. Concern with decorousness and decorum may promise to make its practitioners fine advertising illustrations but actually leaves one of them bunched up by the side of the road “like a little white rabbit.”

Although Cather and the story approve of Tommy and behavior classified as “Western,” Cather’s portrayal of Tommy’s riding clearly links leaning over, scorching, and immoderation in riding with “masculine” traits and attitudes. And, although Tommy has used her bicycle to visit her ostensible fiancé, bicycling here is not recuperated or promoted as an advantageous new form of heterosexual socializing that leads to a “new bond of union.” Rather, it becomes a means for a woman to more fully encompass and investigate the world, a test dividing the autonomous woman from the fops and the rabbits.<sup>75</sup>

The story was published in *The Home Monthly*, intended as a genteel and moral entertainment; as Cather’s biographer Sharon O’Brien notes, Tommy’s cocktail-mixing abilities were hardly the skills the publisher wished to recommend to his teetotalling readers.<sup>76</sup> But the story appeared in the first issue that Cather edited, and she wrote half the copy to make up for the absence of a file of manuscripts on hand. Under the circumstances, she may have felt licensed to use work she had already written or to please herself by publishing a story that subverted the conventions of bicycling stories, as she does here. Perhaps it helped that *The Home Monthly*’s advertisements were mostly for local merchants, not national manufacturers.

## Conclusion

The nationally distributed middle-class magazines took on the project of defusing the threatening commodity and making it salable by asserting scenarios in which it upheld and renewed the traditional social order. Within these scenarios, played out repeatedly within formulaic fiction, bicycles no longer threaten to erode gender distinctions or to make riders loose women.

The advertising-dependent magazines' makeover of women's bicycling in a more decorous image may have been appreciated by women who wanted to ride, as is suggested in accounts such as that of Annie Nathan Meyer, a founder of Barnard College. Meyer took up bicycling early and touts her approach to it as an example of her "shrewd theory that to put any radical scheme across, it must be done in the most conservative manner possible." In distinction to Willard's and others' advocacy of the bicycle costume as a first step toward dress reform, Meyer adopted the protective coloration of a "well tailored suit . . . and modest hat" so that "there was nothing about me to indicate that I was not a genteel conservative, though I was engaged in an exceptional and pioneering act."<sup>77</sup>

The mainstream magazines' defusing of the bicycle's threatening aspects through attractive images in advertisements and through formulaic fiction perhaps provided similar protective coloration and made it easier and more acceptable for women to take up bicycling—and women did make up an estimated quarter to a third of the bicycle market by the end of the decade. The magazines recast or read out of the discourse the possibility that bicycling might send women riding off alone, outside of or away from marriage. The stories instead suggest that the bicycle is simply an aid to making an improved version of heterosexual marriage.

Roads branch out in many directions from women's bicycling in the 1890s. The marketing of bicycles in retrospect appears as a test drive for the subsequent marketing of the automobile, where again we see differentiated men's and women's versions, rapid deployment in fiction and social experience as an aid to courtship, and a mixed impact on women's lives.<sup>78</sup> Bicycling did undoubtedly provide an impetus to dress reform and helped make lighter, less restrictive clothing acceptable. It made new forms of women's athleticism acceptable as well and pressed toward greater freedom of travel for women.

The “bicycle craze” ended around 1898.<sup>79</sup> Prices dropped drastically—from \$150 in the early 1890s to \$10 by the end—because of production improvements and, arguably, because the well-to-do market was saturated. Women and men continued to ride, but bicycles were no longer a genteel novelty, and manufacturers no longer found it profitable to advertise heavily in middle-class magazines. Editorial content followed advertising, and stories and articles featuring bicycles faded out of magazines about that time.

Working together within the larger framework of the magazine, advertising and fiction made a seemingly threatening new product attractive to potential users. While advertisements could address a specific manifestation of the threat by promoting a new product such as the “hygienic” saddle to take care of it, the larger issues raised by women’s increased mobility could not be headed off as easily. Magazine stories took on those issues by rewriting the product’s apparent threat to traditional roles. They subsume the potential conflict within a discourse of consumption. Soon after, automobiles began appearing in magazine stories—but that’s another story.

### NOTES

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1. Maria E. Ward, *Bicycling for Ladies: The Common Sense of Bicycling* (New York, 1896), 12–13.

2. H. O. Carrington, “As to the Bicycle,” *American Midwife* 2 (1896): 16; quoted in John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (Urbana, Ill., 1974), 184.

3. See, for example, Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York, 1989); and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The New Woman as Androgyne,” in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1985).

4. William Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products, and Images of Well-Being* (New York, 1986), 121. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally draw on Merle Curti, “The Changing Concept of ‘Human Nature’ in

the Literature of American Advertising," *Business History Review* 41 (winter 1967): 335–53. Jackson Lears locates the roots of this shift around 1910, when the "Reason Why" approach promised the consumer a "richer, fuller life" from using the product. Other advertising historians, such as Stephen Fox and Susan Strasser, show advertising by atmosphere and association beginning to displace hard-sell copy around 1915, while Roland Marchand similarly finds advertisers before World War I only just beginning to shift to "selling the benefit instead of the product . . . prestige instead of automobiles, sex appeal instead of mere soap"; they were focusing, in other words, on the pleasures and psychic advantages of owning it. T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880–1930," in Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1980* (New York, 1983), 18; Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York, 1984), 70–72; Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York, 1989), 159–61; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley, 1986), 10.

In the three-dimensional realm, department stores in the 1880s already sold goods by association through lavish displays that associated goods variously with elegance, luxury, glamour, refined taste, and exoticism. (See, for example, William Leach, *The Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* [New York, 1993].)

5. Leiss, Kline, and Jhalley, *Social Communication*, 124; Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 105–8.

6. The rare exceptions to this rule were an already suspect class of women: stage performers who used the high wheeler in an act. Women could ride the cumbersome carriage-like tricycle sometimes known as a fairy tricycle; riders sat on a bench between two large wheels and steered a small wheel in front. Riding the high wheeler and the tricycle were seen as complementary gendered activities. See Ellen Garvey, "Commercial Fiction: Advertising and Fiction in American Magazines, 1880s to 1910s" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1992).

7. The bicycles on which Lancelot and his knights ride to Hank Morgan's rescue in Twain's 1889 *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* are the manly high wheelers. An 1880s enthusiast in a bicycling magazine similarly establishes riding the high wheeler as a masculine and chivalrous pursuit: ". . . gallant knights and true are they; / Full hard they ride, oft brook mischance, / And daring feats full oft essay, / For maiden's praise or tender glance" (Basil Webb, "A Ballade of This Age," *The Wheelman* 3 [Oct. 1883]: 100).

8. Max Vander Weyde, "A Turn of the Wheel," *Godey's Lady's Book* 117 (Dec. 1888): 480.

9. See for example Emily Lennox's stories "A Love Game," *Godey's Lady's Book* 117 (Oct. 1888): 295–99; and "The Unbidden Guest: An Episode in a Country House," *Godey's Lady's Book* 117 (Nov. 1888): 349–60. The formula is common in *Munsey's* in the 1890s as well. For a discussion of a similar pattern in British women's novels of the mid-nineteenth century, see Sally Mitchell, "Sentiment and Suffering: Women's Recreational Reading in the 1860s," *Victorian Studies* 21 (autumn 1977): 29–45.

10. Paper dolls advertising Columbia bicycles for women's use, 1895, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Winterthur Library, 78x317.12.

11. Envoy and Fleetwing: advertisement for the Buffalo Cycle Co., *The Century* 53 (Feb. 1896): 38.

12. Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (New York, 1929), 410.

13. For a fuller discussion of the bicycle and tourism, see Gary Allan Tobin, "The Bicycle Boom of the 1890s: The Development of Private Transportation and the Birth of the Modern Tourist," *Journal of Popular Culture* 7 (spring 1974): 838–49.

14. See Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (Lexington, Ky., 1990), for a discussion of the treatment of women's athleticism in the satiric press. Martha Banta also discusses the importance of the image of the woman on the bicycle and asserts that the visual image of the American girl as bicyclist helped form new conceptions of what women might do and be (*Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* [New York, 1987], 88).

15. Frances E. Willard, *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle: Reflections of an Influential Nineteenth-Century Woman*, rev. ed. of *A Wheel within a Wheel* (1896; Sunnyvale, Calif., 1991), 43.

16. Ward, *Bicycling for Ladies*, 12–13.

17. Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, 174.

18. Marguerite Merington, "Woman and the Bicycle," *Scribner's* 17 (June 1895): 703.

19. Willard, *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle*, 32, 74.

20. See, for example, Arthur Bird, M.D., "Is Bicycling Harmful," *Godey's Magazine* 132 (Apr. 1896): 374; and J. West Roosevelt, "A Doctor's View of Bicycling," *Scribner's* 17 (June 1895): 708. A notable exception to this practice is Ward's *Bicycling for Ladies*, with photographs by Alice Austen. Ward not only celebrates the autonomy the bicycle afforded women but augments it with thorough instructions on bicycle repair and adjustment. In a chapter titled "Position and Power," Ward discusses the seat solely in terms of the physical mechanics of riding. Willard, *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle*, 58.

21. E. D. Page, "Women and the Bicycle," *Brooklyn Medical Journal* 11 (1897): 84. See also Thomas Lothrop and William Potter, "Women and the Bicycle," *Buffalo Medical Journal* 35 (Nov. 1895): 348–49.

22. Karin L. F. Calvert, "To Be a Child: An Analysis of the Artifacts of Childhood" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1984), 191, 152. Page, "Women and the Bicycle," 84.

23. R. L. Dickinson, "Bicycling for Women from the Standpoint of the Gynecologist," *American Journal of Obstetrics* 21 (1895): 25; cited in Haller and Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality*, 185.

24. W. E. Fitch, "Bicycle-Riding: Its Moral Effect upon Young Girls and Its Relation to Diseases of Women," *Georgia Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 4 (1899): 155–56.

25. Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist," in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1903; New York, 1963), 84. The story is set in 1895.

26. George Napheys, A.M., M.D., *The Physical Life of Woman: Advice to the Maiden, Wife, and Mother* (Philadelphia, 1884), 40.

27. Mary Wood-Allen, *What a Young Girl Ought to Know* (Philadelphia, 1897), 106; cited in Haller and Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality*.

28. See Napheys, *Physical Life of Woman*, 40.

29. Lina Beard and Adelia Beard: *The American Girl's Handy Book: How to Amuse Yourself and Others* (New York, 1898), 471.

30. Gormully and Jeffery Manufacturing Co. Rambler bicycles catalog, 1893, 23.

31. Luther H. Porter, *Cycling for Health and Pleasure* (New York, 1895), 52.

32. Automatic Cycle Seat, *Harper's Weekly*, 11 Apr. 1896, 367.

33. The Sager Pneumatic Bicycle Seat, *Harper's Weekly*, 11 Apr. 1896, 371.

34. *Dominion Monthly and Ontario Medical Journal* 7 (1896): 504, 11; *Dominion*

*Monthly and Ontario Medical Journal* (1898): 28, 30; cited in Patricia Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors, and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, England, 1990), 75.

35. "Psyche" quoted in Porter, *Cycling for Health and Pleasure*, 18–20.

36. Rambler advertisement, *The Century* 50 (June 1894): 38.

37. See, for example, Henry Garrigues, "Woman and the Bicycle," *Forum* 21 (Jan. 1896): 576–87. Garrigues, a doctor, proclaims that, by bicycling, a woman "far from diminishing her fitness for this supreme act in her life [childbirth], actually renders herself more capable of meeting the ordeal" ("Woman and the Bicycle," 582).

38. Willard, *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle*, 43. Columbia bicycles advertisement, *Harper's Weekly*, 25 July 1896, 38.

39. Merington, "Woman and the Bicycle," 703.

40. For more discussion on this, see Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: Birth Control in America* (New York, 1990), 133–55.

41. Americanness was assumed to be white, as well as native born. Although one bicycle historian notes that a homemade bicycle devised by a young black man who "according to *Cycle* magazine could not buy, rent, or borrow a bicycle" caused a stir in the mid-1890s (James Wagenvoord, *Bikes and Riders* [New York, 1972], 89), the presence of such an anomalous piece of exotica only consolidated the notion that "real" bicycling was a white middle-class pursuit, and other people taking it up could do so only in grotesque imitation. African Americans did ride bicycles, though they are absent from magazine imagery of riding. *Outing* magazine, in April 1893, reported that the League of American Wheelmen convention had been embroiled in a fight ending only with the narrow defeat of an amendment barring black people from membership; the controversy was expected to continue. The league, begun by manufacturer Albert Pope, campaigned for better roads, organized races and clubs, arranged for discounts at inns, and did much to shape the practice and image of bicycling. (See *Outing* 22 [Apr. 1893], 10.)

In the only story seen for this study in which a black cyclist appears, he is a servant accompanying a girls' tricycling club on its tour; although he rides, he is not included in the count of riders (E. Vinton Blake, "The Girls' Tricycle Club and Its Run down the Cape," *St. Nicholas* 13 [May 1886]).

42. These changes and their repercussions are laid out most cogently in Richard Ohmann, "Where Did Mass Culture Come From? The Case of the Magazines" and "Advertising and the New Discourse of Mass Culture," in *Politics of Letters* (Middletown, Conn., 1987); Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization"; and Christopher Wilson, "The Rhetoric of Consumption: Mass-Market Magazines and the Demise of the Gentle Reader, 1880–1920," in *Culture of Consumption*; and Leiss, Kline, and Jhally, *Social Communication*.

43. See Christopher Wilson, *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens, Ga., 1985).

44. Presbrey, *History and Development of Advertising*, 363.

45. Cleveland Moffett, "Great Business Enterprises: The Marvels of Bicycle Making," *McClure's* (Feb.–May 1897), 50 pages paginated separately from both editorial and advertising sections. Others in this series of what would now be called advertorials—one for shoes and another for pianos—are more clearly flagged as advertisements. Pope's twelve-page condensation of the advertising articles in a booklet calls itself a reprint of a *McClure's* article (Cleveland Moffett, *How a Bicycle Is Made: One of America's Great Industries*, n.d., Bella Landauer Collection, New-York Historical Society, box: Bicycles 2).

46. Terdiman suggests in his discussion of nineteenth-century French newspapers that the juxtaposition of such unrelated elements in the newspaper works against the containment or harmonization of conflict and normalizes fragmentation. American magazines of this period operate rather differently (Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1985], 122–24).

47. For more on editors' and advertisers' common interest in what was cast as "progressive" advertising, see Garvey, "Commercial Fiction," 13–15.

48. Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago, 1988), 10.

49. Joseph Bishop, "Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle," *Forum* 21 (Aug. 1896): 680–89.

50. See Maude Cooke, *Social Etiquette; or Manners and Customs of Polite Society* (n.p., 1899), 343–44. It may be that the bicycle simply extended to the genteel middle class the upper-class acceptance of a young unmarried woman's horseback riding alone with a young man. This may have been acceptable, Louis Auchincloss suggests, because outdoor activities were seen as inherently wholesome (Auchincloss's commentary in Florence Adele Sloan, *Maverick in Mauve: The Diary of a Romantic Age* [Garden City, N.Y., 1983], 126).

51. This may have been a specifically American notion, at least as it appears in fiction. In H. G. Wells's *The Wheels of Chance* (London, 1896), bicycling allows a draper's assistant to be mistaken for a genteel, educated man and get entangled in a love plot. In Maurice Leblanc's *Voici des ailes!* (Paris, 1898), a bicycle trip sets off a rash of spouse swapping, Stephen Kern reports in *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

52. Flora Lincoln Comstock, "Rosalind Awheel," *Godey's Magazine* 132 (Apr. 1896), 388–93.

53. *Godey's Magazine* in this period was no longer the genteel mainstay of women's magazines it had been as *Godey's Lady's Book* but was attempting—ultimately unsuccessfully—to shape a more commercial identity; it dropped its price to ten cents in 1894. See Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines 1885–1905* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 5, 87; and John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America, 1741–1990* (New York, 1991), 36.

54. Adelaide Rouse, "The Story of a Story," *Munsey's*, October 1896.

55. *Ibid.*, 47.

56. Bishop, "Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle," 684.

57. Bernice Rogers, "The Reverend Abiel—Convert," *The Household* 29 (Nov. 1896): 6.

58. Harry St. Maur, "To Hymen on a Wheel," *The Home Magazine* 8 (Aug. 1897).

59. John Seymour Wood, "A Dangerous Sidepath: A Story of the Wheel," *Outing* 22 (June 1893): 209.

60. *Ibid.*, 212.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, 213, 214.

63. For a discussion of a children's story in *St. Nicholas* magazine that uses some of the same elements, Gabrielle Jackson's "The Colburn Prize," see Garvey, "Commercial Fiction," 339–42.

64. Charles H. Day, "Willing Wheeler's Wheeling: A Bicycle Story," *The Home Magazine* 8 (Aug. 1897): 137.

65. Kate Chopin, "The Unexpected," in *A Vocation and a Voice: Stories* (1895; New York, 1991), 91, 90, 92, 93. Originally published in *Vogue*, 18 Sept. 1895.

66. Emily Toth, *Kate Chopin* (New York, 1990), 253, 279.

67. Mott, *History of American Magazines*, 759.

68. Willa Cather, "Tommy, the Unsentimental" (1896), in *Women on Women: An Anthology of American Lesbian Short Fiction*, ed., Joan Nestle and Naomi Holoch (New York, 1990). Originally in (Pittsburgh) *Home Monthly* 6 (Aug. 1896).

The significance of the fact that the writers I cite here who subvert the formula are canonical ones is *not* that greatness breaks the mold but that, although these stories appeared in relatively obscure magazines, the writers' later fame and the still later feminist scholarly interest in them made the stories available in modern collections. Counter-formulaic stories may have been published in less-commercial magazines by writers who stayed obscure as well.

69. See Virginia Niles Leeds, "A Coast and a Capture: A Bicycling Story," *McClure's* 7 (July 1896): 122–26.

70. Cather, "Tommy," 9.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*, 10, 11.

73. *Ibid.*, 13.

74. *Ibid.*, 15.

75. Setting the story in the somewhat exotic rural West, incidentally at a considerable distance from the main market for bicycles, may have made such a vision of bicycling less threatening. Poor roads in rural regions as well as the depression of 1893 that cut into farmers' incomes meant that few people living in rural areas owned bicycles.

76. Sharon O'Brien, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (New York, 1987), 227. O'Brien sees Cather's subversion here as the substitution of a male plot for a female one, a switch from romance to adventure story.

77. Annie Nathan Meyer, *It's Been Fun* (New York, 1951), 5.

78. See Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (New York, 1991).

79. Among the historians who give this date are Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle: Its Early Life and Times in America* (New York, 1972).