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**BICYCLES IN LITERATURE: THE ALTERNATIVE MODERNITIES OF
HUMAN-POWERED LOCOMOTION IN BRITAIN AND FRANCE, 1880 – 1920**

LE VÉLO DANS LA LITTÉRATURE : LES MODERNITÉS ALTERNATIVES D'UN
MOYEN DE TRANSPORT À PROPULSION HUMAINE EN GRANDE-BRETAGNE ET
EN FRANCE, 1880 – 1920

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Abstract

Bicycles in Literature: the Alternative Modernities of Human-Powered Locomotion in Britain and France, 1880 – 1920

The compelling links between modes of transport and literature have been widely examined from the perspective of the walker, the train traveller and the car driver. This thesis engages with the long overlooked bicycle as an object that actively shapes our interaction with text and provides a unique interface for viewing the world. I assess literary treatments of utilitarian and recreational cycling in a wide range of English and French fiction, as well as some travel writing and non-fiction, from the turn of the twentieth century. I show how the bicycle became a favoured literary device with certain authors, allowing writers to do much more than simply make a story appear up-to-date or move a character from place to place; authors used cycle journeys as a means to structure or punctuate their narratives or depict a novel sensory and aesthetic experience. The late-Victorian era saw the emergence of the modern bicycle along with a host of other transport and communication technologies that transformed everyday life. Literature from the early period of the bicycle's adoption shows how this technology contributed in some measure to the emergence of an accelerated, subjective, commodified modernity that the critic John Urry argues defined the twentieth century. Yet this thesis reveals that from the earliest days of its use, the bicycle played a crucial counter-cultural role, proposing an alternative modernity that directly challenged bourgeois, patriarchal, capitalist society. From blurring gender and class divisions, to offering a more empowering interaction with the machine, to allowing an embodied and social experience of space, the bicycle suggested a human-powered route to progress.

Le vélo dans la littérature : les modernités alternatives d'un moyen de transport à propulsion humaine en Grande-Bretagne et en France, 1880 – 1920

De nombreuses études témoignent des liens puissants qui existent entre les moyens de transport et la littérature, du point de vue du marcheur, du voyageur en train ou de l'automobiliste. À son tour, cette thèse s'interroge sur le vélo, longtemps négligé, en tant qu'objet qui façonne activement notre interaction avec des textes et propose une interface unique pour appréhender le monde. Cet ouvrage se propose d'étudier le cyclisme utilitaire et récréatif au tournant du XX^e siècle dans une sélection de textes en anglais et en français, principalement des romans, mais aussi des récits de voyage et des guides. Il s'agit de démontrer que le vélo est devenu un dispositif privilégié, qui permet de faire bien plus que simplement situer une histoire dans le présent ou déplacer des personnages d'un endroit à un autre. Certains auteurs se servent des voyages à vélo comme un moyen de structurer leurs récits, de les ponctuer ou de dépeindre une nouvelle expérience sensorielle et esthétique. Le vélo est apparu à la fin de l'ère victorienne en même temps que de nombreuses technologies de transport et de communication qui ont transformé la vie quotidienne. La littérature de cette période démontre que cette technologie a contribué dans une certaine mesure à l'émergence d'une modernité accélérée, subjective et marchande que John Urry conçoit comme un fondement du XX^e siècle. Or cette thèse révèle que depuis ses débuts, le vélo allait à contre-courant de la culture dominante, proposant une modernité alternative qui remettait en question la société bourgeoise, patriarcale et capitaliste. En brouillant les différences entre les classes et les sexes, en proposant une interaction plus responsable et stimulante avec la machine, en permettant une expérience corporelle et sociale de l'espace, le vélo a proposé une route à propulsion humaine vers le progrès.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are given for frequently cited works, which are cited parenthetically throughout.

VA: Maurice Leblanc. *Voici Des Ailes*. 1898. Vierzon: le Pas de côté, 2012.

TL: Dorothy Richardson. *The Tunnel*. 1919. London: Virago, 2002.

KP: H. G. Wells, *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul*. 1905. London: Collins, 1961.

MP: H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr Polly*. 1910. London: Pan Books, 1963.

WC: H. G. Wells, *The Wheels of Chance*, *A Bicycling Idyll* [1896]; *The Time Machine* [1895]. London: J. M. Dent, 1935.

Translations

Unless otherwise stated, all translations from French to English included in footnotes are my own.

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Introduction

Like other technologies, the bicycle extends the range of human experience. Voted the greatest invention since 1800 by BBC listeners in 2005,¹ over the past two centuries cycling has played a fascinating role in society and in literature. This thesis engages with the object's rich relationship to text, presenting how the novel sensations and perceptions experienced in the saddle provided a new interface for viewing and representing the world. The period 1880-1920 saw the appearance of numerous transportation and communication technologies but while it looked forward in anticipation, it kept one foot firmly planted in the past. From the perspective of literary history, this late-Victorian, pre-modernist moment is particularly compelling in terms of the contradictions and compromises writers observed between the old world and the new, the body and the machine, the city and the countryside. At the end of a century of rapid change, society began to take stock of the tears that had appeared in its fabric with the spread of new technologies and phenomena such as urban sprawl. Before World War 1, the motorcar and aviation changed the western world beyond recognition, the cracks in the structure of industrial capitalism had begun to show. At this juncture, the bicycle was a technology that allowed riders and writers to adopt a modern form of mobility while exploring the forgotten byways of a world that was rapidly disappearing. This thesis shows how the liberating experience of people powered locomotion pointed an alternative route to modernity, one which remained rooted in an awareness of the past, the environment, the body and humanity while moving steadily into the future.

One of the aims of this thesis is to reinstate the turn-of-the-century bicycle as a crucial

1 'Bicycle Chosen as Best Invention,' *BBC News*, 5 May 2005. Web. Accessed 18 Sep 2015. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4513929.stm>>

element in the wide-ranging project of modernity, to which it contributed by helping to introduce such concepts as rapid individual mobility, an intimate connection to the body and the machine, subjective or fragmented time and a renewed relationship to space. Modernity has generally been understood as an ensemble of cultural shifts occurring from the second half of the nineteenth century which laid the basis for an accelerated, mobile, subjective experience of space and time that has come to characterise contemporary experience. This research uncovers the ways in which the dominant paradigm of modernity, based on ever faster technological progress, individualism and commodity culture, was challenged by a technology that encouraged its users to maintain a connection to the past, their body and fellow humans. Thus, I seek to interrogate the very definition of modernity – often automatically associated with mechanism, accumulation and acceleration – in order to point to ways in which the bicycle helped early twentieth-century subjects to formulate an alternative, human-centred vision of progress.

At the same time, I seek to (re)define the bicycle itself, by reconnecting with the revolutionary meanings it was given at the point of its introduction. While today cycling may be variously considered as a means of transport, a leisure pursuit or a sport, its first users gave the activity a range of unexpected, emancipatory or transcendental interpretations. The bicycle provides us with an alternative means by which to examine the concept of modernity. Contrary to the general thrust of thinking about this cultural movement, it refocuses our attention on the capacities of the human body, its position within space and its relation to others. Far from pointing to a regression to a previous state of society, it offers a responsible, compassionate, convivial and just means of moving forward, one that moves counter to the individualist, profit-centred nature of contemporary capitalist societies.

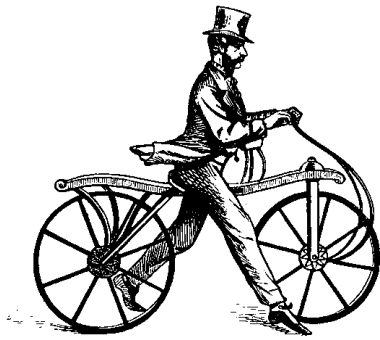


Figure 1: The draisine or ‘dandy horse’ invented by Karl von Drais in 1817.

When one considers that the basic technology of the wheel had been understood for millennia, it may seem surprising that it took until the nineteenth century for humans to realise the possibility of balancing and moving forward on two aligned wheels. Cycling historians over the past thirty years have helped to correct many inaccuracies concerning the origin of the bicycle, disproving a fraudulent Da Vinci sketch

claimed to have featured in his *Codex Atlanticus* in 1493 and the false claim that the Comte de Sivrac developed a *célérifère* in 1791. A general consensus now exists within the academic community that the first two-wheeled human-powered vehicle was invented by Baron Karl von Drais in Mannheim in 1817.² A version of his wooden draisine, also called a ‘running machine’ or ‘dandy horse’ was manufactured in London by Denis Johnson in 1818, where it enjoyed a brief moment of popularity amongst wealthy young men, before the two-wheeler was largely forgotten about for over forty years.

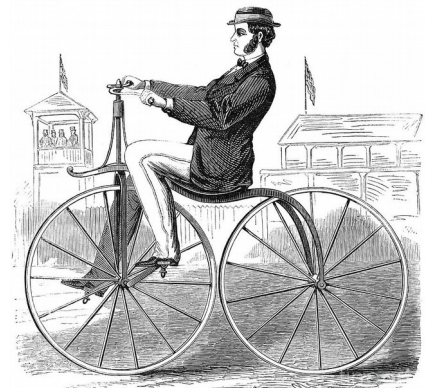


Figure 2: A version of Pierre Michaux’s 1860s velocipede, equipped with pedals.

² A number of well documented histories of the bicycle are available, as well as the acts of the International Cycling History Conference (*Cycle History*), which annually brings together experts on the subject. See Frederick Alderson, *Bicycling; a History* (New York: Praeger, 1972); Andrew Ritchie, *King of the Road: An Illustrated History of Cycling* (London: Wildwood House, 1975); James McGurn, *On Your Bicycle: An Illustrated History of Cycling* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1987); Pryor Dodge and David V Herlihy, *The Bicycle* (Paris; New York: Flammarion, 1996); David V Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Frédéric Héran, *Le retour de la bicyclette: une histoire des déplacements urbains en Europe, de 1817 à 2050* (Paris: la Découverte, 2014); Paul Smethurst, *The Bicycle: Towards a Global History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Various three and four-wheeled machines were tested throughout the nineteenth century without great success, but it was not until the early 1860s that the first commercialised pedal-

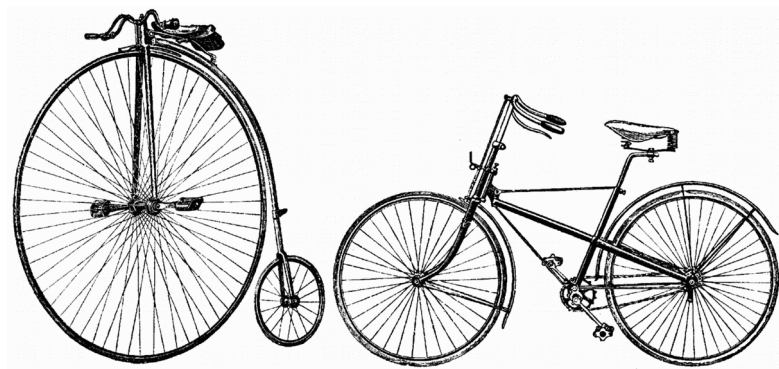


Figure 3: An 1880 'Ordinary' bicycle or high-wheeler, and J.K. Starley's 1885 'Safety Bicycle.'

powered machine – the velocipede – made its appearance in the Paris workshop of the blacksmith Pierre Michaux.³ The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war has been held responsible for halting the 1860s velocipede craze in Paris, but the machine would be adapted and improved in numerous ways across Europe and the USA over the following twenty years. The most influential model to come out of this period of innovation (and the first one to be termed a 'bicycle') was the Coventry manufacturer James Starley's steel framed, wire-spoked Ordinary bicycle whose high wheel allowed young, athletic riders to cover much greater distances with increased comfort and speed. Various attempts to build a less perilous machine resulted in John Kemp Starley's chain-driven low-wheeled safety bicycle of 1885, which was equipped with pneumatic tyres patented in 1888 by John Dunlop from Belfast. This last design differs little from bicycles ridden today. As this very brief summary of bicycle history goes to show, two-wheeled transportation was conceived at the outset of the industrial revolution, but had a surprisingly long gestation period, and only reached its final form in the

³ This was quite possibly the work of Michaux's apprentice Pierre Lallement, who began producing velocipedes in the US soon after emigrating there in 1865. See Keizō Kobayashi, 'The Inventor of the Lallement Pattern: Michaux, Olivier, or Lallement Himself?' *Cycle History* 1, 1990, 100–109; David V. Herlihy, 'Who Invented the Bicycle - Lallement in 1863 or Michaux in 1861?' *Cycle History* 4, 1993, 11–26.

closing decades of the nineteenth century. It is also important to note that the bicycle was a cosmopolitan invention, an object which was variously taken up, forgotten about, improved and commercialised by innovators in Germany, France, the UK, the US and elsewhere.

This project focuses on literature written at the end of the high-wheel period and during the era of the first popularity of the safety bicycle, c.1880-1920, when Europe and the US witnessed an explosion in the manufacture, purchase and use of the two-wheeler. The boom in bicycle sales reached its peak in the last years of the century. In 1890, twenty-seven factories in the UK produced around 40,000 bicycles; six years later, 250 factories were producing some 1,200,000 machines annually.⁴ Although the dandy horse, the velocipede and the Ordinary bicycle each enjoyed their moment in the limelight, the difficulty and expense of riding these machines meant that their use was largely limited to daring, aristocratic young men. However, in the safety bicycle era mass production techniques and resale of second-hand machines meant that cycling grew steadily amongst diverse social groups. Even if the price of new machines was prohibitive for many right up to the First World War,⁵ the rapid development of the technology meant that cheaper, second-hand machines rapidly appeared on the market, making cycling accessible to the working and middle classes. The widespread uptake of cycling from the 1890s meant that the bicycle left a lasting mark on contemporary mindsets, society and culture.

It would be both possible and fruitful to trace the cultural and literary impact of cycling from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present day, but the period of the bicycle boom was judged most interesting for this project since it allows us to examine the first contact of society at large with a revolutionary new technology. As Tom Gunning notes:

4 McGurn, *On Your Bicycle*, 98.

5 Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 7.

To imagine an old technology as something that was once new means [...] to try to recapture a quality it has lost. It means examining a technology or device at the point of introduction, before it has become part of a nearly invisible everyday life of habit and routine. But it also must mean examining this move from dazzling appearance to nearly transparent utility, from the spectacular and astonishing to the convenient and unremarkable. This transformation needs to be interrogated for the cultural myths of modernity it assumes and creates.⁶

Literature gives us a privileged means to imagine the now familiar technology of the bicycle when it was new, and to trace the contours of the ‘myths of modernity’ it engendered. Gunning concentrates on society’s encounter with the cinema, while others have focused on the specific modernity introduced by the railway or a range of turn-of-the-century inventions such as the typewriter, telephone, or automobile. Like these other major technologies, at the moment of its introduction the bicycle proposed a utopian, uncanny future which was quickly forgotten about in the rapid forward march of technological development. This thesis seeks to uncover the bicycle’s particular vision of progress by analysing works of literature that engaged with the technology when it was still ‘dazzling’ and new.

The geographical criteria selected for this project reflect the fact that the invention of the bicycle in the second half of the nineteenth century may rightly be considered a cross-Channel initiative, with the UK and France vying to improve existing technology during the era of the velocipede, Ordinary and safety bicycles. They were both cultures in which cycling was enthusiastically and widely adopted and written about, yet they are just one part of a global picture. Recent criticism has rightly drawn attention to the Eurocentrism of studies on bicycle history and literature, a bias that occults the major cultural impact the bicycle has made across the world during the past century and a half.⁷ Even when focusing on the British

6 Tom Gunning, ‘Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn of the Century’ in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 39.

7 Critics who have addressed this imbalance include Alon Raab, ‘Wheels of Fire: Writers on Bicycles’, *10.7588 World Literature Today* 86, no. 5 (2012): 22–31; Smethurst, *The Bicycle*; Glen B. Norcliffe,

and French context, it is important to remain aware of the bicycle's complex imbrication in a wider colonial network of exploitation and exchange, on which it notably relied for the provision of rubber from central Africa.⁸ While conscious of my focus on a much discussed European colonial centre, I attempt to come to a closer understanding of the literary and cultural function of the bicycle in this context in order to better apprehend the technology's relation to humanity on a global scale. I agree with Emily Apter's critique of world literature in that it can 'fall prey [...] to the tendency to zoom over the speed bumps of untranslatability in the rush to cover ground';⁹ as such, rather than offering a rapid bird's eye view of the global picture, I attentively follow the bicycle's route through the literature of two countries whose languages and cultures are familiar to me, and whose relationship to the technology in question is rich and varied.¹⁰

The fascinating relationship between books and bicycles has recently been the subject of much comment. Several anthologies of cycling literature have been published in the US, the UK and France, and a number of websites and blogs are dedicated to this question.¹¹

Critical Geographies of Cycling: History, Political Economy and Culture (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

8 William Woodruff, *The Rise of the British Rubber Industry During the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1958), 39.

9 Emily S Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London; New York: Verso, 2013), 3.

10 I would apply Emily Apter's criticism to the only PhD thesis I am aware of on the subject of bicycles in literature, by Josh Guevara. Guevara explores many interesting avenues, yet its temporal and geographical ranges are extremely broad; he includes a wide variety of excerpts from global fiction across the twentieth century, resulting in a rather general and vague impression of the importance of cycling literature. See J. Josh Guevara, "'The Mechanisms. Light and Miraculous': The Convivial Bicycle in Literature and Film." (PhD Dissertation, University of California Santa Cruz, 2012). However, some noteworthy Master's dissertations have been written on the subject, including Andrew Shrimpton, 'The Cultural Significance of Cycling C. 1870-1900' (University of York, 1991); Nanci J. Adler, 'The Bicycle in Western Literature: Transformations on Two Wheels' (Rollins College, 2012).

11 See Seamus McGonagle, *The Bicycle in Life, Love, War, and Literature* (South Brunswick: Pelham Books, 1969); Roderick Watson and Martin Gray, *The Penguin Book of the Bicycle* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978); James E Starrs and Kevin Schaeffer, *The Literary Cyclist* (New York: Breakaway Books, 1997); Edward Nye, *A bicyclette: anthologie* (Paris: Sortilèges, 2000); Hélène Giraud, *Le goût du vélo* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2011); Keizō Kobayashi, *Pour une bibliographie du cyclisme: répertoire des livres en langue française édités entre 1818 et 1983 : la bicyclette sous tous ses aspects* (Paris: Fédération française de cyclotourisme, 1984); Edward Williams, *The Pocket Bibliography of Cycling Books* (Wolverhampton: Edward Williams, 1993); Jeanne MacKenzie, *Cycling* (Oxford; New York: OUP, 1981); Pierre Thiesset and Quentin Thomasset, *Les bienfaits de la vélocipédie: anthologie* (Vierzon: le Pas de côté,

While this thesis aims to actively engage with and contribute to this growing field, identifying a number of previously overlooked literary treatments of cycling, it by no means seeks to provide an exhaustive list of such works. Rather, I focus on a select group of texts from a specific period in order to come into contact with contemporary points of view on a novel technology at the moment of its introduction. This thesis seeks to reach a better understanding of the overarching significance of the bicycle in turn-of-the-century literary texts than can be offered by cycling bibliographies or collections of extracts from literature, which lack sufficient analysis and contextualisation. Cycling literature anthologies and websites have nonetheless helped to draw critical attention to overlooked portraits of cyclists by well known authors such as H. G. Wells (1866-1946), Jerome K. Jerome (1859-1927), Maurice Leblanc (1864-1941) and Alfred Jarry (1873-1907). Taking the extracts included in several anthologies as a starting point, I cast the net out wide in my research, seeking out lesser known texts by means of library catalogue searches and primary and secondary reading.¹² Any fictional text in which bicycles played a significant narrative or symbolic role was taken into consideration, including obscure works no longer in print,¹³ before a final

2013). The first two include somewhat outdated if interesting reflections on the bicycle's literary significance; the third, fourth and fifth are literary anthologies, the sixth and seventh bibliographies and the latter two provide extracts from the press and other sources in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the UK and France respectively. A number of online articles have focused on the relationship between cycling and literature, such as: Jasper Gates, 'Vélivre: Reading and Riding,' *The Dusty Musette*, 25 Nov 2011. Web. Accessed 15 January 2015; Katlin Hawkins, and Eliza Robertson. 'Books on Two Wheels: The Cycling Reading List.' *World Literature Today*, n.d. Web. Accessed 18 March 2015; Douglas Marchant, 'Cracking Books.' *Cyclorama*, n.d. Web. Accessed 4 September 2014.; Micah Mattix, 'Literary Cycles.' *Wall Street Journal*, 26 June 2013. Web. Accessed 16 Oct 2014; Mc Gurn, Jim. *Bikereader*. Web. Accessed 2 June 2015; Philippe Orgebin, Hervé Le Cahain, and Jean-Yves Mounier. *Biblio-Cycles*. Web. Accessed 18 March 2015; Jim Peirpert, 'Literary Musings.' *Jim's Bike Blog*, 29 Aug 2012. Web. Accessed 23 February 2015.

12 In some cases, reading the other novels of an author noted for one cycling novel allowed me to come into contact with overlooked literary treatments of the bicycle. This was notably the case for H. G. Wells; while he is widely recognised for his 1896 cycling novella *The Wheels of Chance*, criticism has generally neglected his compelling narrative and symbolic use of bicycles in a number of later novels, including *Kipps* (1905), *The War in the Air* (1908) and *The History of Mr Polly* (1910).

13 Examples of works in my corpus that are no longer in print include Jehan de La Pédale, *Contes modernes. Pédalons !* (Paris: Véloce-Sport, 1892); W. S. Beekman and Allan Eric, *Cycle Gleanings: Or, Wheels and Wheeling for Business and Pleasure, and the Study of Nature* (Boston: Skinner, Bartlett & Co., 1894); Mary

selection of the works of some twenty authors was made.

A wealth of written material is available in both English and French, but for reasons of space and coherence the decision was made to anchor my corpus in English literature, making comparisons with a smaller selection of relevant primary texts in French. In choosing texts, I privilege accounts of utilitarian or recreational – rather than competitive – cycling,¹⁴ and willingly include minor or lowbrow authors alongside canonical ones. Novels and short stories form the bulk of the corpus, but some non-fiction travel writing and guides are included due to the important insights they provide on the connection between cycle touring and literature. The large number of texts taken into consideration reflects that fact that few texts are analysed in their entirety. With some exceptions (notably H. G. Wells's *The Wheels of Chance* and Maurice Leblanc's *Voici des ailes*), I mainly conduct close readings of isolated cycling scenes within novels and stories whose overall plot does not necessarily centre on the bicycle, but which nonetheless make compelling literary use of the object. The myriad cycling magazines, newspapers, advertisements, posters, guides and manuals published in this period are a valuable source of contextual information on the social and cultural impact of the bicycle. However, I restrict the use of such historical sources as this project's main interest is not the real object of the bicycle but rather its manifold literary incarnations, and the ways in which authors sought to inscribe the new impressions it afforded them in textual form.

Focusing on representations of an object provides a compelling means of establishing and engaging with a corpus of literature. In the case of familiar texts, the bicycle provides a

E. Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (London: F.V. White & Co., 1896); Mary E. Kennard, *The Golf Lunatic and His Cycling Wife* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1902); J. W Allen, *Wheel Magic; Or, Revolutions of an Impressionist* (London: J. Lane, 1909).

14 I follow Andrew Ritchie's differentiation between three distinct categories of cycling: utilitarian, recreational, and sporting. See Andrew Ritchie, *Quest for Speed: A History of Early Bicycle Racing 1868-1903* (Santa Clarita: A. Ritchie, 2011), 18.

novel lens with which to revisit canonical works (by D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) or Marcel Proust (1871-1922), for instance), while allowing us to come into contact with the works of neglected authors. While far from adopting Franco Moretti's literary methodology of 'distant reading', I broadly agree with his observation that 'For practical purposes, the larger the geographical space one wants to study, the smaller should the unit of analysis be: a concept (in our case), a device, a trope, a limited narrative unit'.¹⁵ Following the bicycle's itinerary across a large and varied corpus of canonical and popular literature allows us to examine texts from a new angle, while providing a rich terrain for comprehending the social, cultural and psychological impact of this invention.

I adhere to a systemic approach to the study of the bicycle, such as that favoured by the historian and economist Frédéric Héran, who argues that: 'l'histoire du vélo utilitaire est principalement une histoire de son rapport aux autres modes de déplacement'.¹⁶ It is important to recall that nineteenth-century societies became increasingly mobile, multiplying the forms of transport they used rather than adopting a single one. Trains, for example, did not negate the need for horse and human-powered transportation, but rather stimulated these modes. According to Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman 'the number of horses used in passenger and freight transport in Britain during the railway age grew from around 250,000 to over a million',¹⁷ and a similar increase in pedestrian travel could be plotted. Furthermore, cycling made its appearance at a time of dizzying technological innovation in the communications sector, where inventions such as the gramophone, the typewriter and cinema led to what Friedrich Kittler termed 'the media revolution of 1880', which transformed our

15 Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review*, II, no. 1 (February 2000): 61.

16 Héran, *Le retour de la bicyclette*, 16. 'the history of the bicycle is principally the history of its relation to other modes of transport'.

17 Matthew Beaumont and Michael J Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space, and the Machine Ensemble* (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 147.

relationship to the spoken and written word.¹⁸ The ‘iron horse’¹⁹ was consistently understood and portrayed in relation to other transportation and communication technologies, all of which proliferated throughout the century. As such, throughout this thesis I keep in mind the connections between the bicycle and other mobility and communication technologies.

Foremost amongst these, in terms of its role in shaping modernity, is the railway. This project follows in the footsteps of the cultural historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch, who studied the creation of the industrial subject through the shock of railway travel in his seminal *The Railway Journey* (1979). Schivelbusch contends that society’s encounter with trains rapidly made old modes of behaviour redundant and necessitated the formulation of new forms of social interaction and perception. In the case of the train, this meant, for example, the birth of a train reading culture (alongside a taboo on conversation in carriages) and the development of a specific, mechanised form of perception which favoured a ‘panoramic view’ of landscapes, framed by the train window and seen as an object to be contemplated as visual spectacle.²⁰ Further compelling examinations of the cultural significance of railways have appeared in recent years, such as Lynne Kirby’s *Parallel Tracks* (1997), which considers the connections between train travel and the silent cinema, and *The Railway and Modernity* (2007), edited by Beaumont and Freeman, which examines the manifold cultural and literary transformations that accompanied the spread of railways.²¹

In recent decades, cultural critics have become increasingly interested in the role of

18 Friedrich A Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 16.

19 This was one of the many early appellations for the bicycle.

20 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th century* [1979], trans. Anslem Hollo (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986), xiv.

21 Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); Beaumont and Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity*; see also John Lucas, ‘Discovering England: The View from the Train’, *Literature & History* 6, no. 2 (1997): 37–55; Jonathan H Grossman, *Charles Dickens’s Networks: Public Transport and the Novel* (Oxford; New York: OUP, 2012).

technology, movement, speed and individual mobility in the construction of modernity. As

Stephen Kern argues in *The Culture of Time and Space* (1983):

From around 1880 to the outbreak of WW1 a series of sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space. Technological innovations, including the telephone, wireless telegraph, x-ray, cinema, bicycle, automobile, and airplane, established the material foundation for this reorientation; independent cultural developments such as the stream of consciousness novel, psychoanalysis, Cubism and the theory of relativity shaped consciousness directly.²²

Kern's compelling study demonstrates how a renewed relationship to time and space was inaugurated at the turn of the century in response to the new capabilities provided by technologies such as the bicycle. Kern is exceptional in including a brief examination of the bicycle in his study, since in most cultural studies of modernity – even those that specifically address the significant role of transportation technologies – the bicycle is either entirely overlooked as a modernising influence or presented as a minority recreation rather than a widespread and influential means of transport. Marc Desportes, for instance, offers a transversal analysis in *Paysages en mouvement* (2005), where he studies the ways in which each major transportation technology from the eighteenth century onwards offered altered means of interacting with the environment. Desportes argues that each technology contains a specific 'landscape' within itself, actively determining our aesthetic engagement with space. Desportes illustrates his argument with reference to eighteenth-century road building and coach travel, train travel in the nineteenth century, and twentieth century car journeys and airplane travel.²³ Yet despite the fact that he surveys the period around 1900 – when taxation figures for France indicate some three and a half million bicycles compared to three thousand

22 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1.

23 Marc Desportes, *Paysages en mouvement : transports et perception de l'espace, XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 8.

automobiles in circulation in France²⁴ – Desportes entirely neglects two-wheeled transportation in his study, leapfrogging from the train to the car to the airplane in a familiar case of cultural amnesia or teleological reasoning. This technology has been consistently sidelined by the academy, with critics tending to consider this surprising industrial harnessing of human energy as an inconsequential ‘blip’ between the train and the motor car age. The latter two transport technologies are rightly thought to have made a momentous impact on shaping mentalities, introducing new modes of perception and forging new cultural and social structures, whilst the bicycle’s role is all too frequently neglected.

Alongside these cultural and historical approaches, literary critics have begun to display a growing interest in the question of mobility, but in common with the above studies, the bicycle has been largely overlooked. The role of the horse in fiction has been explored in several articles and anthologies,²⁵ while Carsten Meiner’s monograph *Le carrosse littéraire et l’invention du hasard* (2008) provides a compelling overview of the literary functions of horse-drawn carriages, from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries.²⁶ Meiner argues that the carriage’s role in literature is much more than a purely utilitarian or representational one; rather, these vehicles serve specific ends, having symbolic and narrative functions in the text. Meiner argues that ‘carriage scenes’ became a convention or topos in literature, functioning to inscribe the sensation of random chance or contingency that would come to define the modern era. Moreover, a number of studies have explored the relationship between walking

24 Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1986), 200 The population of France at the time was some 41 million. The tax on bicycles was introduced in 1893 and only abandoned in 1958.

25 See, for instance Anne Grimshaw, *The Horse, a Bibliography of British Books, 1851-1976* (London; Phoenix, Ariz.: Library Association ; Oryx Press, 1982); Sarah Sceats and Gail Cunningham, ‘Seizing the Reins: Women, Girls and Horses’, in *Image and Power: Women in Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (London; New York: Longman, 1996), 65–77; Jennifer Mason, ‘Animal Bodies: Corporeality, Class, and Subject Formation in *The Wide, Wide World*’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 54, no. 4 (2000): 503–33; Helen Lenskyj, *Out on the Field: Gender, Sport, and Sexualities* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2003).

26 Carsten Henrik Meiner, *Le carrosse littéraire et l’invention du hasard* (Paris: PUF, 2008).

and literature in the Romantic period, when ‘pedestrianism’ became a favoured sport and pastime, shedding the taboo status it had previously held for the well-to-do. As the works of Robin Jarvis, Mervin Coverley, Jeffrey Robinson, Rebecca Solnit, Anne Wallace and others convincingly show, the experience of travelling by foot impacted on the subject matter, form, and rhythms of Romantic literature.²⁷

A recent collection entitled *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement* (2015), edited by Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries, testifies to the expansion of this area of study, and happily includes one chapter on the bicycle and New Women.²⁸ Yet within this volume the predominance of studies on the train in literature is symptomatic of the fact that literary and cultural critics have thus far focused on the railways at the expense of other transport technologies.²⁹ The railway’s impact on society and representation in literature was undoubtedly profound and far-reaching; Schivelbusch and others have effectively demonstrated how the train’s ‘destruction of space and time’ left a lasting mark on Victorian society and fiction. Yet in an increasingly mobile age, trains were far from the only technology allowing people to move and communicate in new ways. In the twentieth century, motor cars and airplanes have been examined from a literary angle by several critics.³⁰ The

27 Jeffrey Cane Robinson, *The Walk: Notes on a Romantic Image* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); Anne D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: the Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997); Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Viking, 2000); Merlin Coverley, *The Art of Wandering: The Writer as Walker* (Harpden: Oldcastle Books, 2012).

28 Lena Wanggren, ‘The Freedom Machine: The New Woman and the Bicycle’, in *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940*, ed. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew Humphries (London: Palgrave, 2015), 123–35.

29 Another example of this trend is Larry Duffy, *Le Grand Transit Moderne: Mobility, Modernity and French Naturalist Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005).

30 See, for instance, Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Peter Thorold, *The Motoring Age: The Automobile and Britain 1896-1939* (London: Profile Books, 2003); Peter. Wenzel and Sven. Strasen, eds., *Discourses of Mobility, Mobility of Discourse: The Conceptualization of Trains, Cars and Planes in 19th- and 20th-Century Poetry* (Trier: WVT, 2010).

literary impact of communication technologies such as the postal system and the telegraph have also been explored.³¹ These studies have provided precious methodological and thematic avenues to explore in terms of how literature and technology may be studied in tandem. This thesis is part of an emerging body of works seeking to fill the gap in criticism on the specific role of the cyclist in literature and culture.

Although long neglected, this area of study is growing increasingly vibrant, perhaps thanks to the upsurge in cycling in European and North American societies in recent years.³² Lately a number of monographs on the bicycle's cultural importance have appeared. Glen Norcliffe offers a compelling portrait of the bicycle's participation in the momentous changes occurring at the *fin de siècle* in *Ride to Modernity: The Bicycle in Canada, 1869-1900* (2001) and provides a global cultural perspective on bicycles in his volume *Critical Geographies of Cycling* (2015).³³ My research is also indebted to the work of Zack Furness, whose volume *One Less Car: Bicycling and the Politics of Automobility* (2010) contains an excellent first chapter on cycling in the 1890s. Furness integrates concepts formulated by John Urry in order to examine the ways in which the bicycle promoted a photographic or 'tourist' gaze as well as 'automobility', a term Urry coined to describe the way in which early twentieth-century technologies shaped the modern subject. According to Urry's theory, the 'clock time' of the industrial revolution – inaugurated by train timetables and factory bells – was succeeded by 'instantaneous', fragmented time at the turn of the twentieth century, with the appearance of technologies such as cinematography, the telephone and the automobile.³⁴ Zack Furness

31 Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008).

32 Frédéric Héran is one critic who argues the bicycle is currently making a comeback as a mode of urban transport. See Héran, *Le retour de la bicyclette*.

33 Glen Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity: The Bicycle in Canada, 1869-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Norcliffe, *Critical Geographies of Cycling*.

34 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London; Newbury Park: Sage

argues that the bicycle also played a key role in introducing this individualised time, marking a departure from the collective or clock time of the train carriage by introducing the concept of individual transportation and a corresponding ‘mobile subjectivity’.³⁵ According to Furness, the bicycle made remote places accessible for a greater number of people, contributing to their appropriation by a ‘tourist’ or ‘colonising’ gaze.³⁶ Furness draws on Walter Benjamin’s concept of the ‘aura’ to argue that the bicycle was a technology that – like photography – made places accessible and so ‘reproducible’, reducing their aesthetic value and commodifying them to a certain extent.³⁷ As such, Furness maintains that the bicycle laid the foundations for the aesthetic and spatial mode adopted by the motor car, and which became a central pillar of twentieth-century modernity.

While Furness insists on the bicycle’s role in the formulation of an accelerated, subjective, commodified modernity, I emphasise the role of the bicycle in formulating an alternative modernity. While cyclists performed a very modern approach to mobility, I argue that the form of progress they suggested was radically opposed to the emerging automobility paradigm. As literature shows, cyclists resented the destruction of space and time by trains, cars and airplanes, and sought to reconnect with in-between and liminal spaces, beyond the contemporary focus on departure and destination. My research shows how travellers on two wheels reconnected with a pre-industrial space, in which the journey and the moving body once again became invested with meaning, and thus proposed a vision of modernity that went counter to the highly mechanised civilization taking shape at that time.

Further studies on the bicycle’s impact on society and culture which have actively

Publications, 1990); John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

35 Zack Furness, *One Less Car: Bicycling and the Politics of Automobility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 14–45.

36 *Ibid.*, 44.

37 See Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J. A Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008).

enriched my research include works by Ivan Illich, Catherine Bertho Lavenir, Gordon Wilson et al., Paul Rosen et al., Wiebe Bijker et al. and Christopher Thompson.³⁸ In emulation of these critics, this project engages with the bicycle as an exemplary means of transportation, and one which has made and continues to make a profound impact on society, culture and literature. What differentiates my approach from the above cultural, historical, sociological and scientific studies, however, is that I place literary texts at the core of my research. This particular area of study is very poorly furnished, yet it is beginning to attract critical attention. I was able to contribute a chapter to the first collection on the subject, entitled *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film*, edited by Jeremy Withers and Daniel Shea.³⁹ This volume brings together many compelling literary and cultural studies of the bicycle, and includes an excellent introduction by the editors as well as a preface by Zack Furness.

While the critical apparatus on cycling is limited to just a few insightful works, I have been influenced by a specific branch of cultural and literary studies that addresses the crucial role of the machine in modern society. Critics such as Leo Marx, Herbert Sussman, Friedrich Kittler, Mark Seltzer, Sara Danus, Nicholas Daly, Christine MacLeod, Andrew Thacker and Alex Goody have all sought to integrate an understanding of the machine's role into cultural and literary criticism.⁴⁰ As Sussman argued in his pioneering monograph *Victorians and the*

38 Ivan Illich, *Energy and Equity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Wiebe E Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995); Catherine Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo: comment nous sommes devenus touristes* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1999); David Gordon Wilson, Jim Papadopoulos, and Frank Rowland Whitt, *Bicycling Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004); Christopher S Thompson, *The Tour de France: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Paul Rosen, Peter Cox, and David Horton, *Cycling and Society* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

39 Una Brogan, 'Albertine the Cyclist: A Queer Feminist Bicycle Ride Through Proust's In Search of Lost Time', in *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film*, ed. Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 116-35.

40 Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: OUP, 1964); Herbert L. Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine: the Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968); Friedrich A Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Sara Danus, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University

Machine (1968), ‘the English Victorians, the first people to live in a culture dominated by technology, expressed their realisation that the use of the machine to perform certain physical tasks created profound changes in intellectual and emotional life’.⁴¹ Bicycles are, among other things, a mode of transport, a technology and a machine, yet they are unlike many other mechanisms in that they are powered by the human body, rather than an external energy source such as wind, steam, electricity or petroleum. The hybrid between mechanised and corporeal elements that this technology proposes makes it all the more compelling as an object of study. Unlike the car, which carries its driver, or the telephone which conveys sounds by the use of electricity, the bicycle is a machine which relies solely on human strength, dexterity and intelligence. As Sara Danius argues in *The Senses of Modernism* (2002), in modernist literature ‘the machine invariably appeared in the same thematic cluster as the corporeal, the sensory and the aesthetic’.⁴² With this in mind, I consider whether the modernist period in literature, coming shortly after the first bicycle boom, might have formed its unique aesthetics partly as the result of the contact with a machine which so explicitly mingled the technological with the human.

Late-Victorian cyclists certainly entertained an intimate relationship with the machine, yet they also discovered a new relationship with their bodies which was based on a multi-sensory, kinaesthetic engagement with their surroundings while privileging the use of human energy. My research relies on the phenomenological theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in order to come to a closer appreciation of the circular, multi-sensory, embodied experience of

Press, 2002); Andrew Thacker, *Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of Invention: Technology, Liberalism and British Identity, 1750-1914* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Alex Goody, *Technology, Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

41 Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine*, vii.

42 Danius, *The Senses of Modernism*, 1.

early cyclists.⁴³ In addition, a number of French critics have shaped my approach to the cyclist's embodied, counter-hegemonic approach to space. I engage with the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault to examine the bicycle's transformation of time and space from the perspective of the literary text, which establishes its own specific temporal and spatial dimensions. I examine the links between narration and the act of moving through space by various means of locomotion, highlighted by critics such as Marc Augé and Michel de Certeau,⁴⁴ and highlight the ways in which the bicycle proposes alternative uses and interpretations of localities, placing the sensing human body at the core of spatial interaction.

At a time when scientific discoveries such as Albert Einstein's theory of relativity were transforming contemporary understandings of time and space, mass and energy, the mobility of the bicycle offered a radical new means of interpreting the world. Einstein recognised the importance of transport technologies in shaping our relation to space-time; in his short version of the special and general theory of relativity (published 1920), he makes extensive use of the image of a moving train to illustrate his findings to a non-specialised readership.⁴⁵ Moreover, Einstein is widely cited as having said of his famous theory 'I thought of that while riding my bicycle.' While there appears to be no firm evidence for this claim, the legend holds that the physicist was inspired when contemplating the beam of light from his moving bicycle.⁴⁶ Whether or not the citation is apocryphal, Einstein (1879-1955) was part of the generation who first discovered this individual form of mobility, and whose interaction with their surroundings was radically transformed as a result.

In examining the literary and cultural nature of the bicycle, my outlook remains

43 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

44 Marc Augé, *Non lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la supermodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 107; Michel De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

45 Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and The General Theory* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1961).

46 See Margaret Guroff, *The Mechanical Horse: How the Bicycle Reshaped American Life* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2016), chapter 6.

decidedly historical. I engage with the work of historians of publishing and examine primary sources (largely newspapers and periodicals) in order to analyse the ways in which the uptake of cycling might have impacted on publishing and reading habits. In presenting the three-decker's downfall in the context of the bicycle boom in Chapter 1, I suggest how changing mobilities may have affected the production and consumption of literature. As such, this work contributes to the existing body of historiography dealing with the ways in which nineteenth century modes of transport helped shape reading and publishing practises. Secondly, this project generally seeks to consider literary texts in a New Historicist light, that is, in the context of their production and, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, to '[enlist] a group of texts in a historical drama', considering them as exemplary of larger cultural trends.⁴⁷ Specifically, the texts in my corpus reflect on and force us to reconsider the profound cultural and social changes occurring at the turn of the century. Literature allows us to come into contact with Raymond Williams's 'structure of feeling', or the shared culture, perceptions and values produced by the generation that first encountered the bicycle.⁴⁸ Finally, rather than viewing literary texts as passive objects simply reflecting changes in society, I consider them as historical actors which are themselves capable of creating meaning and shaping attitudes. As Jeff Hill argues in his study of sport in novels, 'literature is a cultural artefact that is itself capable of producing reality' and 'making sense of the world' as well as determining its future direction.⁴⁹ This thesis shows how the portrayal of the bicycle in literature impacted on the ways in which the object was interpreted and negotiated in contemporary society.

47 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

48 See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

49 Jeff Hill, *Sport and the Literary Imagination: Essays in History, Literature, and Sport* (Oxford; New York: P. Lang, 2006), 27. Several other studies engage with the link between literature and sport, such as: Michel Bouet, *Signification du sport* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1968); Ritchie, *Quest for Speed*; Thompson, *The Tour de France*; Pierre Charreton, *Le sport, l'ascèse, le plaisir: éthique et poétique du sport dans la littérature française moderne* (Saint-Etienne: Université Jean Monnet, 1990).

While integrating these historical approaches into my methodology, I have also made use of the social construction of technology (SCOT) model developed by Wiebe Bijker et al. from the late 1980s.⁵⁰ SCOT offers a compelling methodological approach to unravelling the interaction between technology, the groups that use it and the social changes it engenders. Bijker et al.'s central argument is that technology does not arise as a result of a specific need, but that artefacts first appear in society and are subsequently given varied and often unexpected interpretations by relevant social groups, who gradually negotiate their meaning in society. This takes place during a period of 'interpretive flexibility', which is followed by 'closure' and finally 'stabilisation', when the cultural meaning of the artefact becomes fixed.⁵¹ Bijker et al.'s interest in the period of 'interpretive flexibility' foreshadows Tom Gunning's above cited injunction to imagine 'a technology or device at the point of introduction, before it has become part of a nearly invisible everyday life of habit and routine'.⁵² The SCOT theory is of particular interest to the present study since Bijker et al. select the bicycle as an exemplary object in their seminal work on the subject, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* (1995). The authors argue that in the case of the Safety bicycle, this tripartite process leading to stabilisation occurred from 1879 to 1898.⁵³ Certain aspects of this approach have proven useful, specifically the importance of the discourses which develop alongside new technologies during the period of 'interpretive flexibility.' However, along with other critics I readily recognise the limits of such a prescriptive vision, which neglects to consider elements such as the geographical context of the object's production and the agency of things themselves.⁵⁴

50 Wiebe E Bijker, Thomas Parke Hughes, and T. J Pinch, eds., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987).

51 Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs*, 20.

52 Gunning, 'Re-Newing Old Technologies', 39.

53 Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs*, 39.

54 For critiques of the SCOT model, see Nick Clayton, 'SCOT: Does It Answer?', *Technology and Culture* 43,

Indeed, a further theoretical cornerstone to my research is the appreciation of objects as historical actors. The idea of the life of non-human matter can trace its roots back to antiquity; in modern times it experienced a revival in the Enlightenment materialism of Spinoza and Diderot, and in the vitalism of Henri Bergson and Hans Driesch at the beginning of the twentieth century. In contemporary criticism, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of assemblages, the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour, Bill Brown and Arjun Appadurai's research into how things have shaped the modern subject and Jane Bennett's work on vital materialism have all influenced my approach to the study of a particular cultural artefact.⁵⁵ A compelling material culture study on bicycles and motorcycles by Steven E. Alford and Suzanne Ferriss has recently been published.⁵⁶ Amongst thing theorists, Bill Brown is of specific interest, thanks to his examination of literary texts. In his *A Sense of Things* (2003) he claims his overall aim is to 'concentrate on literary texts precisely to determine what literature does with objects (or how literature produces its objects)'.⁵⁷ This distinct approach is characterised by an interest in the processes which shape the subject, a cultural construct whose genesis, according to Michel Foucault, coincided with the beginnings of the modern age in the late eighteenth century.⁵⁸ If, as Michel Serres argues, 'le sujet naît de l'objet',⁵⁹ then I am concerned with showing how a certain technology helped

no. 2 (2002): 351–60; Glen Norcliffe, 'G-COT', *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 34, no. 4 (2009): 449–75.

55 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: l'anti-Oedipe*. Paris: Les Éditions de minuit, 1980; Bruno Latour, *Aramis ou L'amour des techniques* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992); Bill Brown, *Things* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). See also Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

56 Steven E. Alford and Suzanne Ferriss, *An Alternative History of Bicycles and Motorcycles: Two-Wheeled Transportation and Material Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

57 Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

58 Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses; une archéologie des sciences humaines*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 15.

59 Quoted in Brown, *Things*, 1. 'the subject is born from the object.'

shape new subjects, and how in turn these subjects renegotiated their place in the world as a result.

This project explores both how literature produced the cultural object of the bicycle and how the bicycle in turn helped shape new modes of consciousness and literary production and consumption. I consider various assemblages in which the bicycle became entangled at the period of its widespread adoption; these include its interaction with other transportation and communication technologies (such as the train, omnibus, tram, telephone, camera, car and airplane), its relationship to the socio-political changes occurring at the time, its effect on conceptions of time and space, its impact on the relationship between bodies and machines, and the multifaceted ways in which it interacted with the production and consumption of text. At the same time, I examine how the bicycle (then as now) was not one object but many, depending on the uses it found and the contexts in which it appeared. Bicycles are particularly compelling objects for thing theory; indeed, the critics Ian Hodder and Jane Bennett were both inspired to illustrate the challenging concept of an assemblage by using the example of a cyclist riding a bicycle along a rough road.⁶⁰ From this perspective, the cyclist may be compared to the car driver, whom John Urry characterises as a ‘hybrid assemblage of specific human activities, machines, roads, buildings, signs and cultures of mobility’.⁶¹ The bicycle is an inanimate object forged of industrial steel, colonial rubber and mass-produced, precisely manufactured components, yet it becomes animate once ridden, when the line between rider and machine quickly becomes blurred. Propelled solely by human energy, the agency of the bicycle and its complex relationship to the human body are particularly striking. This was something that fascinated its first riders, many of whom wrote about the

60 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 38; Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships Between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 110.

61 John Urry, ‘The “System” of Automobility’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4–5 (1 October 2004): 26.

bicycle as an extension of the human body, but also as an object which seemed capable of gaining an uncanny measure of autonomy.

Finally, this project draws on the queer and feminist theories of thinkers such as Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam in order to interrogate the ways in which the bicycle as a feminist symbol contributed to the appearance of ambiguously gendered subjects.⁶² Queer theory is valuable not only from this feminist perspective, but also as a tool that allow us to explore the literary and cultural importance of an object that has been ‘deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior’, to quote Halberstam’s definition of queer methodology.⁶³ As we have seen, the body of cultural and literary theory on the bicycle is limited to only a few insightful and pioneering works. However, a wide range of theory tackles the major questions of this thesis, such as the relationship between technology, transport and literature, the agency of objects, the construction of the subject and the nature of modernity. Basing my examination in a literary corpus, the theories outlined above provide a solid backdrop against which to explore the much overlooked role of the bicycle at the turn of the twentieth century.

The first chapter in this thesis deals with the bicycle’s tangible interaction with fiction, text and publishing, drawing attention to the overlooked literary nature of the object. I first consider the object from the writer’s perspective, before reflecting on the bicycle’s interaction with publishing and reading practices. Adopting a systemic approach, the bicycle is compared to other forms of transport, specifically asking how and why this technology forged specific links to text. Close readings of seminal cycling novellas from each side of the Channel, H. G.

62 Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenonology and Feminist Theory.’, *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–31; Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

63 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 13.

Wells's *The Wheels of Chance* (1896) and Maurice Leblanc's *Voici des ailes* (1898), allow us to engage with the narrative role of the bicycle. The vehicle's interaction with various genres, styles and formats is examined, with a focus on its role in adventure, detective and comic fiction. The bicycle's function in adding humour to the works of Jerome K. Jerome, H. G. Wells and others is examined, making use of Henri Bergson's contemporary theory of *le comique*. Finally, a historical case study of the downfall of the three-decker novel in 1894 is provided, suggesting that the emerging pattern of mobility in which the bicycle participated may have helped bring about a sudden sea change in Victorian publishing practises and reading tastes. I argue that the emergence of the cheaply produced pocket classic was symptomatic of a democratisation of knowledge that accompanied major changes in people's everyday mobility.

Chapter 2 extends the analysis of the social changes the bicycle helped engender through a literary lens. Close readings of several of H. G. Wells's social novels allow us to appreciate the symbolism and narrative function of a vehicle that seemed capable of eroding strict Victorian class and moral structures. In Wells's novels, the bicycle emerges as a means of variously negotiating, subverting or corrupting the complex and often baffling English class system. Secondly, I examine the bicycle's relationship to the changing status of women in society, specifically asking whether the bicycle really was the 'freedom machine' recent criticism has seen fit to call it.⁶⁴ By exploring texts from a range of better and lesser known British, Irish and French authors including Grant Allen (1848-1899), Mary E. Kennard (1850-1936), Matthias Mc Donnell Bodkin (1850-1933), Dorothy Richardson (1873-1957) and Émile Zola (1840-1902), I present contemporary points of view on the association of this new

⁶⁴ See, for instance Sue Macy, *Wheels of Change: How Women Rode the Bicycle to Freedom* (Washington D.C: National Geographic Society, 2011); Wanggren, 'The Freedom Machine: The New Woman and the Bicycle'.

technology with women's emancipation. Cycling triggered real changes in women's lifestyles, notably thanks to the rational dress movement and by allowing certain women to be autonomously mobile for the first time. Yet the texts I examine illustrate that the machine played an ambivalent role in a society that remained decidedly patriarchal, despite certain women's determined struggle for equality. A study of Marcel Proust's use of bicycles in *La Recherche* closes this chapter, where I highlight the object's important role as a feminist and queer symbol in literature. The bicycle emerges from all these texts as a subversive technology that permits its users to transgress and blur gender and social boundaries, thus undermining the structure of patriarchal, capitalist society.

The third chapter examines the new aesthetic and sensory experiences of the cyclist. Returning to the above authors and integrating others such as J. W. Allen (1865-1944), J. H. Rosny (1856-1940) and Alfred Jarry, I analyse the ways in which the bicycle offered a direct contact with speed and a unique symbiosis between humans and machines. This permitted a bodily experience of place and an altered interaction with the senses, which writers sought to express in text. Within this examination of the riding aesthetic, I consider how the bicycle made the workings of an industrial machine more accessible to the public, democratising the spanner and allowing a fresh, bodily and sensory engagement with mechanism. This suggested a questioning of the man/machine dichotomy, moving away from the alienation of the industrial era in order to achieve a more empowering and meaningful interaction with technology. The chapter concludes that due to its capacity to extend human abilities and respond to its rider, the bicycle is best understood as a tool rather than as a machine.

The final chapter builds on the phenomenological findings of Chapter 3 in order to examine the cyclist's specific engagement with time and space. Combining theory and

literature, I present the bicycle as both a modernising influence and a counter-cultural technology. By performing a human-centred interaction with time and space, the cyclist proposed an alternative path for modernity at a critical juncture. The spatial theories of French critics including Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau are used to read the counter-hegemonic co-construction of localities in texts by Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939), G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936), E. M. Forster (1879-1970) and Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), among others. I examine the cyclist's inherently nostalgic, backward-looking gaze, inherited from the *flâneur* and exemplified in a group of cycling travel 'pilgrims' including F. W. Bockett,⁶⁵ Joseph Pennell (1857-1926), Elizabeth Robins Pennell (1855-1936) and Edward Thomas (1878-1917). The bicycle allowed these and other authors to propose an interactive geography based on individual exploration and criss-crossing of urban and rural environments, while reviving spaces racked by industrialisation, the railways and the emerging motor car. Reading spaces from a turn-of-the-century cyclist's perspective creates a vision of civilised, humane transport capable of enriching communities and retaining a vital link to the past while pedalling steadily into the future.

Continuing the work begun in this budding area of study, this thesis examines selected literature from the period of the first bicycle boom in order to take a closer look at changing mentalities and modes of perception at the time of the widespread adoption of this new technology. As such, I hope to revive the uncanniness of this relatively accessible, democratic, individual means of transport, while positioning the bicycle as a central object within an existing body of theory about the cultural project of modernity. At the same time, I intend to remind contemporary readers of the continuing relevance and importance of human-

⁶⁵ No biographical information is known about F. W. Bockett, the author of *Some Literary Landmarks for Pilgrims on Wheels* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1901).

powered technology. At the end of a century of car dependence, there is an urgent need to reimagine the technology of the bicycle, and to reconnect with the wonder it aroused when it was first encountered. I join with present day writers such as Didier Tronchet in proposing a reflection on the bicycle as part of what he calls ‘un long travail de reconquête idéologique, face à la déferlante de l’imagerie automobile’.⁶⁶ Through an exploration of the initial cultural impact of this technology, I hope to challenge the entrenched cultural dominance of motorised transport and suggest both the possibility and the desirability of a human-powered impetus for the twenty-first century.

66 Didier Tronchet, *Petit traité de vélosophie: réinventer la ville à vélo* (Paris: Plon, 2014), 13. ‘a long process of ideological reconquest, in the face of an invasion by automobile imagery.’

Chapter 1. Transport and textuality: how the bicycle wove the written word

The bicycle, the bicycle surely, should always be the vehicle of novelists and poets.¹

Bicycles, like boats, trains, automobiles and airplanes, let us travel; and without the exchanges engendered by travel, the community of letters cannot exist.² An intuitive interaction between writing and mobility has long existed; as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*, the rhythms of movement over land and sea have been linked to the inspiration required to begin writing and to the structure, style and literary qualities needed to produce a worthy text.³ Marc Augé points to the specific ways in which the bicycle inscribes itself in the age-old tradition of epic literature by encouraging attentive engagement with the present and an outlook that is at once personal and universal:

La bicyclette est donc mythique, épique et utopique. On ne peut s'y consacrer qu'en prêtant une attention soutenue au présent, ne serait-ce qu'à cause des aléas de la circulation, mais elle fait l'objet de récits qui ressuscitent simultanément l'histoire personnelle de chacun et les mythes partagés par beaucoup ; ces deux passés sont solidaires et confèrent une tonalité épique aux souvenirs individuels les plus modestes.⁴

Roland Barthes similarly remarks on the mythical and narrative aspect to competitive cycling in 'Le Tour de France comme épopée,' one of the longest chapters in *Mythologies*. Barthes

1 Christopher Morley, *The Romany Stain* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926), 35.

2 A convincing case for this is made by Greg Laugero, 'Infrastructures of Enlightenment: Road-Making, the Public Sphere, and the Emergence of Literature', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 1 (1995): 45–67.

3 For a modern treatment of the relationship between touring and writing, with ample consideration of the bicycle in the inter-war period, see Catherine Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo: comment nous sommes devenus touristes* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1999).

4 Marc Augé, *Éloge de la bicyclette* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2008), 41. 'The bicycle is therefore mythical, epic and utopian. You can only devote yourself to it by paying close attention to the present, if only because of the hazards of traffic, but it is the subject of stories that simultaneously revive individual life stories and myths shared by all; these two pasts are united and confer epic overtones to an individual's most modest memories.' All translations from French are my own unless otherwise stated.

compares the stages of the famous race to chapters in a novel, where landscapes are personified as successive enemies the competitors must overcome. He observes that ‘Le Tour dispose donc d’une véritable géographie homérique. Comme dans l’Odyssée, la course est ici à la fois périple d’épreuves et exploration totale des limites terrestres.’⁵ Correspondingly, cyclists and authors at the turn of the twentieth century used this new means of transport to explore new terrestrial and narrative possibilities. From acting as a device for bringing characters into contact to using the rhythms of cycling to structure a story, authors explored a rich literary terrain on two wheels. The cyclist made an appearance in late Victorian literature as a symbol of progressiveness, liberation and modernity, and quickly became interwoven with genres including adventure stories and comic writing. While interacting with existing genres, the bicycle also helped shape original literary forms at the *fin de siècle*, which witnessed, for instance, the appearance of the ‘New Woman’ novel, detective stories and new forms of travel writing. Moreover, the bicycle had a material relationship to print; the spread of a new means of transport impacted on the production and consumption of literature, contributing to the significant changes occurring in the format of books and the manner in which they were read at the turn of the century. As we shall see, the mammoth three-decker novel form relinquished its stranglehold on the book market to make way for more portable formats, and a relationship with printed material that was at once more personal and transient. The visceral experience of this contemporary form of mobility thus had a palpable impact on the minds of writers and readers alike.

5 Roland Barthes, ‘Le Tour de France comme épopée.’ *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), 128. ‘The Tour therefore has a truly Homeric geography. Like in the Odyssey, the race is both a testing ground and a total exploration of terrestrial limits.’

1.1. Transporting structure and genre

In this section I seek to understand the significance of the bicycle as a trope, symbol, narrative or structuring device. I begin by examining the literary role of other means of transport, since the bicycle inherited discourses developed around earlier vehicles, interacted with contemporaneous modes and handed on others to later technologies. In light of the formal links critics have established between literature and various means of transport, notably walking, horse-drawn vehicles and trains, I offer a case study of the way in which bicycles in their turn came to weave texts, and consider literary genres that were associated with the technology: adventure or detective fiction and comic writing.

1.1.1 Walking, Romantic literature and cycle pilgrims

Turn-of-the-century cyclists inherited and extended aesthetic, literary and social conceptions of movement and mobility that had begun to be formulated in the Romantic period, when walking was tightly bound up with the processes of literary creation. Several Romantic poets were keen walkers, writing during a period described by some – even at the time –



Figure 4: Robert Cruikshank, 'Pedestrians travelling on the new invented hobby horse.' (1819).

as an 'age of Pedestrianism.'⁶ Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and De Quincey each acknowledged the influence of walking on their writing, and Victorian critics readily

⁶ Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), 1.

recognised the importance of Pedestrianism to the Romantic movement. Lesley Stephen, for instance, claimed in his essay 'In Praise of Walking' (1901) that 'the literary movement at the end of the eighteenth century was [...] due in great part, if not mainly, to the renewed practice of walking.'⁷ This close association between human-powered means of locomotion and a literary movement is compelling for this study as it can shed light on the ways in which cycling, in its turn, came to shape the way both readers and writers interacted with text.

Since the late 1980s, there has been an upsurge in critical interest in the place of pedestrian travel in Romantic literature. A number of monographs explore the manifold links between Romantic authors' passion for walking and the literature they produced. Jeffrey C. Robinson, for instance, claims that 'the walk may be said to code the Romantic dialectics of wonderment and consolation and critical thought' and argues that the walk is a 'quintessentially Romantic image.'⁸ Robin Jarvis similarly maintains that 'the creativity of Romantic verbal art is repeatedly referred to the conditions, qualities and rhythms of a body in motion, a travelling self making excited passage over the land, or through the streets, discovering locomotive and representational freedoms that were unavailable to previous generations.'⁹ Anne D. Wallace's research reveals how the walk was a 'crucial metaphorical or narrative structure in Wordsworth's poetry' that laid the foundations for a peripatetic approach to literature.¹⁰ All these critics make a convincing case for the privileged relationship of walking to the processes of literary creation. This form of locomotion affords an intimate connection with nature and fellow humans and establishes a mobile subject with a

7 Quoted in *ibid.*, ix.

8 Jeffrey Cane Robinson, *The Walk: Notes on a Romantic Image* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 6.

9 Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, ix.

10 Anne D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: the Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 1.

gaze that encourages what Eric Leed terms a ‘progressional ordering of reality.’¹¹ In addition, it allows for digressions and detours, and its pace may calm a troubled mind while provoking the rhythms of poetry. As we shall see, all of these concepts were handed down in greater or lesser degrees to late-Victorian cyclists and were reflected in the texts they read and produced.

The Romantic era is not readily associated with the bicycle, yet it should be recalled that the first two-wheeled human-powered vehicle was invented as early as 1817. From the outset, the machines were conceptualised as a technological improvement on the body’s innate capacity for walking. Consisting of two wheels joined by a wooden bar, the draisine was known as a ‘Laufmaschine’ in Germany and a ‘swift walker’ in Britain, since the rider’s feet simply pushed off the ground to give impetus to vehicle. Even once pedals were introduced in the 1860s, the etymological and conceptual link with the foot was conserved in the name Michaux gave to his new machine, *vélocipède*. Although it would take until the end of the century for the bicycle to make a lasting impact on transport habits, it is significant that, from the first, the new vehicle was conceptualised as a ‘walking machine’ that could extend and optimise the body’s means of locomotion. This precocious and revealing association between two-wheeled and pedestrian modes of locomotion would return with force at the *fin de siècle* and persist into the twentieth century, leading the French cycling advocate Louis Baudry de Saunier to claim that ‘Aussi ne voit-on pas de différence fondamentale entre la marche et le cyclisme [...] Le cycliste est un marcheur qui roule.’¹²

Despite their marginality at this time, the draisine’s brief boom in popularity (along

11 Eric J Leed, *The Mind of a Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

12 Louis Baudry de Saunier, *Ma petite bicyclette: sa pratique*, (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1925), 20. ‘Therefore we see no fundamental difference between walking and cycling [...] The cyclist is a walker on wheels.’

with the rise of ice-skating)¹³ in the pre-train era should not be forgotten. When John Keats encountered young men on draisines in 1819, he termed the machine ‘the nothing of the day’, and he was right to predict that the fashion would be short lived.¹⁴ However, its cultural impact in the early nineteenth century was not negligible. Brian Rejack has examined ‘the broader cultural narrative into which the draisine fell, albeit briefly’, pointing out how the object had significant social implications and powerful symbolic potential in Regency Britain.¹⁵ Rejack argues that the swift walker craze foreshadowed the rise of commodity culture, while participating in the elaboration of a Romantic discourse that rejected fashion while seeking the aesthetic utility of ‘things.’ The two-wheeler’s brief but significant appearance at this moment in the early nineteenth century reinforces its link to walking – an activity which was being established as a literary pursuit at the time – while simultaneously inscribing it in cultural and counter-cultural discourses which would persist throughout the century.

Walkers in the Romantic period defined themselves in opposition to contemporary negative views of pedestrian travel (notably its association with poverty and criminality) and also against the tradition of the aristocratic Grand Tour, seeking to establish walking as at once a respectable and a literary pursuit.¹⁶ Similarly, turn-of-the-century touring cyclists were a marginal group who struggled to forge an identity for themselves in the face of preconceptions and criticism, often by means of the written word. This is illustrated by Joseph and Elizabeth Robins Pennells’ *Our Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*

13 See Hans Erhard, ‘Cycling or Roller Skating: The Resistable Rise of Personal Mobility’, *Cycle History* 5, 1994, 129–32. The author argues that during the mini-ice age at the turn of the 19th century, the popularity of ice-skating allowed people to grow accustomed to balancing and using human energy for locomotion, conditions that arguably favoured the invention of the draisine at this time.

14 See Brian Rejack, ‘Nothings of the Day: The Velocipede, the Dandy, and the Cockney’, *Romanticism* 19, no. 3 (September 2013): 291.

15 Rejack, ‘Nothings of the Day.’

16 Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, 14.

(1893), which is littered with instances of locals ridiculing the couple's machine or cycling dress, or being turned away from hotels and restaurants due to their means of locomotion.¹⁷ In the midst of the polemic that raged around cycling from the mid-1880s, a strong pro-cycling discourse was developed in medical journals, newspapers, travel accounts and literature. Authors actively participated in this contemporary debate, and like their Romantic forefathers, they enlisted the written word in defence of their pastime.

While there is a vast body of travel writing by cyclists in this period, the Pennells were part of a specific group of authors who looked to eighteenth-century and Romantic authors and their world by cycling to places connected with them, or by writing in a style that emulated them. These writers consciously chose bicycle journeys as a means to engage with past works of literature while producing new texts in response to the experiences cycling afforded them. Along with the Pennells, works such as F. W. Bockett's *Some Literary Landmarks for Pilgrims on Wheels* (1901) and Edward Thomas's *In Pursuit of Spring* (1913) recount journeys in which cycling 'pilgrims' seek out the birth and burial places, or retrace the journeys of well-loved authors and poets. The Pennells ride a tandem tricycle retracing Laurence Sterne's famous journey through France and Italy, Bockett goes on day trips to sites associated with a range of well-loved authors in the south of England, and Thomas's journey 'on or with a bicycle'¹⁸ brings him to Coleridge's homeland in the Quantocks. Although these texts were written well after the Romantic period, each owes a major debt to the literary movement which occurred a hundred years previously, and to the pedestrian mode that was associated with it. In the case of the Pennells, a legacy from eighteenth-century sentimental literature is also an important feature. Not only are these authors inheritors of the concept of

17 Joseph Pennell and Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *Our Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1893).

18 Edward Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring* [1914] (Albany, CA: Berkeley Hill Classics, 2013), 3.

slow-paced, subjective exploration of landscapes, they use their modern machine to seek out new and privileged connections with literature, the past and their environment. Each of these authors explore anew the vital connection between human-powered locomotion and literature, pointing to the ways in which cycling, like walking, can revive and shape spaces and texts.

These bookish cyclists all seek to draw closer to the texts and authors they admire by journeying to places associated with them, resurrecting both the person of the author and their fictional creations in the process. It was perhaps the keen sensory experience of cycling that encouraged these authors to attempt to transgress the ultimate frontier between living and dead, present and past, in order to experience the world as lost writers had. Temporal boundaries are crossed in both directions: the Pennells and Bockett invite Laurence Sterne and Thomas Carlyle into the present by painting the anachronistic image of these eighteenth-century gentlemen riding bicycles. The Pennells express the firm conviction that Sterne would have preferred their chosen vehicle, addressing him directly in the preface where they argue ‘in these degenerate days, you, Sir, we are sure, would prefer it to a railway carriage, as little suited to your purposes as to those of Mr Ruskin.’¹⁹ As for Bockett, he goes as far as to imagine that cycling would have improved Carlyle’s writing style, taking some of the pessimism out of his outlook: ‘Imagination fails one in the attempt to conceive what Carlyle might have been had he practised vaulting into the saddle over a pair of sound pneumatics. [...] The adjuncts of cycling would have taken some of the objectionable philosophic starch out of Thomas.’²⁰ The fact that both these texts present the unusual image of a deceased author on a bicycle reflects the literary potential of the vehicle as well as its powerful

19 Pennell and Pennell, *Our Sentimental Journey*, xi.

20 F. W Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks for Pilgrims on Wheels* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1901), 7.

potential to transgress temporal boundaries. As Dave Buchanan highlights, the Pennells' and Bockett's images 'illustrate how cycling in the late Victorian period was seen by some as having imaginative overtones connecting writers of the past with riders, writers, and readers of the present.'²¹ The bicycle is not just a tool for the writer, but also for the reader, establishing a relationship with the past that allows a privileged connection to works of literature and the worlds that produced them.

While inviting dead authors into the present, cycle pilgrims sought to journey into the past themselves. Bockett, on departing from Shelley's home, remarks 'as I took a last look round and mounted my cycle I felt that I should read "Alastor" that night with fresh interest, with a keener eye for its beauties, with a sense of possession such as I had never felt before.'²² Cycling to the place in which the famous poem was written provides Bockett with a sense of connection with the author that enhances his pleasure in reading the work. Indeed, it is not only the texts that these cyclists seek to come into closer contact with, but the very person of the dead author. When Bockett cycles to Tennyson's home – which is still a private house – he makes an attempt 'to obtain almost the identical view seen from the poet's own windows'²³ by standing on high ground near the house, at once summoning the author to his imagination and attempting to *become* him, in order to experience directly the sensations he felt.

The Pennells bring Sterne back to life by addressing their preface to him, expressing their sincere wish that he enjoy their homage to his famous journey. They include an account of their recent visit to Sterne's grave, visited by 'many, who have come to breathe a sigh or

21 Dave Buchanan, 'Pilgrims on Wheels: The Pennells, F. W. Bockett, and Literary Cycle-Travels' in *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film*, ed. Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 20.

22 Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks*, 111.

23 *Ibid.*, 211.

drop a tear for poor Yorick' (the fictional but largely autobiographical hero of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*).²⁴ The familiarity the Pennells establish with Sterne in the preface acts as a pretext for their liberal borrowings from his work throughout their travel account. They explain that 'as you will recognise your own words without our pointing them out, we have not even put them into quotation marks, an omission which you of all men can best appreciate.'²⁵ The Pennells thus openly appropriate Sterne's journey and text as a structure and guide for their own, something that was commonplace in the eighteenth century, but disparaged in the Victorian age when concepts of copyright and intellectual property came to the fore. The Pennells display an irreverent attitude towards these contemporary attitudes to literary creation, daring to enter into an open dialogue with and reappropriation of Sterne's classic text. These cyclists willingly blur the lines between past and present, fiction and reality, living and dead, in an attempt to resurrect the author and journey with him to the places that shaped his writing.

The rich connection established between walking and literary creation in the Romantic period inspired these cycle pilgrims to seek a new connection with texts by means of bicycle journeys. In many ways late-century cycling authors extended the approach to walking developed in the Romantic era. They sought to come to a fresh appreciation of literary works through their new-found mobility, and to produce their own texts in response to their novel experiences in the saddle.

²⁴ Pennell and Pennell, *Our Sentimental Journey*, xiii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

1.1.2 Narrativity and forms of transport

Les récits, quotidiens ou littéraires, sont nos transports en commun, nos *metaphorai* [...] Tout récit est un récit de voyage – une pratique de l'espace.²⁶

De Certeau recalls the fact that in modern-day Greece, public transport is called *metaphorai*, a fact that recalls the semantic origin of this inherently literary device. Metaphor derives from the Greek for 'transfer', implying that the movement between localities and the connection thus established between them is at the root of any narrative endeavour. The bicycle was one part of a complex picture of increasingly efficient and rapid transport in the nineteenth century, beginning with fast, cheap public stagecoaches and culminating with the motor car. At the turn of the century, Britain witnessed a transport explosion. Alongside the bicycle, urban public transport such as omnibuses, trams and the underground railway all offered new ways of navigating the city and the countryside. At the same time, inventors across Europe and the United States were attempting to master the secrets of flight and the internal combustion engine, preparing the ground and air for the coming of two major twentieth-century transportation technologies.²⁷ Here I briefly present how the major modes that preceded or coincided with the bicycle – such as stagecoaches, horses, trains, buses and trams – have been seen to influence the structure of texts, to shape the narrative act, to adopt a symbolic function and finally to impact on reading habits. This will provide us with a useful backdrop against which to examine two iconic *fin de siècle* cycling novellas.

26 Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 171. 'Everyday or literary stories are our public transport, our *metaphorai* [...] Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice.'

27 On the literary and cultural role of airplanes and motor cars, see Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Peter. Wenzel and Sven. Strasen, eds., *Discourses of Mobility, Mobility of Discourse: The Conceptualization of Trains, Cars and Planes in 19th- and 20th-Century Poetry* (Trier: WVT, 2010).

It should be noted that vehicles can have an important bearing on the structure of literary texts. John Dussinger and Carsten Meiner have identified how the horse-drawn carriage was used by eighteenth century authors such as Sterne, Richardson and Austen as a structuring device.²⁸ Arrivals or departures of coaches often mark the opening or closing of chapters, for instance, and the reader is invited to consider the spaces between chapters as the coaching inns between stages on a journey.²⁹ In the railway era, new formats in text responded to the shortened journey times made possible by trains. In the 1830s, the bookseller W.H. Smith set up bookstalls and circulating libraries in railway stations in order to sell lightweight ‘yellow back’ railway novels, serialised fiction and newspapers to a captive reading public. Alongside this desire for portable reading material, the railways helped buttress the three-decker novel, assuring its transport from Mudie’s circulating library in London across the length and breadth of Great Britain. In their introduction to the collection *Transport in British Fiction* (2015), Adrienne Gavin and Andrew Humphries observe that trains ‘in their prominence, length, and multiple carriages, mirror in terms of fiction the dominance, length, and multiple subplots of the period’s three-volume novels.’³⁰ As Aileen Fyfe observes, steam power was crucial for the mass production of books in industrial printing presses, as well as for the distribution of reading material. Fyfe quotes Samuel Phillips who noted in 1851 that ‘millions of readers have been created under a new system of travelling.’³¹ The railways had a rich relationship to literature, playing a major role

28 John A Dussinger, “‘The Glory of Motion’: Carriages and Consciousness in the Early Novel’, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 1, no. 2 (1989); Carsten Henrik Meiner, *Le carrosse littéraire et l’invention du hasard* (Paris: PUF, 2008).

29 Meiner, *Le carrosse littéraire*, 50.

30 Adrienne E Gavin and Andrew F Humphries, eds., *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4. I take a closer look at the case of the three decker at the end of this chapter in order to explore how its downfall may have been linked to the radical changes occurring in mobility at the end of the century.

31 Aileen Fyfe, *Steam-Powered Knowledge: William Chambers and the Business of Publishing, 1820-1860* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 135.

in the spread of reading while paradoxically encouraging the rise of both light, disposable reading, and bulkier formats such as the three-decker.

The various forms of public transport that proliferated at the century's end – trams, buses, underground railways – threw strangers together in an enclosed space, mirroring the space of the novel in which characters interact, often in unexpected ways. Gavin and Humphries suggest a link between turn-of-the-century modes of mobility and the format of books, remarking that 'Edwardian novels became slimmer as the three-volume novel was left behind [...] Consumers wanted shorter, quicker, cheaper literature just as they wanted sleeker, faster, less expensive transportation, and there was an increased commuter market for fiction.'³² Although I largely agree with Gavin and Humphries's analysis, they concentrate on passive, collective modes of transport and fail to suggest how an active, individual mode such as cycling might have shaped new forms of fiction at this time. The bicycle was a technology that shared much in common with the other emerging modes at the *fin de siècle*; it was 'sleeker, faster, less expensive transportation' and, as I will show, it also shaped the way those who rode it wrote and consumed text.

Furthermore, vehicles can mirror the narrative act itself, providing a compelling spatial mode to conceptualise the imaginative journey on which the author invites us. As Michel de Certeau notes, narration is inherently a 'parcours d'espace' in which 'les structures narratives ont une valeur de syntaxes spatiales.'³³ The tradition of oral storytelling for amusement during a journey has a long history, as witnessed for example by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in which the pilgrims hold a storytelling contest during their journey on horseback. Wolfgang Schivelbusch remarks that 'travellers of the 18th century, prior to the

³² Gavin and Humphries, *Transport in British Fiction*, 10.

³³ De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 170. 'journey through space [...] narrative structures have the value of spatial syntaxes.'

railroads, formed small groups that, for the duration of the journey, were characterized by intensive conversation and interaction.³⁴ This was facilitated, Schivelbusch contends, by the seating arrangement of coaches, in which passengers faced each other.³⁵ It was perhaps this traditional association with storytelling that led Henry Fielding (1707-1754) to evoke the public coach as a means of thinking about the act of narration and the role of the author when he wrote: 'I consider my Paper as a sort of Stage Coach, a Vehicle in which everyone hath the right to take Place.'³⁶ Carsten Meiner cites Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), in which the carriage becomes a symbol of both the narrative act and the emerging novel form.³⁷ The narrator compares his story first to a newspaper and subsequently to a public vehicle, stating that 'such stories as these [...] may likewise be compared to a stage coach, which performs constantly the same course, empty as well as full. The writer, indeed, seems to think himself obliged to keep even pace with time, whose amanuensis he is.'³⁸ In addition to directing and providing rhythm to the story, stationary coaches may equally perform a role in the narrative; Meiner cites Marivaux's *La Voiture embourbée* (1714), for instance, in which a coach that is stuck in the mud becomes the setting for a story invented by the passengers.³⁹ This dual role of the vehicle as at once facilitator of movement and a potential source of immobility (for example, in the case of a breakdown or accident) gives it a crucial, flexible narrative role. We shall presently examine how both moving and stationary bicycles in their turn provided rhythm and structure to turn-of-the-century narratives.

Forms of transport have been shown to fulfil symbolic functions in literature, acting

34 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th century*, [1979] trans. Anslem Hollo (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986), 67.

35 *Ibid.*, 73.

36 Henry Fielding, *Contributions to The Champion and Related Writings*, ed. W. B. Coley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 117.

37 Meiner, *Le carrosse littéraire*, 50.

38 Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* [1749] (London: Penguin, 2005), 73.

39 Meiner, *Le carrosse littéraire*, 51.

as a means to explore themes that relate to contemporary society. Margaret Linley offers a compelling examination of the portrayal of horse-riding in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), a novel which, according to her, 'foregrounds the role of motion that animates literary communication and highlights the ways in which transportation technologies facilitated or featured in communication.'⁴⁰ Writing at the height of the railway era, Eliot casts a backward look to the pre-train society of the early part of the century in order to explore crucial aspects of the human relationship with technology and mobility. The horse – which Linley sees as 'the most traditional metaphor of the spirit'⁴¹ since Antiquity – offered a means of conceptualising the complex imbrication of the body in technology. Linley argues that the frequent instances of individuals journeying by horse in the novel emphasise 'how for Victorians the equine body, in its dual status as material and metaphorical vehicle of transport, as well as in its cultural location at the border of the living and the mechanical, stands at the crux of technology and the language of the soul.'⁴² Horse transport has also been examined as a vector of female experience in nineteenth century novels by Sara Wintle, who argues that it 'offered a fruitful way of registering female physical energies and of exploring the subtleties of female sexual feeling and the relation of both to social and psychological patterns of domination and subservience.'⁴³ The physical, unmechanised aspect of horse travel would be vividly recalled in the era of the bicycle, when the technology became closely associated with the 'New Woman' (a figure I examine in Chapter 2). Moreover, as I demonstrate later in this chapter, frequent references to the bicycle as an 'iron horse' or to the

40 Margaret Linley, 'The Living Transport Machine: George Eliot's *Middlemarch*', in *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940*, ed. Andrew F. Humphries and Adrienne E. Gavin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 87.

41 *Ibid.*, 89.

42 *Ibid.*, 88.

43 Sarah Wintle, 'Horses, Bikes and Automobiles: New Women on the Move', in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin de Siècle Feminisms*, ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 67.

cyclist as a modern knight are to be found in literature, underlining the bicycle's inheritance from the equine register and imaginary.

In terms of the symbolic function of coach travel, Meiner's central thesis is that the principal role of the vehicle as a literary device is to confront characters with unexpected events in order to 'inscrire le hasard, l'imprévu, l'incident ou les aléas de la vie moderne dans la littérature.'⁴⁴ According to Meiner, the chance situations and characters which coach travellers encounter act as a literary shorthand for representing the contingent nature of modern life. Another critic who has reflected on the literary and symbolic role of transport is Jonathan Grossman, who examines both horse-drawn coaches and trains in three novels by Dickens, arguing that the author 'repeatedly isolated passenger transport's networking effects and explored how the notionally mobile characters of his novels offered the means for comprehending the networking of passengers.'⁴⁵ Both Meiner and Grossman thus draw attention to the role of vehicles in symbolising crucial elements of modern experience, such as contingency and the networking of people across large distances. Trains and coaches were important devices in fiction that authors use to explore and question the changing place of the modern subject in an increasingly networked, contingent world.

Nicholas Daly makes a compelling comparison between railways and fiction by arguing that both stage melodramas and the three-decker sensation novel acted as a means to accustom subjects to the new modes of interaction introduced by the railways. He observes that:

[...] to be immersed in the plot of a sensation novel, to have one's nerves quiver with those of the hero or heroine, was to be wired into a new mode of

44 Meiner, *Le carrosse littéraire*, 9. 'Inscribe the chance, unforeseen events, mishaps or hazards of modern life into literature'.

45 Jonathan H Grossman, *Charles Dickens's Networks: Public Transport and the Novel* (Oxford; New York: OUP, 2012), 5.

temporality [...] Just as the cinema would later ‘train’ people in the mode of distracted perception necessary to navigate the modern metropolis, in the 1860s the sensation novel trained its readers to live within the temporality of the railway age.⁴⁶

Daly goes on to point out how, in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), Oscar Wilde ‘fixes on the sensation novel and the railway, as emblems of the mid-Victorianism to which he is determinedly waving goodbye from the platform.’⁴⁷ Written during the summer of the three-decker’s demise and at the beginning of the bicycle boom, the play’s plot relies on ‘the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality’⁴⁸ being accidentally exchanged for a baby at Victoria railway station. Both these emblems of Victorian culture are ridiculed in Wilde’s scathing comedy, which hints at the emergence of a modernist aesthetics built on subjective experience (something that Wilde had developed elsewhere, such as in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1890]). Gwendolen’s remark ‘I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in a train’⁴⁹ irreverently dismisses the sensation novel in favour of a subjective model of self-introspection. Daly concentrates on the cinema as the defining turn-of-the-century technology that would ‘train’ spectators to live in the subjective, mobile temporality of modernity (just as the railway had ‘trained’ subjects at the mid-century). While viewing the bicycle as one element in a fresco of technological change from the 1890s, I seek to draw attention back to this mode of transport as a factor that – like the train before it – shaped new mentalities and modes of interacting with text.

Trams and buses offered new possibilities for social interaction; unlike the train, no

46 Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49–50.

47 *Ibid.*, 51.

48 Oscar Wilde, *The Annotated Importance of Being Earnest*, [1895] ed. Nicholas Frankel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 247.

49 *Ibid.*, 189.

compartments separated the first class travellers from the third. Lorna Shelley quotes the turn-of-the-century writer Helen Hamilton, who argued in her article ‘Concerning the bus’ (1913) that ‘literature is, so to speak, full of buses and buses full, not to say overfull of human beings. Buses should, then, inspire writers.’⁵⁰ Hence, these various collective modes of transport could provide the means to present universally felt shifts in social relations. As we shall see in the subsequent analysis, the bicycle – while echoing the themes of contingency and chance represented in literary depictions of travel since the 18th century – also introduces a more subjective element, in which the characters, and even the reader, are able to construct a personal itinerary and story. As I show in Chapter 2, the bicycle shares with the bus and the tram its capacity to subvert class structures by engendering unexpected social constellations.

Vehicles have a long association with the act of reading, influencing the way texts are consumed. The train distanced itself from the oral tradition enshrined by the coach, yet, making its appearance in an increasingly literate century, it played a major role in establishing certain reading habits. Schivelbusch notes that a taboo on conversation in train carriages very quickly emerged, as a firm reading culture took hold.⁵¹ Richard Altick emphasises the role of the railways in the birth of a reading culture, arguing that ‘perhaps no other single element in the evolving pattern of Victorian life was so responsible for the spread of reading.’⁵² John Feather points to the fact that the railways also facilitated the distribution of literature whilst actively creating a new and captive reading public, who bought or borrowed books at the station and read them on their journey.⁵³ Late Victorian modes of

50 Lorna Shelley, “‘Buses Should... Inspire Writers’: Omnibuses in Fin-de-Siècle Short Stories and Journalism’, in *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940*, ed. Adrienne E Gavin and Andrew F Humphries (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 136.

51 Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 75.

52 Richard D Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 89.

53 John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (London; New York: Routledge, 1988), 136.

public transport provided a space for reading but also for talking to or observing fellow travellers more openly than one could on the train. Buses and trams were rapidly associated with reading, and the newspapers, magazines and light paperbacks popular in the late-nineteenth century were well suited for carrying on this form of transport. The bicycle, as an active mode of transport, does not at first sight seem conducive to reading – but as we shall see, from its earliest days cycling was connected with the consumption of text. Cyclists continued to make the connection between physical and imaginative journeys, seeking out light, portable formats that could be read by the roadside or on arrival.

1.1.3 Cycling and narrative structure: H. G. Wells's *The Wheels of Chance* and Maurice Leblanc's *Voici des ailes*.

Following these reflections on the deep connections between literature and human, animal and mechanised transport, I now turn my attention to the specific role of the bicycle as a literary device. What emerges from cycling literature is a renewed form of human interaction and relation to one's environment which creates a unique literary geography. Marc Augé, one of the rare critics to have considered the literary qualities of the bicycle, provides the following compelling description:

On se glisse subrepticement dans une autre géographie, éminemment et littéralement poétique puisqu'elle est l'occasion de contacts immédiats entre lieux que d'ordinaire on ne fréquentait que séparément, et qu'elle apparaît ainsi comme la source des métaphores spatiales, de rapprochements inattendus et des courts-circuits que ne cesse de susciter à la force du mollet la curiosité réveillée des nouveaux promeneurs [...] Le vélo, c'est une écriture, une écriture libre souvent, voire sauvage – expérience d'écriture automatique, surréalisme en acte, ou, au contraire, médiation plus construite, plus élaborée et systémique, presque expérimentale, à travers les lieux préalablement sélectionnés par le goût raffiné des érudits.⁵⁴

54 Augé, *Éloge de la bicyclette*, 55–56. 'You slip subtly into another geography which is eminently and literally poetic, since it creates immediate contacts between places that ordinarily could only be visited

Augé highlights how the cyclist's privileged, immediate contact with her surroundings, combined with the speed that allows her to reconnect places that remain separate for the walker or train traveller, create unexpected couplings that are a direct inspiration for metaphor and poetry, recalling de Certeau's emphasis on the intimate connection between travel and metaphor. In Chapters 3 and 4, I examine how the sensory experience of cycling shaped a novel aesthetics and geography; here I concentrate on the second element in Augé's observation – the idea that cycling is a form of writing, and can actively shape texts that place this form of locomotion at the core of the narrative.

By means of a parallel analysis of two seminal texts in cycling literature from each side of the Channel, H. G. Wells's *The Wheels of Chance* (1896) and Maurice Leblanc's *Voici des ailes* (1898), I point to several ways in which cycling as a mode of transport introduced a new means of engaging with and structuring texts. These contemporary novellas helped open the doors of the literary establishment to two young authors, who would become famous as fathers of science fiction (Wells) and detective fiction (Leblanc) in their respective countries. Both works offer a compelling opportunity for an examination of the bicycle's literary role, as the vehicle is central to each narrative. While many of the works I examine feature the bicycle only at isolated moments, both Wells and Leblanc's texts are structured around cycle journeys. Wells's story recounts the draper Hoopdriver's ten-day cycling holiday in the south of England, while Leblanc's tale relates two Parisian couples' cycling tour over several weeks in Normandy and Brittany.

The first three chapters of *The Wheels of Chance* are brief, providing momentary separately. This geography seems to be the source of spatial metaphors, of unexpected mergings and short-circuits that are aroused by the awakened curiosity of these new ramblers, one pedal stroke at a time. [...] The bicycle is writing, often free or even wild writing – an experience of automatic writing, surrealism in action, or, on the contrary, a more developed, elaborate, systematic, almost experimental mediation of places chosen in advance according to the refined taste of the initiated.'

glimpses into Hoopdriver's working life. Within these opening sections the narrative gradually begins to focus on the steep learning curve of the aspiring cyclist, at first obliquely (the reader's attention is initially drawn to 'The Remarkable Condition of this Young Man's Legs', which the narrator proceeds to describe with 'the scientific spirit, the hard, almost professorial tone of the conscientious realist'⁵⁵), and then explicitly, when we are provided with an impressionistic depiction of Hoopdriver's lessons:

Behind the decorous figure of the attentive shopman that I had the honour of showing you at first, rises a vision of a nightly struggle, of two dark figures and a machine in a dark road [...] a wavering unsteady flight, a spasmodic turning of the missile edifice of man and machine, and a collapse. (WC 7)

So long as the protagonist is unable to ride, the narrative remains at an effective standstill – recounting little else than 'the tale of [Hoopdriver's] bruises and abrasions' (WC 8) while he attempts to mount a bicycle – and the paternal voice of the narrator is loudly heard. The mysterious 'vision of a nightly struggle' provides the interest of the story, a rare glimpse of movement and intrigue within the draper's static, humdrum life. It is only from the fourth chapter, entitled 'The Riding Forth of Mr Hoopdriver', that the story begins to get into its stride, as the protagonist's voice starts to emerge. The chapters lengthen and the narrator retires, setting aside the judgements of the first three chapters in order to leave front of stage to characterisation and plot.

Similarly, in Leblanc's tale, the opening chapter conveys an impression of stasis and immutability that is connected to the fact that the characters have not yet begun their journey. Two wealthy young couples, Pascal and Régine Fauvières and Guillaume and Madeleine d'Arjols, have come to dine at their club at the Bois de Boulogne, where they engage in the fashionable activity of riding bicycles. Their enthusiasm for the machine is apparent,⁵⁶ yet the

⁵⁵ H. G. Wells, *The Wheels of Chance; The Time Machine* (London: J. M. Dent, 1935), 5. Henceforth WC.

⁵⁶ Especially when it comes to Pascal, who develops an aesthetic theory on the bicycle from the book's

narrator insists that their main motivation for cycling is to follow society's codes and appear fashionable:

Il y a des opinions nécessaires, des plaisirs indispensables, des spectacles obligatoires, et ils obéissaient à tout cela en bons enfants soumis, en êtres anonymes, élégants, frivoles, d'âme oisive et de coeur endormi, inféodés à la mode, faisant l'exercice par mode, aussi bien qu'ils fussent demeurés au lit jusqu'au soir si la mode l'eût exigé.⁵⁷

Reflecting contemporary French concerns around idleness, decadence and degeneration,⁵⁸ these childless, loveless couples appear as listless automatons who mindlessly follow the precepts of the social circle to which they belong. Towards the end of the novella, Pascal will reflect that these years were 'mes années perdues, mes années de sommeil, de torpeur, de gêne, d'hypocrisie !' (VA 87).⁵⁹ Cycling is the activity that will rouse Pascal and the other characters from their torpor and indifference. When Guillaume suggests riding to Dieppe – where their club is to meet the following week – the idea appears to the women as 'quelque aventure extraordinaire, hors des conditions possibles de la vie, une de ces expéditions lointaines et périlleuses dont il n'est pas sûr que l'on revient jamais' (VA 15).⁶⁰ The 'tonalité épique'⁶¹ conveyed here (to borrow Augé's term) appears to be a mere figment of the women's imagination, but it will in fact correspond to the reality of their journey, which transforms their lives completely. The growing enthusiasm around their departure culminates

opening pages (this will be explored in Chapter 3).

57 Maurice Leblanc, *Voici Des Ailes* (Vierzon: le Pas de côté, 2012), 14. Henceforth VA. 'There are such things as necessary opinions, indispensable pleasures, obligatory shows, and they obeyed all these requirements as good, submissive children, as anonymous, elegant, frivolous beings with idle souls and sleeping hearts, indentured to fashion, taking exercise for fashion, just as they would have stayed in bed all day if fashion had required it.'

58 See Christopher Thompson, 'Regeneration, Dégénérescence, and the Medical Debate about Bicycling in Fin-de-Siècle France.', in *Sport et Santé Dans L'histoire/ Sport and Health in History* (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 1999), 339–46.

59 'my lost years, my years of sleep, torpor, discomfort, hypocrisy!'

60 'some extraordinary adventure, outside the normal conditions of life, one of those distant and perilous adventures from which there may be no return.'

61 Augé, *Éloge de la bicyclette*, 41. 'epic tonality.'

in the closing line of the first chapter – ‘Et alors, en route!...’ (VA 16)⁶² – which invites us away from the stagnant, bland world of the Parisian club to take part in the voyage of discovery just beginning.

In the opening chapters of Wells’s ‘Bicycling idyll’, the narrator’s musings on the nature of fiction and his evocation of the literary style of realism establish a parallel between Hoopdriver’s attempts to learn how to ride a bicycle and mastery of narrative form. Wells was not alone in suggesting a link between the frustration of learning how to ride a bicycle and managing to produce a worthy literary text. Mary Kennard (or Mrs Edward Kennard, the name under which she published), wrote a prolific number of now neglected works of popular fiction and non-fiction on themes such as horse riding, cycling, motoring and sports from 1883 to 1903. In her *Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (1896), she recounts her own struggle of learning to ride, and makes a telling comparison: ‘It was as bad as writing one’s first novel, when one set to work secretly and would have died rather than let anybody suspect the task on which one was engaged.’⁶³ When she has mastered the skill, however, cycling becomes a writing tool: Kennard recounts how she set out on rides in the morning to clear her head before writing.⁶⁴ As well as mirroring the difficult creative process, cycling can provide inspiration to artists. For instance, Edward Elgar rode fifty miles a day in the Malvern hills when he was composing *Enigma Variations* in 1899.⁶⁵ Like Hoopdriver and the aspiring novelist, Kennard battles in private to acquire a new skill, hiding her imperfect cycling and writing from public view. The fits and starts of the novice author mirror the covert exertions of these apprentice cyclists. While Leblanc’s characters are already

62 ‘Well then, let’s go!...’

63 Mary E. Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (London: F.V. White & Co., 1896), 3.

64 *Ibid.*, 23.

65 Edward Nye, *A bicyclette: anthologie* (Paris: Sortilèges, 2000), xxv.

proficient cyclists when the story begins, the second chapter of *Voici des ailes* refuses an effortless start to their journey. The characters are ‘affalés sur le talus d’un fossé’ while ‘les machines gisaient pêle-mêle, de droite et de gauche, comme des objets encombrants dont on s’est débarrassé le plus vite possible et non sans quelque rancune.’ (VA 17)⁶⁶ Not yet used to the physical difficulties of riding long distances in the heat, the journey and the story get off to an unsure start, that has the virtue of introducing an element of humour into an otherwise straight-faced narrative. In various ways, then, both Wells and Leblanc make use of the difficulties of cycle touring, or riding a bicycle itself, in order to slow the narrative rhythm down, and to mirror the apprentice author’s hesitant first steps (let us recall that both were little-known writers when they penned these texts).

Once the skill has been mastered, the story may begin. In both novellas, it is the bicycle that physically allows the change of location and the encounter with various characters needed to determine the rest of the narrative. It opens up a narrative space in which mobile protagonists cross and recross each other’s paths, forming new and unexpected configurations in the process. In *The Wheels of Chance*, in stark contrast to the stasis of the opening chapters (which reflect the immutability of Hoopdriver’s working life in London) successive scenes of country life and specifically the intrigue with fellow cyclists Jessie and Bechamel quickly provide rhythm and interest to the narrative. As Ellen Gruber Garvey remarks, ‘as a prop or narrative convenience, the bicycle had many of the same attractions for story writers as it did for tourists: riders could ride alone or in pairs or groups; they could stop at will and visit familiar or unfamiliar places.’⁶⁷ Like the coach and the train before it, the

66 ‘sprawling on the bank of a ditch’; ‘the machines lay pell-mell, to the right and left, like cumbersome objects that have been discarded as quickly as possible and not without some resentment.’

67 Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: OUP, 1996), 124.

bicycle fulfilled that basic and crucial function of literature: moving characters from place to place and confronting them with new people and landscapes. In Wells's novel, Hoopdriver encounters two upper class cyclists on the first day of his ride: teenage Jessie, fleeing home, and her tutor Bechamel, who has helped her escape from her overbearing stepmother. The three cyclists' south-bound trajectories overlap, producing numerous unexpected encounters. They eventually collide to form a new configuration on the evening in Bognor when Jessie escapes from Bechamel, who has lured her away from home with the intention of seducing her, and cycles off with Hoopdriver. Unlike collective, timetabled rail travel, the bicycle creates its own subjective time in the narrative that allows for confrontations and coincidences that would otherwise seem forced and unlikely. When Hoopdriver takes detours to avoid the couple by whom he feels he is 'haunted', he invariably meets them on the road or in an inn (WC 36). Ironically, it is when Hoopdriver starts actively pursuing the pair, after he is alerted to Bechamel's attempted (and uninvited) seduction of Jessie, that he loses their trace. It is as though the bicycle introduces a contingent time that refuses forward planning, constantly confronting the characters with unexpected events, to which they must respond spontaneously and ingeniously. Just as previous works 'haunt' texts, in Derrida's terms,⁶⁸ these cyclists are on individual journeys that haunt each other, creating points of friction and interaction that constantly weave the texture of the story.

In *Voici des ailes*, after the characters have become accustomed to cycling all day, their relationship to time seems transformed. The narrator describes how 'les heures écoulées leur laissaient de la béatitude et de l'étonnement. Elles leur paraissaient étranges, ces heures [...] Dans le trouble grisant de leurs rêves, ils se faisaient l'effet d'être fabuleux qu'a

68 See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

touchés la baguette d'une fée' (VA 22).⁶⁹ It is as though they have entered into a strange cycling time that mirrors the fictional, narrative time in which the reader must suspend belief for the length of the story. The magic wand that touches the cyclists seems also to operate on the reader, inviting her into an imaginary, fantastic world. Now that the protagonists have left behind the tedium of their old lives, the idea of joining their club at Dieppe seems impossible; indeed, it would mean the end of the journey, and the conclusion of the story. It is the suggestion made by one member of their party, 'Si l'on s'en allait comme ça, très loin, au hasard, du côté de la Bretagne?' (VA 22)⁷⁰ that allows for the continuation of the narrative. They decide to continue their journey 'en flânant sur les grand'routes, selon l'ordre de leur caprice' (VA 23),⁷¹ thus aligning themselves with the observant, marginal outlook of the *flâneur*.⁷² They travel 'sans hâte, sans programme' (VA 26)⁷³ and as such are able to enter into an alternative temporality that eventually allows them to cast off society's moral and behavioural codes completely.

Cycling for Wells's protagonists also invites a renewed attitude towards time and interpretative procedures. This is well illustrated by a scene in *The Wheels of Chance* where Hoopdriver rides past Jessie and Bechamel as they are arguing under a bridge. It is the bicycle's unique silence and speed that allows him to '[come] on them suddenly, without the slightest preliminary announcement, and when they least expected it, under the South-Western Railway arch' (WC 53). Here Wells draws attention to the cyclist's singular mode of perception by placing the characters in a position where they would be invisible to passengers

69 'the hours that had gone by left them with a feeling of beatitude and surprise. Those hours seemed strange to them [...] In the heady confusion of their dreams, they felt like fabulous beings that have been touched by a fairy's wand.'

70 'What if we carried on in this way, far away, without a plan, towards Brittany?'

71 'wandering on the high roads, obeying their every whim.'

72 I consider the cyclist's heritage from the *flâneur* in Chapter 4.

73 'without haste, without a programme.'

in passing trains. Riding fast, Hoopdriver receives only ‘the impression of a second’, but the few words he hears and the body language he glimpses are enough for him to grasp the dangerous situation Jessie is in. ‘It’s horrible,’ he hears Jessie cry, ‘it’s brutal—cowardly—’ (WC 53). At this pivotal moment in the story, Hoopdriver realises the pair are not siblings, and hatches the plan of saving the young woman from Bechamel’s uninvited advances. As noted by Sue Zemka, Wells’s narrative use of the moment is exemplary of a late-century ‘shift in priorities away from the moment as a vector of emotional pitch and narrative movement to the moment as an opening into or distillation of meanings that are invisible to sight and invite complex interpretative procedures.’⁷⁴ While Hoopdriver’s moment of insight under the railway bridge does involve visual clues, it is the words he hears (again, inaccessible to the closed-in railway passenger or to the pedestrian, whose gradual approach would have been seen or heard) which allow him to distil the various clues he has received over the preceding days.

The bicycle was one of a range of technologies that encouraged the increasing tendency to pay attention to short intervals of time, observed by the historian Karl Lamprecht. Stephen Kern quotes Lamprecht, claiming that at the turn of the century people became interested in ‘five-minute interviews, minute-long telephone conversations, and five second exchanges on bicycles.’⁷⁵ The above scene from Wells’s work may be considered as a literary reflection of this cultural trend, which was facilitated by the appearance of new technologies. In another example from contemporary British fiction, the collection of short stories *The Humours of Cycling* (1897) contains several instances of brief but insightful exchanges on

74 Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 65.

75 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 110–11.

bicycles, chosen to give structure and rhythm to a short piece. For instance, in ‘The Junior Constitutional’ by Pett Ridge, two friends sit at Hyde Park Corner listening to amusing, decontextualised snippets of conversation from passing cyclists.⁷⁶ In ‘A Drama in One Mile’, the anonymous author relates a heated dialogue between a recently married couple during their brief journey on a tandem.⁷⁷ The collection ends with a section entitled ‘Spokelets’, which includes short jokes and anecdotes, mostly about bicycle accidents.⁷⁸ These brief formats in fiction mirrored the specific manner in which the bicycle encouraged its riders to interact with people, surroundings, and text, an issue to which I shall return in the next section of this chapter.

Meiner points out how chance and contingency were central to literary depictions of coach journeys,⁷⁹ and such an outlook is closely connected to the bicycle in Leblanc’s pastoral tale. Pascal depicts his new life as ‘la bonne vie de hasard et d’imprévu’ (VA 30),⁸⁰ and similar terms appear later, when the narrator describes how ‘ils allaient au hasard des chemins et au hasard de la vie’ (VA 50).⁸¹ In common with Hoopdriver, these cyclists are constantly confronted with unexpected sights and situations, and rejoice in this experience. Towards the end of the novella, Pascal describes how ‘nos âmes, comme nos corps, ont volé sur les grandes routes blanches, dans la pureté de l’espace. [...] On dirait même que les événements se sont rués sur nous comme [la bicyclette] se précipite, elle, à travers les paysages et les horizons’ (VA 87).⁸² The bicycle as a form of locomotion is here directly linked to narrative progression; events come suddenly and vividly upon the reader, just as

76 Pett Ridge, ‘The Junior Constitutional’, in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897), 29–31.

77 Anonymous, ‘A Drama in One Mile’, in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897), 52–53.

78 Anonymous, ‘Spokelets’, in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897), 93.

79 See Meiner, *Le carrosse littéraire*.

80 ‘the good life, full of chance and unexpectedness.’

81 ‘they travelled at random on the roads and at random through life.’

82 ‘Our souls, like our bodies, have flown across the great white roads, through the purity of space. [...] It even seems that events have come upon us just as [the bicycle] itself rushes across landscapes and horizons.’

impressions unfold unexpectedly before the mobile cyclist.

All this might seem to point to a lack of agency on the part of the travelling protagonists (or, for that case, the reader), but these cyclists do in fact actively participate in determining the rhythm of their journey. In contrast to Wells's tale, no new characters are introduced over the course of Leblanc's narrative; rather the bicycle journey intervenes to form a new constellation of the four characters we meet at the beginning. Thanks to the different speeds of each cyclist, two new couples form, since 'on partait toujours ensemble, mais on n'arrivait jamais que deux par deux, Guillaume et Régine filant en général comme des fous, Mme d'Arjols et Fauvières se contentant d'une allure modérée' (VA 26).⁸³ While the narrator aligns himself with Pascal's perspective from the beginning, the diminishing view of his wife and Guillaume, cycling ahead, effectively removes them from the narrative from this point. The reader stays behind with Pascal and Madeleine who, cycling slowly and making frequent stops, gradually fall in love (as do the speeding pair ahead). It is the personal, subjective nature of travelling by bicycle that makes such a turn of events possible, allowing the continuity of traditional alliances and social constraints to be broken down. Had the four characters been travelling in a collective, passive manner such as by train, there would have been no possibility for privacy and the growth of mutual affection. The budding desire between Madeleine and Pascal, as well as that implied between Guillaume and Régine, soon merges with the joy of cycling to become the main narrative drive.⁸⁴

The novel form relies on movement from place to place, from one perspective to another, and it is the bicycle that provides the motor and sets the pace for this narrative mobility in both texts. In *The Wheels of Chance*, the speed, flexibility and independence of

83 'we always left together, but we invariably arrived in pairs, Guillaume and Régine speeding ahead like lunatics, Mme d'Arjols and Fauvières contenting themselves with a moderate pace.'

84 My reflection on the theme of love and sensory experience in *Voici des ailes* is continued in Chapter 3.

the bicycle place the characters in a sort of perpetual motion, locating them in a different temporal sphere from the non-cycling characters. Bechamel remains in the narrative only as long as he is a cyclist; once Hoopdriver has stolen his much superior bicycle to escape with Jessie, the narrator leaves him fuming in his hotel room. We hear no more of him and do not find out how or if he returns home to his wife after his botched elopement. (WC 95) It is in the closing chapters of the novel, when Jessie's stepmother and her three admirers are in hot pursuit of the pair, that the bicycle reveals itself as both an exemplary narrative device and a supremely adaptable technology. Jessie's fraught stepmother, Mrs Milton, first hears of her whereabouts from her admirer Widgery, who has been cycle touring in Sussex and rushes to her house to bring her the news. (WC 105) The late hour prevents them from leaving straight away, as there are no more trains; coming only pages after the description of Jessie and Hoopdriver's nocturnal flight from Bechamel, the superior potential of the bicycle for the purpose of escape is thrown into sharp relief.

The subsequent chapters recount the pursuit of the cyclists and repeatedly drive home the superiority of the bicycle over the train; while Mrs Milton and her cohort are held up by late trains and the incomplete railway network, Jessie and Hoopdriver slip effortlessly from their clutches, flitting from one village to the next. In the description 'the fugitives vanished into Immensity; [...] there were no more trains' (WC 137), the cycling characters seem to exist in a different dimension to the encaged and dependent train travellers. Dangle eventually catches up with the pair on a horse-drawn dog cart, but – in a further display of the bicycle's supremacy over traditional forms of transport – the horse is spooked by the bicycles and bolts down the hill, once again allowing the cyclists to escape. The final scene exclusively involves bicycles and tricycles, since the rescue party have mounted 'a

remarkable collection of wheeled instruments' (WC 186). They eventually manage to catch up with the fugitives thanks to the fact that 'downhill nothing can beat a highly geared tandem bicycle' (WC 181). It is interesting to note that communication as well as transportation technologies play a crucial narrative role in the chase; Jessie is betrayed by the letter she writes to her former teacher Miss Mergle, who immediately alerts Miss Milton of her whereabouts by telegram (WC 187). The bicycle was just one of a range of *fin de siècle* technologies that allowed authors such as Wells to move characters and information around at will, experimenting with narrative forms that could convey the speed, elasticity and contingency of modern experience.⁸⁵

Bicycles do more than move characters efficiently from origin to destination, however. The form of movement they represent in both Wells's and Leblanc's texts is reliant on interruptions, unexpected encounters, stoppages and accidents. In this sense, they share a common lineage with the literary carriage as theoried by Carsten Meiner, who argues that this nature of the vehicle is 'celle de ne pas bien rouler, de se briser, de se rompre',⁸⁶ thus inscribing chance and contingency into the narrative, while reflecting the uncertainties of modern experience. Lukács also notes the important narrative role that may be played by failure, arguing that 'by a strange and melancholy paradox, the moment of failure is the moment of value; the comprehending and experiencing of life's refusals is the source from which the fullness of life seems to flow.'⁸⁷ Indeed, the bicycle provides even more opportunity for chance encounters and coincidences than a public coach, as it follows no set

85 Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is another interesting example of a novel that makes compelling narrative use of a host of new technologies, culminating in a chase that tests the limits of each of them. For a discussion of this see Carol A Senf, *Dracula: Between Tradition and Modernism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998).

86 Meiner, *Le carrosse littéraire*, 221. 'that of not working, of falling apart and breaking.'

87 György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel; a Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 126.

route and can change direction or stop according to the rider's will. The title of *The Wheels of Chance* already gives an indication of the importance of random encounters in the narrative; it is Hoopdriver's repeated, unplanned meetings with the cycling couple Jessie and Bechamel that provide the backbone to the story, as we have seen. Yet in the majority of cases it is the bicycle's dysfunction that allows the characters to engage with each other. When the hero first meets Jessie cycling along the Surbiton road, it is his fall (an incident he significantly blames on the bicycle – 'Had the machine a devil?' [WC 21]) that allows them to exchange a few words. Some chapters later, Hoopdriver's first exchange with the dastardly Bechamel occurs while the latter is repairing a puncture on the Ripley Road (WC 31). As such, the mobility provided by the bicycle sets up the context for encounters, but, as with coach travel, it is often when the vehicle breaks down that 'these chance collisions of human beings'⁸⁸ (to borrow E. M. Forster's phrase) are able to occur. Indeed, as Forster portrays in *Howards End* (1910), brief encounters between strangers are part and parcel of the experience of modernity, and are a phenomenon that transportation technologies such as the train, car and bicycle helped render commonplace.⁸⁹

It is not only mechanical failures that may cause the cyclist to call a halt. The bicycle is intimately connected to the body that powers it, as well as prevailing meteorological conditions. Just as Fielding made use of coaching inns as a metaphor for the breaks between chapters, Wells and Leblanc mobilise their cyclists' necessary pauses to eat and sleep in order to structure their narratives. In coaching days, horses were changed and travellers able to refresh themselves at set points during the journey. With the bicycle, however, it is the human body that must be periodically refuelled and rested, and this provides a rich opportunity to

⁸⁸ E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (London: Penguin, 2000), 21.

⁸⁹ I examine modes of transport in *Howards End* in Chapter 4.

add narrative rhythm and structure. Leblanc's heroes listen to their bodies; the narrator recounts 'Ils ne se surmenaient point. Le matin, deux ou trois heures, de même à la fin de la journée, sans hâte, sans programme. Le moindre symptôme de fatigue motivait une halte' (VA 26).⁹⁰ Rather than pushing themselves to cover impressive distances, or stick to a rigid schedule, the four cyclists adopt the pace their body dictates. This pace is mirrored in the narrative, which alternates cycling scenes with descriptions of the long breaks the two couples take from cycling.

In the opening chapter of *Voici des ailes*, the first words spoken are by Guillaume, who remarks as he gets off his bicycle, 'Ne perdons pas de temps [...] je meurs de faim' (VA, 5).⁹¹ In addition to Pascal's enthusiastic admiration of the bicycles lined up in the stable, it is the cyclists' appetite that provides some sign of life within the stifling environment of the club. Guillaume relishes his meal, stating that 'assouvir la faim que l'on a gagnée par la force de ses jarrets, je ne connais rien d'aussi délicieux' (VA 9).⁹² The pleasure he takes in eating after physical exercise prefigures the importance of food in the rest of the narrative. For example, the first premises of the liaison between Guillaume and Régine occur in the following exchange, when the young woman dares to call him by his first name:

- Vous voyez, Guillaume, le village qui est tout là-bas, tout là-bas?
- Oui, c'est là que nous devons déjeuner.
- Eh bien! Parions que j'y serai avant vous. (VA 25)⁹³

Motivated by the prospect of lunch, the two quicker cyclists shoot off, thus constituting two newly formed couples in separate narrative spaces. In addition to the physical requirement of eating and sleeping, the pace of these cyclists' journey is also determined by the weather. In

90 'Two or three hours in the morning, and again at the end of the day, without haste, without a programme. The slightest sign of fatigue led them to call a halt.'

91 'Let's not lose any time [...] I'm starving.'

92 'I know of nothing more delicious than satisfying the hunger that you have earned with your own muscles.'

93 'Guillaume, can you see the village that's all the way over there?'/ 'Yes, that's where we'll have lunch'/ 'Well then! Let's bet I'll be there before you.'

contrast to coach, train or car passengers, cyclists are open to the elements and the rate of their progress depends on factors such as heat, wind and rain. Thus, when rain ‘les retint deux jours’ (VA 70)⁹⁴ in a small town, Pascal and Madeleine have the time to discuss and work through the latter’s jealous feelings concerning Guillaume and Régine. As such, the physical needs of the body and the weather conditions constantly provide the structure to their journey and to the text.

In *The Wheels of Chance*, the places where Hoopdriver stops to eat, drink and sleep during his journey are described in detail; in addition, they are often sites where key encounters or realisations occur. Moreover, the reader is invited to enter into the rhythms of Hoopdriver’s body; on the first night of his holiday we share in his sleep by reading an account of his rather surreal dreams (WC 48-51). It is as though his bodily rhythms correspond directly to the narrative time, with a journey into his subconscious only being made possible by the fact he is asleep. On the evening he escapes with Jessie, the narrator explicitly makes use of the time when the young people are sleeping to insert an ‘interlude’ describing the events occurring at Jessie’s home. ‘And here,’ the narrator informs us, ‘thanks to the glorious institution of sleep, comes a break in the narrative again.’ (WC 102). At the end of this chapter, the reader is once again reminded that ‘this is only an Interlude, introduced to give our wanderers time to refresh themselves by good honest sleeping.’ (WC 107-8). Thus, the narrative is aligned with the sensations, needs, pains and pleasures connected to the body of the central cyclist.

This bodily approach perhaps took one step towards a more unified and subjective conceptualisation of narrative that would be exemplified by modernist authors at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sue Zemka points out how Joseph Conrad, in negotiating

94 ‘detained them for two days.’

the serialisation of *Lord Jim* (1899-1900) with *Blackwood Magazine*, refused chapter breaks in the usual sense.⁹⁵ He explained that the divisions in the text ‘are only meant as pauses – rests for the reader’s attention while he is following the development of *one* situation, only one really from beginning to end.’⁹⁶ The subjective experience of cycling, being intimately connected to the steady rhythms of the body’s movement and its physical requirements, invites us to adopt a unified perspective that differentiates itself from the disconnection of rail travel. In-between spaces are revived, taking attention away from departure and destination, or beginning and end, in order to concentrate on the subjective process of the journey as a unified experience. Chapters 3 and 4 examine further the various ways in which the bicycle may have specifically influenced modernist narrative technique.

Among the few critics to have considered the question, Yoonjoung Choi establishes a compelling parallel between Wells’s narrative and the act of cycling, observing that ‘Like cycling, which encourages people’s active participation, Wells’s cycling romance refuses the final statement; it is a participatory reading leisure in carnivalesque “becoming”.’⁹⁷ Choi mobilises Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque in order to illustrate how Wells adopts a literary mode that subverts dominant discourses through humour and chaos, while inviting the reader’s participation in the narrative.⁹⁸ The reader is left to imagine the end of the story, as Hoopdriver returns to his dreary life as a draper in London. Just as Bechamel was eclipsed from the story when his bicycle was stolen, Hoopdriver ‘dismounts with a sigh’ in the last paragraph of the novella, and so ‘vanishes from our ken’ (WC 197). Leblanc’s novella

95 Zemka, *Time and the Moment*, 200–201.

96 Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, ed. Allan Simmons (London: Penguin, 2007), xli.

97 Yoonjoung Choi, ‘The Bi-Cycling Mr Hoopdriver: Counter-Sporting Victorian Reviving the Carnavalesque’, *Critical Survey* 24, no. 1 (28 June 2012): 112. Chapter 2 returns to Choi’s theory that Wells mobilises the Bahktinian notion of the carnivalesque in this text in order to challenge the prevailing social order.

98 See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

‘refuses the final statement’ even more categorically; the two newly formed couples simply take separate routes – one pair towards the coast, the other inland – and we are left wondering if they ever attempt to return to their bourgeois lives in Paris, or whether they decide to prolong their bohemian existence indefinitely. Thus, just as a cyclist cannot be simply carried along by her machine, in both these tales the reader is invited to contribute imaginative energies to the journey on which she has been taken, finishing the story in her own manner and at her own pace.

1.1.4 Adventurous bicycles: romance and detective fiction

The thrilling chase that ends *The Wheels of Chance* casts a backward glance at the many adventure and detective stories published in the cycling press in the 1880s. Brian Griffin has shown, through an examination of a range of stories that appeared in the newspaper *The Irish Cyclist*, that in the early days of cycling the object was closely associated with an imaginary of danger, excitement and sensation. Griffin quotes the prominent cycling journalist Beatrice Grimshaw, who wrote in 1893:

I knew, by means of reading all the cycling papers, and the exciting stories therein contained, that it was the commonest thing in the world for ordinary riders of the wheel to be chased by escaped lunatics, railway trains, burglars, etc etc... in short, to go through what the eighteenth century would have called ‘a thousand vastly diverting adventures.’⁹⁹

The paper’s editor, the former racing cyclist R. J. Mecedry, also remarked on the conspicuous association with the adventure genre in the early days of cycling, claiming in 1901 that ‘every literary aspirant who had steered a cycle felt capable of making it the ground-work for those

99 Brian Griffin, ‘The Romance of the Wheel: Cycling, Fiction and Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland’, *Sport in History* 29, no. 2 (2009): 285.

slender romances of the late-Victorian magazine style.’¹⁰⁰ Added to the slim format of the books these pioneering cyclists were inspired to produce, the themes selected for treatment were linked to their thrilling pastime. Mecredy noted that:

Those were enthusiastic times, and with all their mock heroics and melodramas they had their charm. We were all younger then, and were not too captious in judging a story with a few bicycles in it. How we thrilled when the hero ran away down the 1 in 5 incline, and held our breath as he neared the inevitable precipice at the duly accredited express speed.¹⁰¹

Representing the pinnacle of locomotive technology at this time, the bicycle was well placed to fulfil the colourful role in fiction that car chases or air battles play for contemporary cinema audiences. Griffin identifies an ‘adventure phase’ in cycling literature during the era of the high-wheeler, when the activity was still an elite and risky pastime and cyclists were largely daring, athletic, well-off young men. The cyclist became the modern-day knight, as R. J. Mecredy noted in 1893. ‘The hero is depicted on a bicycle,’ Mecredy observes, ‘instead of a horse, and flourishing a wrench instead of a pistol.’¹⁰² A corresponding example of this trend is provided in an 1889 novel by Mark Twain (1835-1910), entitled *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, in which Lancelot comes to the rescue of King Arthur and the novel’s hero Hank with ‘five hundred mailed and belted knights on bicycles!’¹⁰³ Yet the bicycle’s association with adventure lasted beyond the 1880s, if only in a nostalgic form. As late as 1910, H. G. Wells’s cycling hero Mr Polly feels ‘like one of those old knights [...] who rode about the country looking for dragons and beautiful maidens and chivalresque adventures’¹⁰⁴ when exploring the countryside on his bicycle. Herbert Sussman appraises the

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 293.

¹⁰² Brian Griffin, ‘The Romance of the Wheel: Cycling, Fiction and Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland’, *Sport in History* *Sport in History* 29, no. 2 (2009): 293.

¹⁰³ Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* [1889] (New York: Bantam Classics, 1983), 267.

¹⁰⁴ H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr Polly* [1910] (London: Pan Books, 1963), 88. Henceforth MP. A cyclist named Mr Warspite also plays a detective role in a mysterious episode at the end of *The History of Mr Polly*, when he discovers Polly hiding from his armed aggressor, Uncle Jim, in a ditch. Mr Warspite, the

bicycle in Wells's *The Wheels of Chance* as an example of how 'opportunities for courageous action and exotic adventure were not only still possible but actually increased by mechanization.'¹⁰⁵ Wells recognised this fact not only in his 1896 cycling romance, but also in an 1897 story entitled 'A Perfect Gentleman on Wheels', in which the narrator remarks:

[...] the bicycle in its earlier phases has a peculiar influence upon the imagination. To ride out from the familiar locality, into strange roads stretching away into the unknown, to be free to stop or go on, irrespective of hour or companion, inevitably brings the adventurous side uppermost.¹⁰⁶

The capacity of the bicycle to confront its user with unknown people and places, along with the sense of autonomy it provided, helped establish this enduring association between cycling and adventure or detective fiction.

Alongside expanding literacy rates and a growing popular demand for the printed word, the nineteenth century witnessed an increasing interest in the activities of criminals. This tendency manifested itself in reading habits – for example, the Newgate novel in the 1830s and the Wilkie Collins-inspired detective novel from the 1850s – but also via the press, which printed detailed accounts of gruesome murders and improbable robberies. The passion of the press and the public at large for detailed accounts of Jack the Ripper's atrocities in 1890s London bears testament to a real and enduring fascination with deviant and criminal behaviour. Growing rates of crime were linked to the profound changes taking place in Victorian society and people's fears around them; urbanisation, for example, often anonymised people, cutting them off from their traditions, families and communities. Moreover, communication and transport developments made possible the hatching of

narrator informs us, 'takes that exceptionally lively interest in his fellow-creatures which constitutes so much of the distinctive and complex charm of your novelist all the world over, and he at once involved himself generously in the case.' (MP 203-4)

105 Herbert L. Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine: the Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 164.

106 H. G. Wells, 'A Perfect Gentleman on Wheels', in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897), 8.

complex plans, as well as their subsequent execution. Wolfgang Schivelbusch shows how some of the early fears around train travel centred on the potentially deviant site of the train compartment.¹⁰⁷ There were growing concerns around the danger posed by accidents, health disorders, and fellow train passengers.¹⁰⁸ Two famous murder cases – that of Judge Poinot on the Paris-Mulhouse train in 1860 and that of Thomas Briggs in London in 1864 – emblematised contemporary fears of the dangerous strangers one could encounter on a train, the industrialised space *par excellence*, where all links to society were effectively severed. Following these murders, some attempts were made to mitigate the compartmentalisation of train travel, such as installing peep-holes and a footboard along the outside of the train. However, the fear of encountering criminality on the railways remained present right through the century, and is reflected in accounts of train travel in literature.¹⁰⁹

The bicycle offers its rider a very different space from the train compartment. Indeed, the openness of the bicycle meant that it could not be easily associated with the hidden criminality of the railways. The forms of deviancy associated with this technology – racers who endangered pedestrians, New Women who challenged societal conventions – were socially unacceptable rather than criminal. Yet the bicycle could also offer narrative and actual means to achieve a measure of anonymity that offered criminals the possibility of escape. In Grant Allen's *Hilda Wade* (1899), a novel that combines elements of New Woman and detective fiction, Mr Le Geyt escapes London on a bicycle after he has murdered his

107 Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 83.

108 On the association between criminality and the railways, see Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*; Matthew Beaumont and Michael J Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space, and the Machine Ensemble* (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2007); Gavin and Humphries, *Transport in British Fiction*.

109 To provide just two examples from my corpus, Dora Myrl – Mc Donnell Bodkin's eponymous lady detective – solves several railway crimes, and Grant Allen's cycling detective Miss Cayley uncovers a thief in a railway carriage. See Matthias Mc Donnell Bodkin, *Dora Myrl, the Lady Detective*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1900); Grant Allen, *Miss Cayley's Adventures. With Illustrations by Gordon Browne*. (London, Grant Richards, 1899). These female cycling detectives are presented in Chapter 2.

wife. This crime was predicted by the perspicacious Hilda, who presents it as a temperamental inevitability, due to the character and physiognomy of Mrs Le Geyt. ‘Sooner or later, that type of women is cock-sure to be assaulted’,¹¹⁰ she maintains, simply wondering how Mr Le Geyt managed to restrain himself from killing her for so long. The criminal is thus portrayed as a victim of a nagging wife, who callously drove him to kill her. Once we manage to overcome the overt sexism of such a narrative line, it is interesting to observe the bicycle’s role in Mr Le Geyt’s escape. Hilda Wade accurately imagines the murderer’s plan of action:

[...] he would buy a new bicycle – a different make from his own, at the nearest shop; would rig himself out, at some ready-made tailor’s, with a fresh tourist suit – probably an ostentatiously tweedy bicycling suit; and, with that in his luggage-carrier, would make straight on his machine for the country.¹¹¹

While the railway provides too obvious a means of escape, with many witnesses and set routes that allow pursuers to narrow down the criminal’s options, the bicycle allows the wealthy Mr Le Geyt to become a class-ambiguous traveller,¹¹² and to leave London on one of the many routes that lead to the country. Hilda nonetheless manages to track the culprit down to his native Devon, where she and the narrator Hubert follow him by train and bicycle. When he sees him, even Hubert fails to recognise his good friend Mr Le Geyt, who had the ‘loose-knit air of a shop assistant’¹¹³ riding towards the sea on his bicycle. The adaptability and anonymity conferred by the bicycle could thus allow fictional criminals a means of slipping through the net of the justice system.

The bicycle was rarely portrayed as a tool for criminals, however, with writers more often depicting it as a new tool for the detective. In Mc Donnell Bodkin’s *Dora Myrl, Lady*

110 Grant Allen, *Hilda Wade, a Woman with Tenacity of Purpose* [1899] (New York: Jefferson Publication, 2015), 35.

111 *Ibid.*, 46.

112 Class issues and the bicycle are examined in Chapter 2.

113 Allen, *Hilda Wade*, 48.

Detective (1900), Dora tracks down a robber who fled by means of the railway and corners him thanks to a bicycle chase. Although the criminal is also a cyclist, his initial choice of the train (which was often associated with criminality, as we have seen) and the superiority of Dora's machine single out the bicycle as a propitious tool for the detective. Dora makes a triumphant entry into the local town to hand the robber over to the police: 'There was a wild sensation in Eddiscombe when, in broad noon, the bank thief was brought in riding on a one-pedalled machine to the police barrack and handed into custody. Dora rode on through the cheering crowd to the hotel.'¹¹⁴ Furthermore, Brian Griffin points out how the short stories in *The Irish Cyclist* often involved 'cyclists discovering organised illegal activity in the countryside.'¹¹⁵ In some respects this reflected the contemporary context, since as Griffin notes elsewhere, Irish policemen were some of the earliest and most enthusiastic converts to the wheel.¹¹⁶ In fiction and society, the bicycle quickly became a privileged crime-solving device.

In the 1897 collection of short stories *The Humours of Cycling*, the short story 'My Match with Eileen. A Cycling Adventure in Ireland' by Lawrence Ogden Robbins again dealt with the association between cyclists and crime-solving in an Irish context.¹¹⁷ This story gives us an insight into the specific ways in which the bicycle could become an invaluable tool for the detective. The English protagonist goes on a cycling tour in the north of Ireland, where he is invited to stay in a farmer's home in Antrim. He arrives at the house shortly after a band of robbers have made off with most of his host's possessions – as well as his complicit niece – in a horse-drawn carriage. The hero cycles after them, managing to follow the tracks of the

¹¹⁴ Bodkin, *Dora Myrl, the Lady Detective.*, 56.

¹¹⁵ Griffin, 'The Romance of the Wheel', 2009, 285.

¹¹⁶ Brian Griffin, *Cycling in Victorian Ireland* (Dublin, Ireland: Nonsuch Publishing, 2006), 75–84.

¹¹⁷ Lawrence Ogden Robbins, 'My Match with Eileen. A Cycling Adventure in Ireland', in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897).

horse called Eileen, paying close attention to various ‘clues’ that bring him closer to the criminals:

I tried all three ways for a short distance; not a clue. [...] I had actually mounted my wheel, and was turning the pedals slowly, still irresolute, when the clue came. There came a brief sound, of the quality of great remoteness; thud, thud, thus, five or six times, and a faint rumble – so faint, I could have questioned having heard it. Yet I knew it was the sound of a horse and wagon passing rapidly over a loose, wooden bridge: and never have I felt such a thrill of adventure as at that moment.¹¹⁸

In tracking down the criminals, the hero makes careful use of his senses (an issue explored at length in Chapter 3), while his bicycle seems to become more attuned to the surroundings and gain animation; the hero describes how ‘I could have framed a eulogy for the bicycle that seemed to take its way under my faulty guidance with a sort of animate intelligence.’¹¹⁹ The cyclist is mistaken for a ‘detective officer’ by the keeper of the inn where the robbers stop, recalling a scene in *The Wheels of Chance*, in which Bechamel takes Hoopdriver for a detective, sent to rescue Jessie from his clutches. The cycling draper takes up the bait, acting as ‘a detective, a Sherlock Holmes in fact’ (WC 72) in order to concoct his plan of helping Jessie flee. This leads to a state of mental and sensory stimulation that mirrors the description provided by Ogden Robbins. The hero of ‘My Match with Eileen’ reflects, after the event, that he had enjoyed the chase because it had ‘all the delight of adventure; the suspense and stealth and that tingling sense that our best daring and wit may be at instant demand.’¹²⁰ The excitement of the chase recalls the physical experience of riding a bicycle, when the rider’s reflexes and senses are constantly alert. Just as, in Raymond Williams’s terms, ‘Conan Doyle [...] created in Sherlock Holmes a version of pure intelligence penetrating the obscurity

118 *Ibid.*, 36.

119 *Ibid.*, 37.

120 Ogden Robbins, ‘My Match with Eileen. A Cycling Adventure in Ireland’, 39.

which baffled ordinary men,’¹²¹ late-Victorian cyclists appear as super-sensory beings, capable of engaging with the world in a more perceptive manner and uncovering mysteries as a result.

Alertness and attention to detail are central to the work of a detective, and nowhere is this more explicit than in the Sherlock Holmes stories by Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930). Two stories in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905) integrate bicycles into the narrative as key elements in the solving of the central crime. In ‘The Priory School’, Holmes’s sharp eye, familiar with ‘forty-two different impressions left by tyres’, is able to distinguish the different tracks of two bicycles across a marsh, one belonging to a young abductee and the other to a teacher from the school who followed his kidnappers in an attempt to save the boy.¹²² Indeed, the detective is even able to surmise in what direction the riders were travelling or at what speed from how far the wheels sank into the mud. Whilst clues may be misleading – in this story, for example, the culprits’ horses are shod with shoes that mimic cow’s hooves – paying close attention to them is key to solving the crime. In another story, ‘The Solitary Cyclist’, Holmes notices instantly that the governess Violet Smith is a keen cyclist because of ‘the slight roughening of the side of the sole caused by the friction of the edge of the pedal.’¹²³ The detective’s attention to detail mirrors the perspective of the perceptive young cyclist, who pays a visit to Holmes after growing wary of a male cyclist following her at a distance each time she rides to the train station. Like in ‘The Priory School’, it turns out that the cyclist in this story is not the criminal, but rather someone seeking to protect a potential victim, since Violet is being targeted by a pair of men planning to abduct her in a horse and trap. In both stories, the perpetrators’ chosen mode of locomotion is the horse. As a modern, adaptable

121 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: OUP, 1973), 229.

122 Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* [1905] (London: Penguin, 2011), 142.

123 *Ibid.*, 97.

instrument, the bicycle appears much more likely to be associated with detective work than with the activities of criminals in fiction of this time. It is portrayed as the successor to the horse and the train, a vehicle that responds to and enhances the insight and attentiveness of its user.

The bicycle was an ostensible symbol of modernity, and it therefore comes as little surprise that detective and adventure novels should include it in their heroes' array of gadgets. Tom Gunning takes up Walter Benjamin's insight¹²⁴ by arguing that 'the narrative form of the detective story, rather than [serving] simply as an exercise in puzzle-solving, depends explicitly upon the modern experience of circulation.'¹²⁵ Gunning describes the opposing positions of the 'the criminal, who preys on the very complexity of the system of circulation; and the detective, whose intelligence, knowledge, and perspicacity allow him to discover the dark corners of the circulatory system, uncover crime, and restore order.'¹²⁶ Central to the system of circulation, means of transport were frequently portrayed in detective stories. Authors associated the bicycle with fictional detectives, who are able to gain access to hidden recesses of knowledge due to their versatile, modern means of transport. Just as James Bond films showcase the latest – real or imagined – technological developments, late Victorian detective writers closely associated new technologies with their protagonists. Indeed, the detective heroine Dora Myrl, who rides into the novel on a bicycle, recounts that 'within the last year I have been a telegraph girl, a telephone girl, a lady journalist.'¹²⁷ She has mastered a wide range of new technologies – telegraphs, telephones, typing machines and bicycles, and

124 Walter Benjamin located the origin of the modern detective story in the 'obliteration of the individual's traces in the big city crowd' allowed by the modern environment. See Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), 43.

125 Tom Gunning, 'Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema', in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 20.

126 *Ibid.*

127 Bodkin, *Dora Myrl, the Lady Detective.*, 6.

shaped her life, image and identity around them. In turn, these authors shape their stories around a new technology that radically transformed the way in which we apprehend and move through the world.

1.1.5 The humours of cycling

Les attitudes, gestes et mouvements du corps humain sont risibles dans l'exacte mesure où ce corps nous fait penser à une simple mécanique.¹²⁸

While interacting with the detective and adventure genres, the bicycle became a means for weaving humour into texts at the turn of the twentieth century. From their earliest days, writers have found in bicycles a rich source of comic inspiration. Many of the texts produced about bicycles at this time are still funny for a contemporary audience, in spite of the fact that humour is often contingent on a particular cultural and temporal context. Continuing my reflection on the ways in which texts were shaped by this new transportation technology, I now turn to some examples of comic writing in order to explore how the machine provided fresh possibilities for amusement, play and creativity. As we shall see, the humour associated with bicycles relied on a blurring of the established lines between human and mechanical, animate and inanimate, mirroring crucial shifts in turn-of-the-century mindsets. Critically examining humour may seem an impossible task; it escapes any definition we try to pin on it, and often a joke obstinately loses its power once it has been pulled apart for analysis. In his classic treatise *Le Rire* (1900), Henri Bergson recognised this fact from the outset, but nonetheless insisted on the importance of coming to an

128 Henri Bergson, *Le rire: essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: PUF, 1981), 22–23. ‘The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable insofar as this body brings to mind a simple mechanism.’

understanding of *le comique*, since it can provide important insights into ‘l’imagination sociale, collective, populaire.’¹²⁹ Loosely following Bergson’s reasoning in the aforementioned essay, I consider how and why two-wheeled transportation had the capacity to provoke mirth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and specifically how this potentiality was put to use in text. Moreover, I consider the deeper meaning of contemporary laughter around bicycles, considering the social implications of humour in this context.

Bergson’s essay provides a compelling critical framework for an examination of humour in cycling texts, as it appeared in 1900, during the bicycle craze in France and the UK. As such, it provides an important insight into contemporary attitudes to humour. Bergson wrote his treatise at a time when ideas around humour were being reformulated, notably as a result of contact with British models. It is not the French *humour* – understood as a form of satire – which interests Bergson here, but rather self-deprecating British humour. Judith Stora-Sandor, editor of the review *Humoresques*, makes the following distinction: ‘L’humour français est de la moquerie. L’humour juif ou anglais est plutôt de l’autodérision.’¹³⁰ This eccentric, self-conscious laughter has been called ‘l’humour 1900’ in France, and is tied to the turn of the century and to French ideas of Britishness, inherited from authors such as Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear. Bergson’s text thus enacts the contemporary cultural dialogue between British and French concepts of humour, interestingly mirroring the to-ing and fro-ing of ideas around both the technology and the social significance of the bicycle and other new technologies at this time.

Bergson points to three essential elements which must be present if we are to find something funny, summarised in the following terms: ‘le comique naître, semble-t-il, quand

129 *Ibid.*, 2. ‘the social, collective and popular imagination.’

130 Judith Stora-Sandor and Nelly Feuerhahn, quoted in *Le Monde*, ‘Le rire sans éclats’, 23rd March 2013.

‘French humour is mockery. Jewish or English humour is self-deprecation.’

les hommes réunis en groupe dirigeront tous leur attention sur un d'entre eux, faisant taire leur sensibilité et exerçant leur seule intelligence.'¹³¹ This description of the conditions in which laughter may be provoked brings to mind the early cyclists who navigated streets at the time Bergson was writing. By adopting this individual means of transport, early cyclists singled themselves out and became a fascinating object for the collective gaze. Going against the grain of the dominant, collective paradigm of transport, late-nineteenth century cyclists were certainly a spectacle, drawing the attention, fascination or ridicule of those they passed by. Bergson's first example of a humorous situation is easily transposable onto many humorous depictions of cyclists in literature. He describes a fall in the following terms: 'Un homme, qui courait dans la rue, trébuche et tombe : les passants rient. [...] On rit de ce qu'il s'est assis involontairement. [...] Une pierre était peut être sur le chemin. Il aurait fallu changer d'allure ou tourner l'obstacle.'¹³² Falling was part and parcel of riding a bicycle, especially in the early period of its adoption. The structure of the high-wheeler, or Ordinary bicycle, meant that the rider was placed directly above the front wheel some two meters above ground. Whilst this gave him an agreeable lofty sensation, reduced vibration and increased efficiency thanks to the large wheel diameter, falls were frequent and dangerous, and their representation in literature was equally common. This technology therefore provided new terrain for play and humour that could be a rich source of literary inspiration. Moreover, it was a technology that invited people to laugh at themselves.

Returning to Bergson's reasoning on humour, the reason why falls from bicycles are funny quickly becomes apparent. The walking man in the above example fails to miss the

131 Bergson, *Le rire*, 6. 'it seems that humour arises when people in a group direct their attention to one of its members, silencing their sensitivity and exercising their intelligence only'.

132 *Ibid.*, 7. 'A man running in the street trips and falls: the passers-by laugh [...] They laugh because he sat down involuntarily [...] Perhaps a stone was on the road. He should have slowed down or gone round the obstacle.'

stone because:

[...] par manque de souplesse, par distraction ou obstination du corps, par un effet de raideur ou de vitesse acquise, les muscles ont continué d'accomplir le même mouvement quand les circonstances demandaient autre chose. C'est pourquoi l'homme est tombé, et c'est de quoi les passants rient.¹³³

Bergson insists on the mechanical aspect to this stiffness, arguing that laughter is provoked by 'une certaine raideur de mécanique là où l'on voudrait trouver la souplesse attentive et la vivante flexibilité d'une personne.'¹³⁴ A pedalling cyclist conforms very closely to this description. His movements are not completely free, but rather mechanised by the limits the machine imposes on him; notably, the need to balance, to keep the machine in motion and to continuously turn the pedals. As Bergson argues, what is humorous is the idea that an automatism would keep the cyclist in motion, whilst his rational mind tells him to stop or steer to avoid the obstacle.

In her recent study of comedy, *The Odd One In* (2008), Alenka Zupančič engages with Bergson's theory of the comic, reasoning that, in Bergson's terms, comedy arises because there is 'something mechanical encrusted on the living.'¹³⁵ Yet rather than suggesting that this is a one-way process, Zupančič argues that in comic situations there is a mutual exchange of agency between humans and objects; while the human takes on the inertia of the material world, objects gain animation in turn. In her example of a baron slipping in a puddle (which is very similar to Bergson's description of a comic fall), not only does the baron become 'mechanical', but the puddle manifests 'elasticity' and 'changeability.' What we laugh at is humans' sense of self-importance, their desire to control the material world, and

133 *Ibid.* 'Due to a lack of flexibility, a distracted or stubborn body, or by the effect of stiffness or acquired speed, the muscles continued to make the same movement when the circumstances required something new. This is why the man fell, this is what makes the passers-by laugh.'

134 *Ibid.*, 8. 'a certain mechanical stiffness where you would expect to find attentive suppleness and the lively flexibility of a human being'.

135 Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), 111.

their blindness to the agency which objects possess. Zupančič asks: ‘is not the comic precisely the reversal in which we come upon something rigid at the very core of life, and upon something vivid at the very core of inelasticity?’¹³⁶ The intimacy of a cyclist’s connection to his machine provides a compelling opportunity for a blurring of the living and the non-living, a theme that was used to comic effect from the earliest days of cycling literature.¹³⁷

In *Three Men on the Bummel* (1900) Jerome K. Jerome’s sequel to the bestselling comic classic *Three Men in a Boat* (1889), the author sends the same three friends (now older, though not much wiser) on a cycling tour in Germany. As Murray Roston notes, the long-lasting humour of *Three Men on a Boat* relies on Jerome’s first-person narration, by means of which ‘he created a pseudo-self, a projection of himself seemingly unaware of the foibles, misapprehensions and illusions for which the story lampoons him.’¹³⁸ A similar narrative technique is adopted in the sequel, providing a clear example of the kind of self-reflexive British humour Bergson was attempting to theorise. Throughout *Three Men on the Bummel*, cycling affords rich opportunities for self-mockery, since the characters come to realise that ‘human performance lags ever behind human intention.’¹³⁹ As Roston observes, the narrator is ‘to be laughed at whenever the gap between his illusions and the reality of his situation is perceived.’¹⁴⁰ Due to fatigue, clumsiness or inattention, they repeatedly fail to realise their grand aims of rising early and cycling great distances, and instead suffer various minor disasters. Indeed, after a drawn-out departure and a leisurely tour by rail around

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹³⁷ A later example of the comic agency of bicycles is provided in Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman* (1947), in which the policeman Sergeant Pluck develops an ‘Atomic Theory’ about the exchange of molecules and agency between cyclists and their bicycles.

¹³⁸ Murray Roston, *The Comic Mode in English Literature from the Middle Ages to Today* (London: Continuum International, 2011), 198.

¹³⁹ Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men on the Bummel* (London: Penguin, 1994), 139.

¹⁴⁰ Roston, *The Comic Mode in English Literature from the Middle Ages to Today*, 198.

Germany, they only begin their 10-day cycling holiday in the Black Forest two-thirds of the way through the novel.

Jerome's cycling novel certainly continues the humorous motif of self-deprecation, but it also relies heavily on another comic element we have been discussing; that of the movable agency between things and people, theorised by Bergson and Zupančič. While in *Three Men in a Boat*, the intelligent dog Montmorency or the stubborn, unopenable tin of pineapples could be cited as examples of vibrant, non-human actors, in the sequel the bicycle allows for a rich comic exploration of the uncertain frontiers of agency. This is well illustrated by a passage in which the exasperated narrator watches an incompetent friend attempt to 'overhaul' his bicycle, which puts up stiff resistance:

The bicycle, I was glad to see, showed spirit; and the subsequent proceedings degenerated into little else than a rough-and-tumble fight between him and the machine. One moment the bicycle would be on the gravel path, and he on top of it; the next, the position would be reversed – he on the gravel path, the bicycle on him. Now he would be standing flushed with victory, the bicycle firmly fixed between his legs. But his triumph would be short-lived. By a sudden, quick movement it would free itself, and, turning upon him, hit him sharply over the head with one of its handles.¹⁴¹

This struggle between man and machine is richly comic since it refuses the conventional distinction between inert objects and active humans. While the man attempts to dismember it, the bicycle fights back, attempting to injure the man in turn. What is funny here is the man's undue sense of self-importance and expertise; the reader observes the struggle alongside the increasingly frustrated narrator, knowing that the man's efforts are in vain. The bicycle mocks the man's stubborn belief in his own agency and his inability to notice that of the non-human elements around him.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Jerome, *Three Men on the Bummel*, 41.

¹⁴² Like in his earlier novel, Jerome frequently portrays the agency of animals as well as machines in *Three Men on the Bummel*. The narrator describes an encounter with a German horse that takes an instant dislike to them, possibly because they are foreigners and/ or cyclists (George is wearing a cycling suit). The narrator describes how the horse 'turned his head, and looked me up and down with a cold, glassy eye [...] I

Alongside animate objects, automatism in human movement is a theme that was often employed to comic effect in turn-of-the-century cycling narratives. The mechanical limits imposed upon the body and its instincts were keenly felt by early cyclists, as Wells reminds us in *The Wheels of Chance*. A novice to cycling, the hero Hoopdriver ‘doubted his steering so much that, for the present, he had resolved to dismount at the approach of anything else upon wheels’ (WC 14). When he encounters a cart, he attempts to stop and instead falls off his bicycle, unable to recall quickly enough how to get off the machine. Several passages from the collection of short stories *The Humours of Cycling* (1897) involve similar scenes, where the rider does not react in the way he or the reader would have expected, but rather in the way the machine obliges him to, inevitably resulting in a collision. In ‘Some Emotions and – No Morals; or, how to learn “to Bike”’ G.B. Burginthere’s narrator admits to an ‘irresistible tendency on my part to steer straight into the nearest cart.’¹⁴³ In ‘Pogeley’s Ride Down Town’ by Fred Wishaw, the exasperated cycling teacher recounts ‘I told Podgeley that he had lost his head, and leaned over on the wrong side; but he didn’t believe me, of course; according to him, the machine went one way because he tried to steer it the other, and because it was possessed of the devil.’¹⁴⁴ In this instance the mechanical and the human once again become blurred, with the bicycle taking on agency and refusing to go the way it is directed. The author J. W. Allen relates a similar situation in his fictionalised account of cycle touring, *Wheel Magic* (1909):

have never known a horse that could twist himself as this horse did. If I had seen his eyes looking at me from between his own hind legs, I doubt if I should have been surprised.’, *Ibid.*, 92. Later, he describes a lively encounter with farm animals: ‘The great charm about the Black Forest house is its sociability. The cows are in the next room, the horses are upstairs, the geese and ducks are in the kitchen, while the pigs, the children, and the chickens live all over the place. You are dressing, when you hear a grunt behind you. “Good-morning! Don’t happen to have any potato peelings in here? No, I see you haven’t; good-bye.”’ *Ibid.*, 152.

143 G.B. Burginthere, ‘Some Emotions and – No Morals ; Or, How to Learn “to Bike”’, in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897), 26.

144 Fred Wishaw, ‘Pogeley’s Ride Down Town’, in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897), 22.

I remember once beholding an elderly lady riding slowly and carefully, straight at me. I was well on my proper side of the road. I rang my bell, and she looked at me and came on, as it were fascinated. If I turned out of her way, it seemed likely that she would turn also. I dismounted and stood facing her ten yards away. And still she came on, very slowly and resolutely, still she struck my front wheel and sprawled in the roadway.¹⁴⁵

In all the above examples, it is the mechanisation of the cyclists' actions, their rigidity and lack of adaptability to the current situation, which result in comic effect.

Falls also involve a disruption of the temporal sphere, which can be a rich source of laughter.¹⁴⁶ Bergson describes the situation:

Imaginons une certaine inélasticité naïve des sens et de l'intelligence, qui fasse que l'on continue de voir ce qui n'est plus, d'entendre ce qui ne résonne plus, de dire ce qui ne convient plus, enfin de s'adapter à une situation passée et imaginaire quand on devrait se modeler sur la réalité présente.¹⁴⁷

This description could apply to any of the falling cyclists described above, who seem unable to change their minds about their course of action, in spite of changed circumstances. The sensation of being out of sync with the world is evoked by J. W. Allen who, as he falls, wishes for 'a half-minute back from remorseless Time – nay, ten seconds – that is all that one requires [...] And the Past is suddenly merged in the acutest of Presents. The misused machine lies prone.'¹⁴⁸ In the description of Hoopdriver's fall in front of a heathkeeper, at least three different temporal spheres are invoked:

He gripped the handles and released the brake, standing on the left pedal and waving his right foot in the air. Then—these things take so long in the telling—he found the machine was falling over to the right. While he was deciding upon a plan of action, gravitation appears to have been busy. He was still irresolute when he found the machine on the ground, himself kneeling upon it, and a vague feeling in his mind that again Providence had dealt harshly with his shin. (WC 14)

145 J. W. Allen, *Wheel Magic; Or, Revolutions of an Impressionist* (London: J. Lane, 1909), 40–41.

146 The bicycle's interaction with changing concepts of temporality is explored further in Chapter 4.

147 Bergson, *Le rire*, 8. 'Let us imagine a certain naïve inflexibility of the senses and intelligence, which results in us continuing to see what is no longer there, to hear sounds that have ceased, to say things that are no longer appropriate, to adapt to a past, imagined situation when we should be responding to present reality'.

148 Allen, *Wheel Magic*, 39–40.

Here, narrative time ('these things take so long in the telling') is longer than subjective time ('he was deciding on a plan of action') while objective, scientific time ('gravitation') is the quickest of all, acting to place the cyclist on the ground before he or the reader expect it. We could also infer a fourth, Providential time, corresponding perhaps to John Urry and Phil Macnaghten's 'glacial' or 'evolutionary' time, which is 'immensely long and imperceptibly changing.'¹⁴⁹ At a time when thinkers such as Einstein and Bergson¹⁵⁰ were revolutionising contemporary attitudes towards time, novelists such as Wells experimented with the separation and superimposition of discrete temporal spheres for comic effect.



Figure 5: 'How to mount a Bicycle: A Drama in Four Acts.' 1880s, possibly by Percy French. Reproduced in Griffin, *Cycling in Victorian Ireland*, 42.

In *The History of Mr Polly*, Wells makes further humorous use of the bicycle's capacity to provoke falls and accidents. Drawing on the lively agency of the objects a cyclist encounters and the uncanny temporal space the technology opens up, Polly actively turns the machine to comic effect. When he crashes his bicycle into his neighbour's ironmongery shop, he experiences temporal disconnection in a moment 'of helpless wrath and suspense that seem to last ages, in which one seems to

perceive everything and think of nothing but words that are better forgotten' (MP 140).

Earlier in the novel, the bicycle figures in a humorous episode that recalls Jerome's comic

149 Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, eds., *Contested Natures* (London: Sage, 1998), 147.

150 See, for instance Henri Bergson, *Durée et simultanéité. À propos de la théorie d'Einstein* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1929). Bergson's concept of *durée* is further explored in Chapter 4.

technique of depicting a gap between the first-person narrator's illusions and reality. Chatting with his young female cousins, 'Mr Polly struck a vein of humour in telling them how he learnt to ride the bicycle. He found the mere repetition of the word "wabble" sufficient to produce almost inextinguishable mirth' (MP 81). A disconnected account of running into a pedestrian follows, giving a vivid impression of the jumbled, atemporal impressions received by the cyclist:

Hears the bell! Wabble. Gust of wind. Off comes the hat smack into the wheel. Wabble. *Lord! what's* going to happen? Hat across the road, old gentleman after it, bell, shriek. He ran into me. Didn't ring his bell, hadn't *got* a bell—just ran into me. Over I went clinging to his venerable head. Down he went with me clinging to him. Oil can blump, blump into the road. (MP 81)

Mr Polly immediately attributes agency and blame to the man's hat – 'I told him he oughtn't to come out wearing such a dangerous hat—flying at things. Said if he couldn't control his hat he ought to leave it at home' (MP 81). Polly is convinced that this inanimate object wilfully caused the accident, an impression that seems to have been encouraged by the cyclist's vibrant interaction with the agency of objects around him: 'that's the sort of thing that's constantly happening you know—on a bicycle', he observes 'People run into you, hens and cats and dogs and things. Everything seems to have its mark on you; everything' (MP 81). Yet what is humorous above all here is Polly's blindness to his own responsibility (and that of his bicycle) in causing the accident. When his cousin sarcastically comments 'You never run into anything', Polly 'very solemnly' replies 'Never. Swelpme.' (MP 81).¹⁵¹ His cousins are laughing at, rather than with, Polly, yet his bicycle allows him to create vital human connections: 'Mr Polly had never been such a social success before. They hung upon his every word—and laughed' (MP 82). His popularity with his cousins will lead to his engagement with one of them, reminding us of the importance of humour as a basic building

¹⁵¹ Wells thus phonetically transcribes the phrase 'So help me.'

block of social interaction. The bicycle is thus an inherently sociable instrument that provides rich opportunities for creating connections between people. Wells repeatedly points to the ways in which cycling could provoke humour and thus organically give rise to the deeply social act of narration.

While this inherently British self-reflexive humour found many outlets in the bicycle, a very different, derisive type of laughter was also associated with the technology in its early days. The above authors made rich use of the comic value of the bicycle to enhance our enjoyment of the texts, yet it should also be noted that laughter was widely used in an attempt to ridicule and discredit the technology. Bergson makes the pertinent remark that laughter is society's punishment for non-conformity or eccentricity: 'cette raideur est le comique, et le rire en est le châtement.'¹⁵² Whilst the bicycle industry was certainly the outcome of profit-driven innovation, the object itself refused to conform to bourgeois, capitalist society's expectations. Although their initial purchase stimulated the market, once let loose on the streets, they cost very little to maintain and transformed even subordinate groups into mobile citizens.¹⁵³ This form of mobility, requiring minimal infrastructure and generative of little profit for state or industry¹⁵⁴ did not sit easily with the values of the commodity-driven societies into which the bicycle was born. In light of this, the laughter that society directed at bicycles may be viewed as a punishment for non-conformity. Writers who used humour in their sketches of cycling were, in part, reflecting this social reality. Yet a distinction should be made between the derisive laughter of the bicycle's detractors and the playful, self-reflexive outlook of most of the authors we have been discussing, who were mostly cyclists

¹⁵² Bergson, *Le rire*, 15–16. 'this stiffness is humour, and laughter is the punishment.'

¹⁵³ This question is dealt with at length in Chapter 2.

¹⁵⁴ The French government did, however, introduce a tax on bicycles in the 1890s. See Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1986), 195.

themselves, keen on promoting the activity to others.

The bodily posture of cyclists was held up for ridicule by some of the detractors of the technology, notably in connection with the notorious, eccentric, fast-paced cyclists who were respectively termed scorchers and *vélocipédards* in the UK and France. R. J. Muir's mock Platonic dialogue *Plato's Dream of Wheels* (1902) describes these pariahs of the cycling world in the following terms:

Tamias – Indeed, I have seen young men [...] strangely curved as to the back, and I have felt impelled to cry onto them in the words of Persius - “Oh, crooked souls, for ever bent to the earth” but they ever flashed past without stopping to listen.

Eremus – That is true, for they are even as squirrels, *skiouroi*, in their rapid motion and in the clutch of their fore-paws, whence, I fancy, they have derived their names of *skiourchers* or scorchers.¹⁵⁵

Muir's depiction brings to mind a mix of human and animal elements which – again according to Bergson – is as likely to produce mirth as the combination of mechanical and human characteristics. The hunchback position here described by Muir is one Bergson refers to as particularly humorous due to its capacity to mimic a facial expression or ‘faire grimacer le corps.’¹⁵⁶ Like the disruption of temporal continuity, or the introduction of elements of the past and the future into the present, mixing animal and human registers acts as a textual device that allows for the introduction of humour or derision into the narrative.

Nicholas Oddy examines Victorian cycling-related paraphernalia in his article ‘Cycling in the Drawing Room’ and comes to the conclusion that ‘the machine got off to a derision-laden beginning that characterised its subsequent public perception.’¹⁵⁷ Russell Mills in ‘Thinking about Thinking About Cycles’ cites an example from a General Motors

155 Robert James Muir, *Plato's Dream of Wheels; Socrates, Protagoras, and the Hegeleatic Stranger; with an Appendix by Certain Cyclic Poets*. (London: T.F. Unwin, 1902), 7–8.

156 Bergson, *Le rire*, 18. ‘make the body grimace.’

157 Nicholas Oddy, ‘Cycling in the Drawing Room’, *Cycle History* 11 (2001): 175.

exhibition in which comic relief was provided in the form of a man crashing his bicycle into a pig pen, and claims that 'bicycles are not ordinarily taken seriously in twentieth-century industrial culture. Jet planes, locomotives, nuclear reactors, and other machines are taken seriously – but not bicycles.'¹⁵⁸ Both Oddy and Mills suggest that the derision and ridicule connected to bicycles functioned to effectively rule them out as a serious transportation technology. Indeed, while humour plays a role in many of the works I have been discussing, what many authors show evidence of is taking the bicycle seriously, as a machine that alters human capacities and our interaction with our environment. It is interesting to note that in Jules Romains's comic novel *Les Copains* (1913), the only section in which a serious, metaphysical and lyrical tone is adopted is that in which the friends set off on a cycle tour. Bénin sincerely declares 'je les aime, ces machines. Elle ne nous portent pas bêtement. Elles ne font que prolonger nos membres et qu'épanouir notre force. Le silence de leur marche ! Ce silence fidèle ! Ce silence qui respecte toute chose.'¹⁵⁹ This passage stands in stark contrast to the irreverent, comic tone of the rest of the novel, reminding us that at this time bicycles could provoke not only laughter, but also heartfelt respect, wonder, gratitude and admiration.

A sense of humour is part of being human, and the fact that bicycles have been so often used to comic effect in literature is, first and foremost, proof of the preponderant place they rapidly came to occupy in human affairs, and of the new opportunities they opened up for play and enjoyment. As we have seen, they draw their comic nature from their hybridisation and their ability to combine elements of mechanical and organic, human and animal, past and future in one artefact. All of these aspects provided writers with rich terrain

158 Russell Mills, 'Thinking about Thinking About Cycles', *Cycle History* 5 (1995): 11.

159 Jules Romains, *Les Copains* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1922), 88. 'I love these machines. They do not carry us stupidly. They extend our limbs and fulfil our energy. How silently they go! This loyal silence! This silence that respects everything.'

on which to experiment with humour. Yet bicycles have long been subversive and counter-cultural objects, and society's derisive laughter in their early days should not be considered entirely innocent in light of this.

1.2 'All gentle cyclists ride with a book in their pockets': cycling and turn of the century publishing in Britain¹⁶⁰

The highways and byways of literature are given up, so to speak, to the literary bicyclist. He travels in a costume peculiar to himself, and he considers the landscape all his own.¹⁶¹

At the beginning of *The Wheels of Chance*, Wells's narrator makes the claim that Hoopdriver's 'entire life, you must understand, was not a continuous romance, but a series of short stories linked only by the general resemblance of their hero' (WC 42). This metaphor of the protagonist's life perhaps makes a nod to the serialised form in which the text first appeared, in Jerome K. Jerome's journal *Today*, before J. M. Dent offered to publish it as a novel in 1896. Leblanc's *Voici des ailes*, likewise, was first published serially in *Gil Blas* in 1897. Selling weekly instalments to newspapers allowed struggling authors to make a living, while gauging the public's interest in the story; yet even famous authors such as Zola and Dickens published novels in serial form before they became available as a bound volume. While such practices had been common throughout the century, the taste for short, snappy formats grew during the 'short story age' (as *The Irish Cyclist* editor R. J. Mecedredy termed

¹⁶⁰ Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks*, 117. This research was first presented at the 26th International Cycling History Conference at Entraigues-sur-la-Sorgue in August 2015, and subsequently published in the proceedings of the ICHC with the title 'From the three-decker to the two-wheeler: bicycling and turn-of-the-century publishing practices in Britain.'

¹⁶¹ Lord Justice Bowen, in a lecture on popular education at the Working Men's Club, February 1894. Reproduced in his obituary in *The Spectator*, 14 April 1894.

it)¹⁶² at the turn of the century. Following the text from the author's desk to the publishing house, I take a closer look at the material conditions of the production of text in the context of the bicycle boom. I specifically examine the ways in which the bicycle may have directly influenced publishing practices in the mid-1890s, encouraging a more mobile approach to the consumption of text that implied a rejection of the bulky Victorian three-decker sensation novel.

1.2.1. The demise of the three-decker

The sudden demise of the three-decker novel, in the summer of 1894, has been termed 'one of book history's favourite historiographical problems.'¹⁶³ Many causes for this sea-change in publishing practices have been suggested by critics, but the event has not yet been considered in light of the concomitant bicycle boom, another major turn-of-the-century phenomenon. Taking into account historians' interpretations of the publishing and reading climate in the 1890s, as well as contemporary historical and literary sources, I point to ways in which cycling contributed to the appearance of a more individual, decentralised and mobile reading practise, removed from the sedentary fireside or railway reading paradigm elaborated earlier in the century. The specific and very modern mobility of the cyclist called for novel formats and subjects, which the Victorian three-decker could no longer supply.

The three-decker novel was a stalwart of Victorian publishing. Thanks to increasing levels of literacy and improvements in printing techniques in the second half of the nineteenth

162 Brian Griffin, "The Romance of the Wheel: Cycling, Fiction and Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland," *Sport in History* 29, no. 2 (2009): 292.

163 Paul Eggert, 'Robbery Under Arms: The Colonial Market, Imperial Publishers, and the Demise of the Three-Decker Novel', *Book History* 6, no. 1 (2003): 128.

century, reading boomed and the three-decker novel thrived. Single volume and serialised literature were also widespread in this period – popular yellow-back fiction and serialised novels were widely sold at W.H. Smith railway bookstalls, for instance – yet publishers paid more for the bulky three-volume format. The three-decker system was buttressed by the circulating libraries, which benefited from a discounted purchase price from publishers (15s. instead of 31s. 6d.) and in turn lent out volumes to subscribers at the cost of one guinea per year. This meant that if a reader wished to read all three volumes of a novel at once, he or she had to pay for three subscriptions. This system persisted due to the prohibitive price of buying new editions; if readers wished to add a title to their personal collection, they could purchase three-deckers at a discounted price a year later from the circulating libraries, or a single-volume 6s. edition directly from the publisher.

Out of the blue, on 27th June 1894, the foremost circulating library Mudie's issued an ultimatum to their publishers, demanding a reduction in the discounted price of three-decker novels, from 15s. to 12s., and assurance that single-volume editions of new novels be withheld until twelve months after their publication in three-decker form. The publishers' inevitable refusal of these terms sounded the death knell for their partnership with the circulating libraries and the long-lived three-decker novel; while 184 of the latter were published in 1894, this number had fallen to just four by 1897.¹⁶⁴ Considerable critical attention has been paid to this event and various explanations for the three-decker's collapse have been offered. Simon Eliot has suggested that Mudie's financial model, based on resale of old books, was untenable in the long term. Eliot agrees with Richard D. Altick's earlier analysis that circulating libraries had been losing money since the mid-1880s, and their

¹⁶⁴ Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 155.

inevitable decline was precipitated by the general financial depression of 1893-4.¹⁶⁵ Guinevere L. Griest has argued that there was increasing competition from cheap single-volume editions (which began to appear well before the tacitly agreed 12-month time lapse) and also from government-funded public libraries.¹⁶⁶ Paul Eggert, on the other hand, claims that the bottom-up demands of the colonial book-selling market, little interested in the three-decker format, forced publishing practises to adapt at the heart of the empire.¹⁶⁷ Whilst the three-decker's decline was undoubtedly brought about by a wide variety of factors, the bicycle boom (at its height in the mid-1890s) may have been one final, and now overlooked, nail in the coffin. This marked change in modes of consumption and mobility was part of a larger shift in lifestyles that impacted on the ways in which people chose to read. In addition, the appetite for sensational fiction (most of which was published in the three-decker format) waned as different literary tastes emerged. A new publishing and reading paradigm appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, shaped by the novel form of individual mobility and flexibility enshrined by technologies such as the bicycle.

1.2.2 Cycling, pocket editions and reading tastes

As Richard D. Altick reminds us in his classic social history of the British reading public, 'few major tendencies in nineteenth-century English life were without their effect. Some stimulated the taste for reading; some inhibited it; some, paradoxically, did both.'¹⁶⁸

Whilst cycling may rightfully be considered a 'major tendency in nineteenth-century English

165 Simon Eliot, 'The Three-Decker Novel and Its First Cheap Reprint, 1862-94', *The Library* s6-VII, no. 1 (1985): 38-53; Altick, *The English Common Reader*.

166 Guinevere L. Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).

167 Eggert, 'Robbery Under Arms.'

168 Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 3.

life', it is a difficult task to try to locate the ways in which an individual and active mode of locomotion might have interacted with reading practises. The impracticality of cycling and reading simultaneously means that the two activities do not automatically suggest an affinity, as is the case with the idle railway passenger. This is not to say that active modes cannot be combined with reading: walking, for instance, was inherently a readerly pursuit for Romantic authors. Not only did walking invite inspiration, it also offered an actual opportunity to read. De Quincey and Hazlitt (in his 1821 essay 'On Going a Journey, for example), both enjoyed reading books during their long walks.¹⁶⁹ Yet one major problem with defining cycling as a readerly activity arises when we consider the fact that it is practically impossible to ride and read at once. Some skilful riders of the Ordinary bicycle may have had free use of their hands on a bicycle, as one cyclist recalled in 1892 :

Cette indépendance des mains est aussi utile qu'agréable. Elle permet en effet de lire son guide, de consulter sa carte, de prendre des notes, de se servir de son mouchoir, de fumer, de boire et de manger, voire même d'ôter et de remettre un vêtement, et cela sans ralentir l'allure, ce qu'on ne pourrait faire avec une égale aisance, ni même quelquefois sans danger sur aucune autre espèce de machine.¹⁷⁰

While hands-free riding may have been a possibility for skilful riders in the Ordinary era, the steering mechanism and greater speed of the safety bicycle along with the increased presence of obstacles and other road users generally meant that cyclists were obliged to keep their eyes on the road ahead and their hands on the handlebars. Cycling, then, is unlike many other transport modes in that the activity itself seems to be incompatible with reading.

It is perhaps for this reason that the bicycle was one of the modern forms of diversion

¹⁶⁹ Robinson, *The Walk*, 44.

¹⁷⁰ *La vélocipédie pour tous, par un vétéran* (Libraries-imprimeries réunies, Paris, 1892). Quoted in Pierre Thiesset and Quentin Thomasset, *Les bienfaits de la vélocipédie: anthologie* (Vierzon: le Pas de côté, 2013), 12. 'It is both useful and enjoyable to thus have one's hands free. It allows you to read your guidebook, look at your map, take notes, use your handkerchief, smoke, drink, eat, even take off or put on an item of clothing, all without slowing down. It would be impossible to do this with such ease and safety on any other type of machine.'

held responsible for contributing to declining reader numbers at the turn of the century. Indeed, cycling and other outdoor activities were seen by some contemporaries as the antithesis of reading, for good or ill. Altick portrays them as a potential threat to the well-established popular reading culture:

The new fashion for participant sports – cycling, rowing, tennis, walking, croquet – offered powerful competition to the reading habit. Thus the spread of leisure both favoured and discouraged the development of the reading public. There was more time to read, but eventually there were also many more things to do with one's spare time.¹⁷¹

Given what some saw as the dubious literary value of publishers' output, active pursuits were often promoted as a more beneficial use of working people's spare time. Such an opinion is expressed in *New Grub Street* (1891) by George Gissing (1857-1903) – a novel that recounts an author's struggle to write a three-decker novel – when the upper class invalid John Yule asks:

Who is it that reads most of the stuff that's poured out daily by the ton from the printing press? Just the men and women who ought to spend their leisure hours in open-air exercise; the people who earn their bread by sedentary pursuits, and who need to *live* as soon as they are free from the desk or the counter, not to moon over small print.¹⁷²

Such arguments effectively positioned reading and outdoor pursuits in opposition to one another. Yet contemporary accounts suggest that the two practices did in fact influence each other in subtle and diffuse ways. Indeed, the activities shared common aims. Both fulfilled what Altick has identified as the main function of reading in industrial Britain; that is, to palliate the 'crisis in popular culture' caused by the loss of folk traditions generated by mass migration to cities, while providing a means of 'escape and relaxation' for overworked industrial subjects.¹⁷³ Escape and relaxation were certainly counted among the virtues of the

171 Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 88.

172 George Gissing, *New Grub Street* [1891] (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 55.

173 Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 4.

bicycle by new converts to the wheel.

Moreover, links between the bicycle and the written word were very quickly established, with cyclists being portrayed as both readers and writers. In the preface to an 1897 collection of cycling songs and poems, *Lyra Cyclus; or the Bards and the Bicycle* (see Figure 8), Edmond Redmond proclaimed ‘A new school of poesy has arisen to celebrate the tribulations and triumphs of the Bicycling world.’¹⁷⁴ Responding to a new technology, the songs designed to be sung to the tune of ‘well-known and popular airs’ revived or recreated a disappearing folk tradition.¹⁷⁵ Club rides, bicycle unions, the cycling press and literature all helped to found a community of the wheel, recalling Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ of the novel and the nation.¹⁷⁶ Bicycle riders identified with each other not only by means of their conspicuous shared activity, but crucially through the texts that circulated amongst them. The bicycle boom witnessed a growing taste for reading about cycling, as evidenced by the multiplication of cycling newspapers, magazines and collections of poetry and song. As early as 1880, the *Bicycling and Athletic Journal* was inspired to hold a writing competition among its readers, offering a ‘prize machine’ to the best short story writer.¹⁷⁷ Twelve stories were subsequently published in a small bound volume, ‘dedicated to all lovers of the wheel and those who are interested in bicycling.’¹⁷⁸

Of course, the commercial value of publishing books about this fashionable new activity should not be overlooked; most cycling guides from the period, as well as some

174 Edmond Redmond, *Lyra Cyclus; Or, The Bards and the Bicycle* (London: Bacon & Co., 1897), preface.

175 One song that has stood the test of time is Harry Dacre’s 1892 ‘Daisy Bell’, which includes the refrain ‘you’d look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two.’

176 Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

177 T Harris et al., *On Wheels!!! By Twelve Spokes*. (London: Cricket & Football Times, Bicycling & Athletic Journal, 1880), 7.

178 *Ibid.*, 1.

works of fiction,¹⁷⁹ contain pictorial advertisements for various brands of bicycles and accessories, and the text often acts as an incitement to buy a bicycle or other commodities.¹⁸⁰ One glaring instance of this tendency occurs in Mary Kennard's *Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (1896), which includes several pages of advertisements at the beginning and the end of the text.¹⁸¹ In addition to these overt marketing strategies, in the midst of a description of her first long-distance cycling tour (to visit the Nottingham Raleigh works – a bicycle brand her guide book unashamedly advocates), Kennard inserts a personal endorsement of Liebig Company's Beef Tea, which she claims 'will not only remove the cold and tired feeling, but will help to quench [...] thirst as well. As this particular extract does not go bad however long one may keep it, the cyclist may be recommended to always keep a supply on hand.'¹⁸² In addition to paying authors and publishers to insert obvious or covert advertisements into ostensibly objective guide books, bicycle manufacturers kept a close eye on the cycling press, often editing a newspaper themselves or regularly placing advertisements in the press.

The cycling industry was clearly concerned with promoting the bicycle by means of the written word. The Coventry printer William Isaac Iliffe responded to a demand for written material on bicycles by founding a publishing house in the 1880s, offering a range of guide books on various aspects of the pastime.¹⁸³ Coventry was the beating heart of the British

179 For example, W. J Coppen, *Romances of the Wheel: A Collection of Romantic Cycling Tales* (Coventry: Iliffe and Son, 1880); Mary E. Kennard, *The Golf Lunatic and His Cycling Wife* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1902).

180 On the multifaceted interaction between advertising and fiction, see Sara Thornton, *Advertising, Subjectivity, and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Dickens, Balzac, and the Language of the Walls* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

181 This was common practice in Victorian publishing, as shown by Thornton in *Advertising, Subjectivity, and the Nineteenth-Century Novel*.

182 Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists*, 76.

183 Titles included: Henry Sturme, *The 'Indispensable' Bicyclists' Handbook, A Complete Cyclopædia on the Subject*. (Coventry: Iliffe & Son, 1880); Coppen, *Romances of the Wheel*; F. J Erskine, *Tricycling for Ladies, Or, Hints on the Choice & Management of Tricycles: With Suggestions on Dress, Riding & Touring* (London: Iliffe & Son, 1885); A. J. Wilson, *The Pleasures, Objects, and Advantages of Cycling* (London: Iliffe & Son, 1887); George Douglas Leechman, *Safety Cycling* (London: Iliffe and Son, 1895); F. J Erskine, *Bicycling for Ladies* (London: Iliffe & Son, 1897); Thomas W. Girling, *Cycles and the Trade* (Coventry ;

bicycle industry, and the fact that a cycling publisher flourished alongside mushrooming manufacturers is further proof of the link between the production of written material and the spread of cycling. Iliffe and Son were part of a creative network of actors promoting the bicycle by a range of means. In the 1890s, Iliffe and Son merged with the bicycle parts manufacturer Sturmey, and based itself and its publishing house in London.



Figure 6: 1895 US advertisement for The Rambler Bicycle: ‘Men and Women of good taste select Bicycles as they do books.’



Figure 7: Cover of Ada L. Harris, *A Widow on Wheels* (1896).

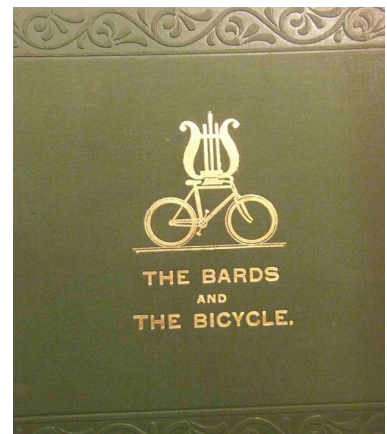


Figure 8: Cover of Edmond Redmond, *Lyra Cyclus; Or, The Bards and the Bicycle* (1897).

While manufacturers made use of texts to sell bicycles, authors may have made use of bicycles to sell books. As a struggling young author, H. G. Wells perhaps saw a marketing opportunity in the bicycle. In a letter to the editor Grant Richards on 6th November 1895, it appears that the then fashionable activity of cycling functions as an important selling point for his manuscript:

I have just completed a story of 60,000 words which will appear here serially in Jerome’s *Today*. It is a purely humorous work and describes the sensations and adventures of a draper’s assistant during a ten days holiday tour upon a bicycle [...] the details of bicycle riding, carefully done from experience and the passing glimpses of characteristic scenery of the south of England, should, I think, appeal to a certain section of the public.¹⁸⁴

London: Iliffe & Son, 1898).

184 H. G. Wells, *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, ed. David C. Smith, vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), 256.

Here Wells promotes his story to a publisher by means of its association with a new, exciting technology, while inscribing his work within a popular genre of fictionalised travel or history writing. As Jeremy Lewis records, Jerome K. Jerome admitted that he ‘did not intend to write a funny book, at first’ when he started working on *Three Men in a Boat* (1889), but was rather responding to the contemporary popularity of boating on the Thames. As Lewis notes, ‘publishers did brisk business with guidebooks-cum-histories of the river, in which topographical details were interwoven with easily digested snippets of English history.’¹⁸⁵ Wells was undoubtedly aware of the recent popularity of cycling when he made his bid to become one of the first authors to publish a full-length novel on the subject; Jerome would follow suit with *Three Men on the Bummel* in 1900. Such texts responded to the contemporary taste for a guide book style in fiction while integrating a new technology which aroused widespread public interest. The cachet cycling had achieved by this time may have encouraged other writers and publishers to use the bicycle to appeal to the public; a case in point is Ada L. Harris’s *A Widow on Wheels* (1896), which boasts a lady cyclist on its cover and in its title, but whose narrative hardly features the bicycle (see Figure 7).¹⁸⁶

Subsequent to its serial publication, it was not Grant Richards but J. M. Dent who agreed to publish Wells’s cycling narrative as a neat single-volume novel in 1896. Dent’s choice of authors reflected a preference for classic literature, yet he also published a small number of new titles, particularly travel literature and guides. Perhaps it was in recognition of his cyclist readership that Dent took up Wells’s offer to appeal to ‘a certain section of the public’ by publishing his novel as a light volume in red cloth, with a simple gilt cyclist on the

185 Jeremy Lewis, ‘Introduction’ in Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat* [1889]. *Three Men on the Bummel* [1900] (Oxford: OUP, 2000), vii.

186 Ada L. Harris, *A Widow on Wheels* (London: Hutchinson, 1896).

cover. Dent is an interesting example of an innovative publisher who established his business and sought to respond to evolving reading habits in the years just before the three-decker's demise. Beginning his career as a modest bookbinder in the 1860s, Dent worked his way up to found a publishing house in 1888. According to the historian Frank Arthur Mumby, the publisher's first two volumes, Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia* and his *Last Essays*, 'struck a fresh note in the trade', both in their subject matter and their portable format.¹⁸⁷ It is interesting to note that the cycle tourist F. W. Bockett, whose *Literary Landmarks for Pillgrims on Wheels* was also published by Dent, always carried 'a little sixpenny edition in one of the pockets of my jacket' on his rides, and counted Lamb's books among his favourites.¹⁸⁸ Dent's next success was the 'Temple Shakespeare' series, in forty volumes at a shilling each, which Mumby argues convinced the publisher that 'there was a demand for the revival of the pocket classic.'

Dent followed up on the success of his 'Temple Shakespeare' by publishing the 'Temple Classics' series and, later, the 'Everyman's Library.'¹⁸⁹ Dent's pocket classics and travel literature in the last years of the century may well have been destined for the saddle bags of cyclists, many of whom were not only newly mobile but also newly literate. Indeed, the interest of such publishers in reprinting classic literature was part of a larger democratisation of knowledge that took place in the late-Victorian era, in the wake of education reforms that had helped create a more literate population.¹⁹⁰ Gissing's novel *New Grub Street* carefully portrays the contemporary changes in reading habits and publishing choices that were taking place in response to changes in people's education and mobility. Mr

187 Frank Arthur Mumby, *Publishing and Bookselling* (London: Cape, 1974), 279.

188 Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks*, 266.

189 Mumby, *Publishing and Bookselling*, 280.

190 Government Education Acts in the 1870s provided for the establishment of 'Board Schools' which made education more affordable. Primary education between the ages of 5 and 10 became mandatory at a small fee in 1881, before becoming free of charge in 1891.

Whelpdale explains his idea for a newspaper in the following terms:

I would have the paper address itself to the quarter-educated; that is to say, the great new generation that is being turned out by the Board schools, the young men and women who can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention. People of this kind want something to occupy them in trains, and on 'buses and trams. [...] what they want is the lightest and frothiest of chit-chatty information – bits of stories, bits of description, bits of scandal, bits of jokes, bits of statistics, bits of foolery.¹⁹¹

Whelpdale's newspaper, entitled *Chit-Chat*, clearly parodies the magazine *Tit-Bits*, founded by Georges Newnes in 1881. Jeremy Lewis notes that Newnes's magazine rejected work by Conrad and Woolf, but 'made a point of reprinting excerpts from classic authors.'¹⁹² This choice was made with a clear awareness of the needs of the magazine's newly literate working and lower-middle class readership. John Carey credits *Tit-Bits* with 'awakening interest in books, arousing curiosity and introducing its readers to new ideas',¹⁹³ in contrast to high-brow literary organs such as T. S. Eliot's *Criterion*, and F. R. Leavis's *Scrutiny*, which were inaccessible to readers who did not possess the requisite cultural capital. Carey argues that 'The purpose of modernist writing [...] was to exclude these newly educated (or 'semi-educated') readers, and so to preserve the intellectual's seclusion from the "'mass.'"¹⁹⁴ Publishers such as Dent, on the other hand, along with literary magazines such as *Tit-Bits*, and later *The Strand*, actively encouraged this new readership of clerks and shopkeepers. Editorial decisions to reprint cheap, portable versions of the classics responded to the growing desire among 'the masses' to gain access to a wealth of knowledge that had previously been denied them. A clear parallel can be established with the masses' late-century discovery of mobility, a domain which had long been the preserve of the wealthiest in society,

¹⁹¹ Gissing, *New Grub Street*, 496.

¹⁹² Lewis, 'Introduction' in Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, xiv.

¹⁹³ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 109.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, preface.

by means of the bicycle and other modes of transport.¹⁹⁵

The renewed interest in the works of past authors at the end of the century stood in clear opposition to the three-decker model, which was built on novelty and sensation. The three-decker had managed to survive so long since the circulating libraries were able to ensure a profit by securing new titles at a discounted price and lending them at a profit to the captive public, who were unable to afford the books themselves. Once the public became more interested in cheaply-produced classics, however, such a model became untenable. In fact, the bicycle may have accompanied the shift in taste from novelty to nostalgia, since it is a technology that had the power to remind its first users of their connection to their bodies, their surroundings and the past. Yet on the other hand, cyclists participated in a growing culture of conspicuous consumption in their desire to own books rather than borrow them, and to finish them quickly rather than spending weeks reading bulky three-deckers. The cyclist aesthetic, then, may be considered as both a motor and an outcome of this ambivalent sea-change in literary taste.

1.2.3 Mobile readers

Early cyclists made a natural association between their new mobility and the activity of reading. F. W. Bockett, who claimed ‘all gentle cyclists ride with a book in their pockets’,¹⁹⁶ frequently paused mid-ride to read in a particularly evocative spot. The physical book is often present in Bockett’s descriptions, whether it be a ‘little sixpenny edition’ of Izaak Walton’s *Compleat Angler* (1653),¹⁹⁷ or a book of Abraham Cowley’s essays, sent to

¹⁹⁵ The class dimension of the bicycle is further examined in Chapter 2.

¹⁹⁶ Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks*, 117.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.

him by a librarian friend ‘because he thought it would go easily into the pocket of my cycling jacket.’¹⁹⁸ For Bockett, cycling was the fair-weather equivalent of reading, and vice-versa. On wet days, he advises cyclists to take a rest day and read in a public library (which, he gladly states, are becoming more and more numerous).¹⁹⁹ During his rides he rejoices in coming across second-hand book shops²⁰⁰ and in finding ‘a hostelry for pilgrims on wheels with bookshelves [...] What a haven for a rainy afternoon, what an alleviation for a cracked centre bracket!’²⁰¹ Cyclists’ goal, claims Bockett, should be ‘building up a healthy mind in a healthy body’;²⁰² the two activities complement each other, and reading is as central to his ‘gentle’ approach to life as cycling.

Thanks to the reduced dimensions and prices of books, cyclists could carry their own books with them on their journeys. Many publishers issued pocket-sized guide books and fiction at the turn of the century, accommodating the needs of space-conscious cyclists. Armstrong and Inglis, for example, presented their tiny guide *Short Spins Around London* (1903) as ‘a volume of limited dimensions, intended for the pocket’;²⁰³ and Iliffe and Son also issued a ‘Nutshell Series’, whose books aimed ‘to give as much information upon cycling matters as possible in so small a space.’²⁰⁴ A corresponding move towards brevity can also be noted in the cycling press. The leading periodical *The Irish Cyclist* began life in 1885 as a text-heavy broadsheet, including lengthy articles and relatively little images or advertising. By 1894, the format had changed considerably; thanks to the bicycle boom, advertisements and images abounded, and instead of publishing articles, the news appeared ‘in brief’,

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁰³ Arthur C. Armstrong and Harry Robert Gall Inglis, *Short Spins Round London* (London and Edinburgh: Gall and Inglis, 1903), preface.

²⁰⁴ Charles William Brown, *Cycling.*, Nutshell Series (London: Iliffe & Sons, 1895), preface.

summarised to a few snappy sentences and placed under headings such as ‘Jottings’, ‘Cranks’, and ‘General.’ Paperback novels had been available since the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth saw railway yellow-backs and serialised novels flourish in spite of the three-decker’s predominance. Yet the interest in pocket editions at the end of the century marked a departure in terms of the material selected for publication in ever more portable formats. As we have seen, in contrast to the three-decker and railway readers’ taste for sensation and novelty, the *fin de siècle* cast a nostalgic glance back at past authors.

The location of books and the manner in which they were consumed were intimately tied to changes in people’s everyday mobility. The railway had already participated in ‘the placing of books in the main-traveled roads of Victorian daily life’,²⁰⁵ to borrow Altick’s phrase. Beaumont and Freeman observe that thanks to the railways reading ‘became less ritualized, and more ordinary, because of train travel. It was woven into the everyday rhythms of modernity’,²⁰⁶ while Aileen Fyfe contends that ‘the railway carriage transformed reading into a public activity’ and ‘brought the bookshop into the street.’²⁰⁷ All these tendencies were continued and expanded in the era of the bicycle. Roads and coaching inns, neglected since the coming of the railways, were revived by the legions of cyclists who took to them for the daily commute or for weekend rides. Inns quickly responded to the demands of their new clientèle, and it was common to find a bookshelf by the fire. As such, cyclists did not have to necessarily carry a book with them, as they were likely to find one on arrival. In J. W. Allen’s *Wheel Magic* (1909), the narrator encounters another cyclist who is absorbed in a book he has come across in an inn,²⁰⁸ while Miriam in Dorothy Richardson’s *The Tunnel* (1919) ends her

205 Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 305.

206 Beaumont and Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity*, 23.

207 Fyfe, *Steam-Powered Knowledge*, 136.

208 Allen, *Wheel Magic*, 52.

first day's cycling with a copy of *Robert Elsmere* she discovers at the hotel at which she is staying.²⁰⁹ Books were no longer confined to Mudie's huge underground storage facility in Oxford Street, to be dispatched and returned by train across the country. Rather, they were dotted around the thoroughfares of daily life, to be picked up, flicked through and borrowed at will. A less centralised model emerged, where people's individual mobility and the reduced price and size of books allowed them to carry volumes with them, or go easily to a place where they could be found.

This mobility of both written material and people implied a different relationship with the texts encountered. In three-decker days, it was difficult to publish anything that did not meet Mudie's evangelical standards, since the circulating library claimed the entirety of its books could be read to all the family. The railway booksellers and circulating library W.H. Smith also claimed it did not publish 'smut.'²¹⁰ In opposition to the collective, sedentary, fireside, family paradigm of reading enshrined by the three-decker and the circulating libraries, individual mobility along with growing rates of literacy – especially when won by women and the working or lower middle classes – allowed a more mobile, modern, decentralised and potentially subversive approach to the written word. Cyclists took one step towards a modern, virtual relationship with text that Sara Thornton characterises as 'a paperless world in which stories and illustrations, text and image, float and travel, materialize in one place and then evaporate.'²¹¹ Gone was the mammoth three-decker, reliant on weeks or months of house arrest, and suitable for collective family reading. Instead books themselves became mobile, allowing readers to dip in and out of the narrative, or obtain 'passing glimpses' of lives and scenery, to borrow Wells's formulation from his letter to the

209 Dorothy M Richardson, *The Tunnel* [1919] (London: Virago, 2002), 236. Henceforth TL.

210 Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 301.

211 Thornton, *Advertising, Subjectivity, and the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, 172.

prospective editor of *The Wheels of Chance*.²¹²

To close our reflection on the bicycle's interaction with publishing and reading, it is useful to quote a contemporary viewpoint on the three-decker, published during the summer of its downfall, which opens with reference to the two major circulating libraries:

The Mighty Mudie and the Scathing Smith have uttered their fiat, sounding the death-knell of the "Three Volume" [...] We have witnessed the arrival of the sacred Three Volume at country houses in dull Autumns when the men have been out shooting the women eager to snap at anything – or each other. [...] The people who have nothing to say and cannot say it in Three-Volumes, who sprawl their vacancy into black and white, have hitherto decorated themselves in a fancy garment of guineas, encouraged by Messrs Smith and Mudie, for ends that have not proved profitable. But the tendency of the increasing class is to read better work, though the pernicious and wrapped weekly flimsies still haunt the railway carriage and flaunt in the hands of labour. But, by and by – in another World – people will hunger for the best; in a World where even Sherlock Holmes will have time to remember his own misdeeds. We are at half-way in this matter, confessing to seldom having read the three Volume; distrusting also the other extreme – the Kodak principle: press the button; buy the pseudonym; we shock the rest.²¹³

This article provides a vivid description of the multifarious interactions between the format and content of texts, social developments and technological change at the turn of the century. Cyclists helped develop an aesthetic that perhaps took one step towards the 'other extreme' – the 'Kodak principle' feared by the journalist of the *Hull Daily Mail*. The bicycle was a technology which, like the Kodak camera, opened up the world to the gaze of the individual, foreshadowing Guy Debord's theory of a society of the spectacle, where capitalism transforms all objects into lifeless commodities.²¹⁴ Bicycles were one part of a dizzying picture of rocketing consumption and multiplying forms of visual and textual stimuli at the end of the century. Manufacturers viewed books, newspapers and journals as a marketing opportunity, while cyclists also became conspicuous consumers. Targeted by advertisers,

212 Wells, *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, 1:256.

213 'The Three-Decker,' *Hull Daily Mail*, 23rd July 1894: 2.

214 Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle* [1967] (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

cyclists responded to the demands of a society of mass consumption, that invited them to find self-fulfilment and a sense of identity in the act of buying and the sentiment of ownership. This cultural shift impacted importantly on changing publishing practices, as buying books took over from borrowing them. Yet this desire for appropriation and instant gratification was tempered by a 'hunger for the best' that implied a move away from the superficial 'weekly flimsies' of railway carriages. This individual and slow-paced means of locomotion encouraged 'literary bicyclists' (to borrow Lord Justice Bowen's phrase)²¹⁵ from all classes to reconnect with classic or 'serious' literature as opposed to the 'vacancy' of the three-deckers. Portable, cheap, accessible and thought-provoking books found their way into the pockets and saddle-bags of a generation, helping shape the way they and subsequent generations interacted with text.

²¹⁵ Lord Justice Bowen, in a lecture on popular education at the Working Men's Club, February 1894. Reproduced in his obituary in *The Spectator*, 14 April 1894, 9-10.

Chapter 2. Liberation on two wheels? Social change, the bicycle and literature

Free people must travel the road to productive social relations at the speed of a bicycle.¹

As well as impacting on our relationship with text, as we saw in Chapter 1, the bicycle participated in the momentous social changes taking place at the turn of the century. Reflecting the preponderant role it played in transforming the everyday lives of women and the working and lower middle classes, many authors employed the bicycle as a symbol of emancipation. In providing mobility to oppressed groups, the bicycle became a political symbol closely associated with the strident demands of workers and women to be heard in society. Yet such movements were by no means uncontested, and strenuous attempts were also made to contain the dangerous image of lower class or women's cycling within certain codes formulated by bourgeois, patriarchal society. This analysis of the class dimension of the bicycle focuses on three novels by H. G. Wells, an author who makes extensive use of cycling as a symbol of social ascendancy or alternatively of a rejection of the British class structure. I argue that the bicycle stands for a democratisation of mobility and knowledge, and finally suggests an alternative to the tenets of capitalist society. The second part of this chapter engages with a debate that has received much attention in recent years; that of the bicycle's role in women's emancipation. Through an exploration of works of British fiction, I show how the bicycle gave women concrete new freedoms, while society simultaneously attempted to constrain women cyclists within the damaging, reductive stereotypes of the New Woman and the lady cyclist. After a reading of Dorothy Richardson's use of the bicycle as a means

1 Ivan Illich, *Energy and Equity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 12.

for women to claim a place in the public sphere, the final section of this chapter crosses the Channel in order to examine what is perhaps the bicycle's most important contribution to debates on both class and gender. As Proust's use of the bicycle in his portrait of Albertine shows, cycling helped challenge social and gender categories by exposing their social, temporal and historical contingency. Rather than placing women and workers on an equal footing to the dominant groups in society, the bicycle allowed individuals to begin to formulate alternative identities that broke down the very distinctions established by those in power. The bicycle was thus a technology that pointed to an alternative, counter-hegemonic organisation of society.

2.1 The socio-political symbolism of the bicycle: democratising knowledge

The bicycle permitted a democratisation of mobility which, I argue, accompanied a late-century drive to invite a broader base of society to participate in the country's intellectual life, thus challenging the prevailing power dynamics in Victorian Britain. Brian Rejack has shown how, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, 'The case of the velocipede strikingly illustrates the interplay of cultural practices and literary production that helps to shape ideas about class identity, embodied masculinity, and the democratisation of culture characteristic of the late Romantic period.'² In the Romantic era, the interrelated figures of the Cockney and the Dandy, enthusiasts of the early two-wheeled machine, came to be associated with a lower class incursion on areas of land and literature previously reserved for the aristocracy.

2 Brian Rejack, 'Nothings of the Day: The Velocipede, the Dandy, and the Cockney', *Romanticism* 19, no. 3 (September 2013): 292.

Similarly, at the end of the century, 'clerking culture' was associated with, among other things, bicycles and lowbrow literature; objects which directly challenged the monopoly of knowledge by a social elite. As John Carey observes, at the turn of the century the term 'suburban' was 'distinctive in combining topographical with intellectual disdain',³ enshrining an attempt by the elite to prevent the masses from gaining access to privileged geographical and intellectual spaces. Cycling was one of the myriad of new leisure activities by means of which the bourgeoisie conspicuously abstained from labour, as theorised by Thorstein Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Yet the extensive use of the bicycle in the fiction of lower middle class authors such as H. G. Wells, Jerome K. Jerome and Grant Allen points to its role in helping to formulate what Carey calls an 'alternative culture' to which the newly literate masses could relate.⁴ As Carey points out, at the turn of the century 'a new culture of socialism, cycling, free thinking and the flouting of respectable norms was flourishing among the clerks, teachers, shop assistants, telegraphists and other white collar youth. Cycling was important in extending the clerks' experience and interests.'⁵ To this low clerking culture Carey contrasts the highbrow literature of modernist authors such as E. M. Foster, Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot, who condemned the fiction produced by and for the clerking classes. Yet these lowbrow authors, actively addressing themselves to the classes from which they came, helped to rethink the connection between popular and high culture. The bicycle was one democratising force in both society and fiction that helped to challenge the boundaries drawn between literary and social classes, allowing for a more creative exploration of both spaces and texts.

3 John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 53.

4 *Ibid.*, 58.

5 *Ibid.*, 59.

2.1.1 Democratising travel

The bicycle democratised travel by making it accessible to anyone with two legs, and by transforming mobility from an exploitative into an empowering activity. Mobility had long been the reserve of the upper strata of society, while the working class had always been complicit and essential to this privilege; they were the grooms, the stable boys, and later, the signalmen and the train and cab drivers. This dominant paradigm of mobility, built on harnessing the time and energy of the many for the benefit of the few, manifested itself in the various human-powered vehicles developed across Europe previous to the draisine. David Herlihy has explored the neglected early history of human-powered transport, documenting how throughout the eighteenth century inventors patented designs for four-wheeled passenger vehicles powered by servants, who actioned a mechanical drive with their hands or feet. In 1813, Karl Drais's first design for a vehicle – a four-wheeler accommodating two to four passengers and actioned by a servant – conformed to the principle that it was inappropriate for people from the upper class to provide their own locomotive power.⁶ Nonetheless, Drais's stubborn search for greater efficiency and speed led to the invention of the two-wheeled draisine in 1818, a machine that, according to Herlihy, 'transformed the very nature of the human-powered vehicle. It was no longer a mechanical "chariot" carrying multiple passengers, but rather a single "horse" that obeyed only one master.'⁷ Crucially, it was the first machine that required energy input from the person being transported, rather than extracting energy from an external power source, an animal or another human being. The draisine and its various descendants throughout the nineteenth century thus made the radical statement that the idle upper class could supply its own energy for locomotion, and

⁶ David V Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

consequently that the workers could also power their own movement, rather than that of somebody else.

Of course, the passenger paradigm was not overcome by this technology; the train was modelled on it, and early motor car owners employed drivers and mechanics for their machines, just as their fathers had employed staff in their stables. Our current reliance on fossil fuels for locomotion may be viewed as a continuation of this model that relies on exploitation of human and natural resources. In contrast, the self-sufficiency of human-powered locomotion by its very nature challenged the idea that the energy of the many should be used to the profit of the few. As such, the bicycle may be considered as a *de facto* levelling device that refused distinctions of class by requiring all able bipeds to pedal. This stood in sharp contrast to the railway's reinforcement of class differences through first, second and third class carriages, and it was perhaps this characteristic of cycling that helped it to forge links with political non-conformism at the turn of the century. As well as becoming an emblem of women's struggle for suffrage, as we shall see later in this chapter, it was quickly transformed into a tool for spreading socialism. Tom Groom made an explicit connection between the two pursuits at the founding of the socialist Clarion newspaper's cycling club in 1894, when he argued: 'We are not neglectful of our Socialism, as the frequent contrasts a cyclist gets between the beauties of nature and the dirty squalor of towns make him more anxious than ever to abolish the present system.'⁸ As Groom's statement underlines, the geographical mobility and change of outlook permitted by cycling encouraged a more critical outlook on the current organisation of society.

For middle or upper class cyclists, encounters with other road users also provided insights into other people's lives. F. W. Bockett, the author of *Some Literary Landmarks for*

8 Denis Pye, *Fellowship Is Life: The National Clarion Cycling Club, 1895-1995* (Bolton: Clarion, 1995), 16.

Pilgrims on Wheels (1901) argues that ‘one good thing about ambling on a bicycle is that it brings you into contact with all sorts and conditions of men’,⁹ making visible ‘social contrasts’¹⁰ between town and city, rich and poor. Bockett’s choice of the verb ‘ambling’ – an unusual one to refer to wheeled locomotion – reinforces the link to his walking ancestors, whose example he consciously seeks to emulate. ‘Social contrasts’ are arguably more visible to a cyclist than to a walker, since she moves more rapidly through city, suburbs and countryside than a pedestrian may, while retaining a close connection to her surroundings. Witnessing such social inequalities could foster a politically radical outlook. Just as a link was established between non-conformism and rambling at the turn of the nineteenth century (John Thelwall’s *Peripatetic* [1793] being perhaps the best known example¹¹), cycling also acquired a political dimension at the turn of the twentieth century.

Historical accounts of the class-spread of the bicycle generally present a trickle-down effect, where the technology first became available to the aristocracy, before mass production and falling prices made it affordable for the middle class and eventually the working class in the early twentieth century.¹² While this interpretation may appear plausible from our current standpoint, we should remain cautious of adopting teleological, top-down interpretations of the spread of the bicycle. I am influenced by Bijker et al.’s SCOT model of the history of technology, which I referred to in the Introduction. SCOT encourages a networked rather than a linear view, with various meanings being debated and negotiated during the period of the machine’s ‘interpretative flexibility.’¹³ Literature as a historical source allows us to come into

9 F. W Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks for Pilgrims on Wheels* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1901), 123.

10 *Ibid.*, 21.

11 See Jeffrey Cane Robinson, *The Walk: Notes on a Romantic Image* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 52.

12 David Herlihy points out that, ‘the bicycle, in fact, did not truly complete its transition from a rich man’s toy to a poor man’s carriage until the early part of the twentieth century,’ Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 7.

13 Wiebe E Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 20.

contact with these contemporary debates, exposing divergent interpretations of the technology and its social spread. The rapid development of the technology in the 1880s and 1890s meant that new, improved models appeared every few years, and outdated bicycles were sold on at greatly reduced prices, allowing lower earners access to the technology.¹⁴ It should also be recalled that the bicycle created new forms of employment; many people found work in the flourishing bicycle trade, delivering telegraphs or goods, or as professional bicycle racers.¹⁵ In addition, the Socialist bicycle clubs set up across Britain up by the Clarion newspaper supplied their users with machines at a discount.¹⁶ By various means, then, people from the working and lower-middle class could gain an early footing on the mobility ladder.

One example of this complicated picture of the class spread of the bicycle may be found in Mary Kennard's *Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (1896). In clear contrast to current perspectives on bicycle history, the upper class author affirms that hers was not the first social group to adopt the bicycle:

Ah! Yes, for those in the so-called upper classes, who cycle with open eyes, attentive ears and receptive minds, there is much – very much – to be learnt. We have no right to be impatient, and if now and again the cyclist of many years is apt to treat us with a touch of derisive scorn – depend upon it, we deserve it. They discovered the beauties of the pastime long before we did.¹⁷

Kennard's advice to novice upper class cyclists in the mid-1890s highlights the fact that the pastime was not associated exclusively with this group at this time. Although Kennard is unclear about which social group 'the cyclist of many years' may belong to, she is undoubtedly referring to a lower class than her own; perhaps to the middle class, working class racers, or those who made a living thanks to their bicycle. The illustration in Figure 9,

¹⁴ This is how the draper Hoopdriver comes to acquire an outdated, solid tyre, cross-bar machine in Wells's *The Wheels of Chance*.

¹⁵ See Andrew Ritchie, *Quest for Speed: A History of Early Bicycle Racing 1868-1903* (Santa Clarita: A. Ritchie, 2011).

¹⁶ Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 274.

¹⁷ Mary E. Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (London: F.V. White & Co., 1896), 23.

published in the same year as Kennard's *Guide Book* and Wells's *The Wheels of Chance*, similarly suggests that the working class (and not only racers) were among the first to make use of bicycles in the mid-1880s, with upper class cyclists appearing in the boom years of the 1890s (when, the artist suggests, the working class man turned to the formerly aristocratic pursuit of horse-riding). As these examples go to show, contemporaries did not necessarily experience the technology in a straightforward manner, and the meanings attached to it diverge according to geographical, social and political factors. Rather than providing a linear view of the class spread of the technology, an examination of literature allows us to appreciate the vehicle's specific role in transgressing and blurring class boundaries, democratising movement and knowledge along the way.



Figure 9: Frederick Pegram. 'A Contrast.' *Punch*, 1896.

2.1.2 Transport in Wells's social novels

H. G. Wells was born to a small shopkeeper and a domestic servant, and spent his early years employed as a draper's assistant. He achieved a measure of financial independence after winning a scholarship to study science and becoming a teacher, before earning his living as a writer. Although he suffered from poor health as a result of a football accident in his twenties, he was a keen cyclist from the 1890s. This activity had a direct bearing on his vocation as a writer, since he found some of his earliest literary inspiration in bicycle rides. Wells recorded that while living at Woking in 1895: 'I learnt to ride my bicycle upon sandy tracks with none but God to help me; he chastened me considerably in the process, and after a fall one day I wrote down a description of the state of my legs which became the opening chapter of *The Wheels of Chance*.'¹⁸ Cycling was an interest he shared with a number of other writers and friends, including Jerome K. Jerome and Bernard Shaw; his autobiography includes a humorous account of teaching George Gissing to ride.¹⁹ Often drawing on autobiographical details in his fiction, he manifests a persistent concern with portraying and interrogating the complexities of the English class system. Wells mobilises various means of transportation in his fiction as metaphors for movement through the strata of English society, a strategy that he made explicit towards the end of *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul* (1905), when the narrator invites the reader to 'imagine fleeing through our complex and difficult social system as it were for life, first on foot and severally to the Folkestone Central Station, then in a first class carriage, [...] then in a four-wheeler, a long, rumbling, palpitating, slow flight through the multitudinous swarming London streets.'²⁰ In

18 H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, vol. 2 [1934] (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 543.

19 *Ibid.*, 2:568.

20 H. G. Wells, *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul* [1905] (London: Collins, 1961), 231. Henceforth KP.

this instance, as we shall see, Kipps's flight marks the beginning of his downward spiral after being rocketed into the upper echelons of British society. The various means of transport evoked give a sense of the importance for Wells of locomotion in individuals' relations with class structures, and also in determining the character of societies to come.

As Wells underlined in *Anticipations* (1900), an essay predicting future developments in society, 'upon transport, upon locomotion, may also hang the most momentous issues of politics and war.'²¹ While he concluded that 'the nineteenth century [...] will, if it needs a symbol, almost inevitably have as that symbol a steam engine running upon a railway,'²² Wells looked forward in his fiction and non-fiction to the new and emerging paradigms of transport and society that would come to define the twentieth century. Bicycles feature in Wells's vision of future methods of locomotion, commerce and warfare. Like other turn-of-the-century writers, Wells conceived of cycling as a possible antidote to urban degeneration, as it allowed workers access to the health-giving air of the countryside while providing a precious opportunity for exercise (indeed, it was in a bid at improving George Gissing's poor health that Wells encouraged his friend to ride a bicycle). Yet he recognised the obstacles encountered by cycling city-dwellers; in one passage he imagines what a historian from the future would conclude about cycling in his own time:

"Just where the bicycle might have served its most useful purpose," he will write, "in affording a healthy daily ride to the innumerable clerks and such-like sedentary toilers of the central region, it was rendered impossible by the danger of side-slip in this vast ferocious traffic." And, indeed, to my mind at least, this last is the crowning absurdity of the present state of affairs, that the clerk and the shop hand, classes of people positively starved of exercise, should be obliged to spend yearly the price of a bicycle upon a season-ticket, because of the quite unendurable inconvenience and danger of urban cycling.²³

21 H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought* [1901] (Auckland, N.Z.: Floating Press, 2008), 3.

22 *Ibid.*, 4.

23 *Ibid.*, 24–25.

Despite the infuriating impracticality of cycling on London streets, Wells believed firmly in the economic and health-giving benefits of the bicycle, especially for the ‘sedentary toilers’ to whose ranks he had once belonged. Five years later, in *A Modern Utopia* (1905), Wells predicted that ‘cycle tracks will abound in Utopia.’²⁴ This well known excerpt is often quoted out of context; for Wells enumerates various mechanised modes of transport before imagining these utopian cycle tracks ‘following beside the great high roads, but oftener taking their own more agreeable line amidst woods and crops and pastures.’²⁵ Wells had a diversified vision for locomotion in the ideal future society. In his outlook, the bicycle played a key role as an economical, health-giving means of transport that allowed a privileged connection to rural environments and a practical means of transport in well-planned cities.

My reading of several of Wells’s social novels examines the bicycle’s fascinating role in this author’s vision of class relations. His use of the bicycle and other machines in his fiction conforms to Herbert Sussman’s observation that ‘primarily the machine appears in those Victorian writers most directly concerned with immediate social problems.’²⁶ The choice to group these three texts together corresponds to a strain of Wells’s own thinking about his fiction. As Simon J. James points out, in the Preface to the 1925 Atlantic Edition, Wells describes *The Wheels of Chance* as one in a ‘series of close studies in personality’, adding Lewisham, Kipps, Mr Polly and Ann Veronica as further examples of ‘personalities thwarted by the defects of our contemporary civilisation.’²⁷ Wells – briefly a member of the Fabian society, and a lifelong socialist – used his fiction to wage a direct attack on Victorian

24 H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* [1905] (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 47.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Herbert L. Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine: the Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 3.

27 Simon J. James, ‘Fin-de-Cycle: Romance and the Real in *The Wheels of Chance*’, in *H. G. Wells: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Steven McLean (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2008), 34.

class structures. As became evident in his feud with his former friend Henry James, he refused the idea that art should be autonomous from society. Rather, he believed in ‘the necessity for art to engage directly in creating the utopia that he saw as the only alternative to mankind’s self-destruction.’²⁸ Indeed, Wells’s social novels share in common with his science fiction their utopian stance. In a 1905 letter to the editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, Wells maintained that:

the proper method of approach to sociological problems is the old, various and literary way, the Utopian way, of Plato, of More, of Bacon, and not the nineteenth century pneumatic style, not by its constant invocation to biology and ‘scientific’ history and its incessant unjustifiable pretension to exactitude and progress.²⁹

Wells himself was a trained biologist, and by no means rejected the insights that scientific investigation could provide. Even if he claimed to reject the ‘scientific’ approach, Wells’s early writing is heavily influenced by contemporary biological, economic and social theories. As Sussman observes, ‘throughout his early writing, his Darwinism and his Marxism coincide. For the evolutionary fantasy becomes a means not only of expressing the physical and psychological results of mechanization but also of depicting the more generalized effects of the class struggle.’³⁰ Particularly in his science fiction, Wells explored possible other worlds in order to draw attention to the contradictions and the injustices of the one in which he was living. In his social novels, the bicycle operates to open up a utopian space not dissimilar to the world into which Wells’s Time Traveller is projected by his conspicuously bicycle-like time machine.³¹ The three novels I examine all mobilise the bicycle as a means to propel their characters into another social, rather than temporal, reality; and for each of

28 *Ibid.*

29 H. G. Wells, *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, ed. David C. Smith, vol. 2 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), 79.

30 Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine*, 174–75.

31 H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* [1895] (London: Book Club Associates, 1980), 22–24.

Wells's heroes it becomes a means of subversively and creatively exploring the byways of the social hierarchy.

Wells's early novel, *The Wheels of Chance: A Bicycling Idyll* (1896) has already been examined in Chapter 1, and provides a useful point of entry into the author's thinking on the interrelation between class issues and the bicycle. Analyses of *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul* (1905) and *The History of Mr Polly* (1910) allow us to trace the complex symbolism of the bicycle as means for Wells's heroes to negotiate or subvert the baffling English class system. All three novels share in common a young draper hero, who aspires for more from life than selling fabric to his social superiors. As Michael Draper notes of this category in the author's fiction, 'Where the science fiction deals in the fantastic, the comic novels deal in the romantically improbable. The central character gradually becomes something of a hero, passing through a series of testing adventures toward fulfilment.'³² Hoopdriver channels his desire for a better life into a cycling holiday, while Kipps and Mr Polly unexpectedly inherit money. In the latter two novels, cycling does not provide the backbone of the narrative, yet bicycles frequently recur in the story in connection with the characters' ascendant or descendant social status. The temporal span of these three novels, from the height of the bicycle boom to the beginning of the motor car era, permits us to examine the evolution of the technology's class significance in the period. While Hoopdriver and Kipps mimic the attitude of gentlemen cyclists, Mr Polly takes to cycling as part of a rejection of the concept of social climbing. In Wells's novels, the bicycle is an amorphous symbol that refuses to be associated with a single category. It takes us on a meandering, subversive ride through the intricate and often infuriating social reality in which Wells's characters dwell.

³² Michael Draper, *H. G. Wells* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 72.

2.1.3 Masquerading as an upper class cyclist in *The Wheels of Chance*

In *The Wheels of Chance* Wells makes extensive use of the bicycle as an outward sign of modernity and social climbing. Vehicles had long played a similar role in literature; Carsten Meiner points out how the coach was used as symbol of social ascendancy in eighteenth-century *romans de parvenus* such as Anne Claude de Caylus's, *Histoire de Guillaume, cocher* (1740), for example.³³ The social cachet of owning a coach and horses was still powerfully felt at the time Wells was writing. In his 1909 novel *Tono Bungay*, for instance, the aspirant businessman Edward Ponderevo promises his wife that when he makes his fortune they will 'ride in our carriage and have a garden.'³⁴ Yet in late nineteenth-century fiction the bicycle came to occupy a corresponding symbolic function. For Wells's heroes, ownership of a bicycle is generally associated with real or imagined ascendant class status, even if its symbolism may gradually grow more complicated as the narrative progresses.

As we have already seen in our examination of *The Wheels of Chance* in Chapter 1, Hoopdriver mobilises the bicycle as a means to transgress the boundaries of the social class to which he belongs. On the first morning of his ten-day cycling holiday, Hoopdriver is called a 'bloomin' Dook' (WC 16) by a sarcastic heathkeeper due to the cyclist's cold manner towards him after falling off his bicycle. Even if intended as an insult, Hoopdriver is buoyed up by being considered to be a member of the aristocracy, an impression he is successfully able to convey thanks to his machine and his new cycling suit. Cycling southwards through the London suburbs allows him to play the role of 'a gentleman, a man of pleasure, with a five-pound note, two sovereigns, and some silver at various convenient points of his person. At any rate as good as a Dook, if not precisely in the peerage' (WC 17). The young man is

³³ Carsten Henrik Meiner, *Le carrosse littéraire et l'invention du hasard* (Paris: PUF, 2008), 56.

³⁴ H. G. Wells, *Tono Bungay* [1909] (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 110.

acutely conscious of his new image, and soon after the encounter with the heathkeeper he takes great pleasure in hearing a nursemaid remark to her charge 'Look at the gentleman wizzer bicicle' (WC 25). Hoopdriver's bicycle, on the first day of his holiday, seems to magically transform him from a lowly draper into a gentleman.

Yet the transformation is not a complete success; the upper class cyclist Bechamel, for one, immediately identifies his rival as a 'greasy proletarian' (WC 32).³⁵ Indeed, Hoopdriver's outdated bicycle, wan physical appearance and Cockney accent provide fairly obvious clues to his origin. Moreover, cycling was an activity that was actively encouraged among urban workers at the time; Hiroshi So examines how Wells's cycling romance participated in larger medical and political discourses around the health benefits of cycling for overworked Londoners.³⁶ Indeed, it is important to recall that the bicycle was mobilised as a means to enforce conformity to the norms of bourgeois society, which relied on efficient, compliant workers. Christopher Thompson shows in his history of the Tour de France how the fashioning of bicycle racers as 'ouvriers de la pédale' represented 'an attempt to shape working class identity in ways that would improve the moral and material condition of the laboring masses and in so doing calm middle class fears about the challenges those masses posed to the social order.'³⁷ Since the salaries, speed, fame and attitudes of these professional cyclists went counter to the criteria distinguishing bourgeois cyclists from 'vélocipédards' (a category corresponding to speed-crazed scorchers in the UK), the race organisers 'sought to effect their social redemption through repeated references to elegance, distinction,

35 Later, however, he revises his opinion and concludes that Hoopdriver is a detective, sent to rescue Jessie from his clutches.

36 Hiroshi So, 'The Wheels of Chance and the Discourse of Improvement of Health', *The Wellsian: The Journal of the H. G. Wells Society* 29, no. 1 (2006): 37–47.

37 Christopher S Thompson, *The Tour de France: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 142. 'pedal workers.'

intelligence and nobility’,³⁸ and by heavily policing these cyclists’ conduct both during races and in their day-to-day lives. Similarly, in the context of turn-of-the-century Canada, Philip Gordon Mackintosh identifies ‘domestic bicycling’ as ‘a bourgeois attempt to control the public use of the bicycle’³⁹ by defining the contexts in which the technology could be used and the appropriate behaviour and dress which could be associated with it. By adopting the dress and demeanour of a gentleman on a bicycle, then, Hoopdriver is in many ways conforming to the bourgeois discourse that sought to defuse the dangerous prospect of active, mobile, independent workers, able to define their own codes and identity.

The contemporary view of cycling as a healthful pursuit for overworked city-dwellers may have helped Bechamel guess Hoopdriver’s class. Bechamel’s pupil and cycling partner Jessie, however, is unable to accurately guess the cyclist’s class status. This situation allows Hoopdriver to invent an identity as a colonial Englishman once he has helped Jessie flee from Bechamel’s sexual advances. As Simon J. James shows in his insightful analysis of the novel, ‘the plot depends on Jessie’s misreading of Hoopdriver’s clothing, language, culture and class,’ and concentrates on the ‘democratising effects both of new styles of clothing alongside another class-levelling, cheaply mass-produced technological innovation, the safety bicycle.’⁴⁰ Jessie misinterprets Hoopdriver’s class due to his ambiguous clothing; unlike flat caps or bowler hats, the apparel associated with cycling did not assign a specific class identity, and thus allowed a certain freedom within the restrictive social reality of late-Victorian Britain.⁴¹

However, Hoopdriver’s foray into the life of a gentleman can never be more than

38 *Ibid.*, 166.

39 Phillip Gordon Mackintosh, ‘A Bourgeois Geography of Domestic Bicycling: Using Public Space Responsibly in Toronto and Niagara-on-the-Lake, 1890-1900’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20, no. 1–2 (2007): 144.

40 James, ‘Fin-de-Cycle: Romance and the Real in *The Wheels of Chance*’, 41.

41 Of course, the clothing question was of vital importance for women, as we shall see later in this chapter.

fleeting. Despite Jessie's naivety and the hero's repeated attempts to disguise his origins, he is betrayed by his body language, (bows and hand-rubbing suggestive of a draper) his locution (his Cockney accent, and calling Jessie 'Miss'), before eventually admitting the truth. External factors also oblige him to end the subterfuge; his meagre savings are rapidly exhausted as a result of paying for two rooms in the best hotels with Jessie. Thus, while the bicycle affords Hoopdriver the opportunity to temporarily masquerade as a member of the leisured upper class during his annual holiday from the drapery emporium, society quickly puts him back in his place. His flight with Jessie must come to an abrupt end, and the closing pages of the novel see both young people firmly reprimanded and brought back into the fold of their respective classes.

At first glance it may seem that the established social structure emerges unscathed at the end of the novel. Yet Hoopdriver's incursion into upper class life is significant at both the individual and the societal level. As the cyclist returns to his life as a draper, an important change has occurred in his outlook: 'Tomorrow, the early rising, the dusting, and drudgery, begin again – but with a difference, with wonderful memories and still more wonderful desires and ambitions replacing those discrepant dreams' (WC 196). Crucially, Jessie promises to send him books in order to encourage his attempts at 'self-education' (WC 193). Hoopdriver returns a changed man, armed with the physical and intellectual means to question his subservience. In addition to Jessie's promise of books, he has a new bicycle; the outdated machine he departed with has been replaced by Bechamel's brand-new model (stolen in order to rescue Jessie), now repainted in grey. In our final glimpse of Hoopdriver disappearing through the gates of the drapery emporium, the new bicycle he holds acts as a visual emblem of the changes he has undergone, while also pointing to the small chip he has

made in the social edifice. In emulating the upper class, and finally making off with a vehicle and a reading list from two of its members, Hoopdriver irreverently subverts the codes of the social hierarchy.

As Yoonjoung Choi argues, Wells effectively mobilises cycling in this novel to embody a Bakhtinian carnivalesque spirit, with the bicycle as an ideal means for ‘breaking class and gender boundaries.’⁴² Bakhtin employs the concept of the carnivalesque to refer to a literary mode that subverts the beliefs of the dominant group through humour, absurdity and chaos.⁴³ As Simon Dentith puts it, this register in writing reproduces ‘the characteristic inversions, parodies and discrownings of carnival proper.’⁴⁴ Hoopdriver’s temporary foray into the upper class uncovers the absurdity of a system delineated by an arbitrary set of codes, activities and clothes. Society as a whole retains its oppressive class structures, but the bicycle becomes a tool for opening up a liminal, utopian, temporary space, in which other possibilities of social organisation may be explored, and the prevailing social order challenged.

Wells’s cycling romance may be compared to a short story written around the same period which appeared in the collection *The Humours of Cycling* (1897). In ‘A Perfect Gentleman on Wheels,’ Wells effectively retells *The Wheels of Chance* from another perspective; here it is an aristocratic gentleman who is humbled by a bicycle journey. The vain, arrogant young hero is ridiculed from the start; both he and his machine are described as ‘overdressed’, his bicycle being ‘chocolate enamelled’ and its rider wearing a cocked hat and trousers ‘to distinguish himself from the common cycling cad.’⁴⁵ While Hoopdriver is called a

42 Yoonjoung Choi, ‘The Bi-Cycling Mr Hoopdriver: Counter-Sporting Victorian Reviving the Carnavalesque’, *Critical Survey* 24, no. 1 (28 June 2012): 102–15.

43 See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

44 Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 65.

45 H. G. Wells, ‘A Perfect Gentleman on Wheels’, in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897),

‘bloomin’ Dook’ by a heathkeeper, a cabman calls ‘New Woman’⁴⁶ after Mr Crampton, an insult that underlines his effeminate appearance while drawing attention to the gender and class blurring capabilities of the bicycle. Like in *The Wheels of Chance*, Mr Crampton’s bicycle ride to Brighton brings him into contact with another social class from his own; yet he refuses to talk to the working class ‘bounder’ who makes friendly conversation with him on the road. He stops to help a young woman with a puncture mainly because she is ‘noticeably pretty.’⁴⁷ But having no mechanical knowledge (his ‘man’, had oiled his machine before he left), he leaves her bicycle in a worse state than when he began, growing more irritable and unpleasant as his ineptitude becomes increasingly apparent. To the young woman’s exasperation, he proudly refuses the assistance of a number of well meaning passers-by, until she insists on accepting help from the very ‘bounder’ Mr Crampton had snubbed earlier.

As an engine fitter, the cyclist is able to tell that Mr Crampton has ‘been pretty near knocking all the quality out of vally’ble machine.’ Mr Crampton angrily responds ‘I’m quite prepared to pay for any damage I’ve done,’ thus attempting to gain the upper hand on the mechanic by invoking his superior economic position. Yet what counts for these cyclists on a lonely road is not how much money or status each of them have, but their practical skills, physical capabilities and empathy for one another. Mr Crampton’s reference to his financial capital is absurd, as here what is needed is mechanical knowledge and a genuine desire to help, rather than to simply seduce or impress. Mr Crampton ends the day by abandoning the pair and catching a train to Brighton, details he omits when relating his journey to his family that evening. The narrator describes how ‘An acute realisation of the indescribable vulgarity of cycling came into his mind. A dirty, fatiguing pursuit that put one at the mercy of every

6.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*, 10.

impudent Cad one met.’⁴⁸ This gentleman has fallen out of love with cycling because it has stripped him of his pretensions and exposed him for what he is; an insincere, vain, selfish, incompetent man. In his dealings with other human beings Mr Crampton shows no proof of being the eponymous ‘perfect gentleman’, in spite of outward appearances. The bicycle brings him down to the level of common humanity; his lack of compassion and mechanical know-how and his failure to ride all the way to Brighton strip him of his airs and graces. The engine fitter’s set of skills – his friendly, frank manner, consideration for others and mechanical knowledge – emerge triumphant from the story, pointing to alternative means of judging social worth while challenging the notion that class distinctions rest on certain character traits. Where Hoopdriver transgresses class boundaries by dressing up as a gentleman cyclist, Mr Crampton’s fashionable clothes and bearing do not prevent the bicycle from bringing him crashing down to earth. In both these tales, the bicycle overlooks worldly trappings and connects its riders to their common humanity.

2.1.4 Sociable cyclists, contingency and upward mobility in *Kipps*

Kipps provides us with a further compelling case study of Wells’s use of the bicycle in his social fiction. In contrast to *The Wheels of Chance*, the bicycle’s role in *Kipps* has been largely overlooked by critics. Indeed, the symbolism of the bicycle in this novel is more subtle than in Wells’s first cycling romance, as the object is rarely associated with the main protagonist; rather, it is his contact with other cyclists which most often plays a crucial narrative role. In this account of Artie Kipps’s rags-to-riches return trip, the bicycle recurrently crops up in the narrative as a symbol of opportunity, chance and contingency, all

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

of which may lead protagonists up or down the social ladder. The bicycle provides a means of re-reading this well known novel, providing a perspective that allows us to come into fresh contact with the text. Above all, the bicycle affirms the importance of values such as spontaneity, empathy and sociability and incarnates both a refusal of and an alternative to stifling Victorian class codes.

The bicycle makes its first appearance in the novel in a description of the young Artie Kipps, who ‘by inherent nature [...] had a sociable disposition. When he was in the High Street he made a point of saying “Hallo!” to passing cyclists’ (KP 9). In the humdrum world of New Romney, where Kipps is brought up by his aged aunt and uncle, the enterprising and enthusiastic young boy is drawn to the adventure and opportunity incarnated in the rare sight of cyclists who pass through the village. His spontaneous friendliness is given an outlet by interacting with the riders of this quintessentially sociable vehicle, which Marc Augé has credited with ‘la réinvention de liens sociaux aimables, légers, éventuellement éphémères, mais toujours porteurs d’un certain bonheur de vivre.’⁴⁹ While Augé is writing in the context of car ingested twenty-first century cities, the bicycle functioned in a similar way in late-nineteenth-century streets by reinstating roads and villages as spaces of encounter in the wake of the railway age. By reviving the possibility of roadside meetings from coaching days, the bicycle crucially instated a new, ephemeral paradigm of interpersonal interaction, based on brief meetings between strangers from various social strata. Kipps’s spontaneous interaction with these cyclists contrasts sharply with the description of his aunt and uncle some lines earlier, who ‘never received visitors’ and, fearing mixing with their social inferiors or superiors, “kept themselves to themselves,” according to the English ideal’ (KP 9). The

49 Marc Augé, *Éloge de la bicyclette* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2008), 36. ‘the reinvention of amicable, light-hearted social relations, which are perhaps fleeting but nonetheless carry with them the joy of living.’

young boy's irreverence towards the strictures of the English class system is thus incarnated in the image of the passing cyclists he greets in the opening pages of the novel.

Some ten pages later, the bicycle reappears when the adolescent Kipps is told a secret by his friend Sid. Sid confides he has a 'girl', and Kipps is taken aback on discovering her identity, since 'Maud Charteris was a young person of eighteen and the daughter of the vicar of St. Bavon's – besides which, she had a bicycle – so that as her name unfolded, the face of Kipps lengthened with respect. "Get out," he gasped incredulously. "She ain't your girl, Sid Pornick"' (KP 19). Kipps's incredulity is well-founded, for Maud's age and class make her inaccessible to the haberdasher's son Sid, who in fact can only dream of being involved with this young cyclist. This second occurrence of the bicycle in the account of Kipps's formative years points to its potent symbolic link to the superior social class into which the young man is to ascend within the course of the novel. Although Sid does not become romantically involved with the vicar's daughter, he leaves home at fourteen to be apprenticed in a bicycle shop (KP 38). At the same time, carefree young Kipps (who has meanwhile fallen in love with Sid's younger sister, Ann) starts his apprenticeship as a draper in Folkestone.

The difference between the friends' career paths is patent, as Sid gradually rises through the ranks and is eventually able to open his own shop, while Kipps remains on the bottom rung of the ladder in the drapery emporium, becoming a mere cog in the capitalist machine. 'Dimly he perceived the thing that had happened to him,' the typically condescending narrator relates, 'how the great stupid machine of retail trade had caught his life into its wheels, a vast, irresistible force which he had nether strength of will nor knowledge to escape' (KP 37).⁵⁰ Kipps's predicament recalls the characterisation of the

⁵⁰ Of course, the context of the 1890s bicycle boom meant that the trade was perhaps likely to be more lucrative than drapery at the time.

modern urban subject by Georg Simmel in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903), where he observes that ‘the individual has become a mere cog in an enormous organisation of things and powers which tear from his hands all progress.’⁵¹ In contrast to the senseless, exploitative wheels of retail, the bicycle is portrayed as a machine that allows Sid to achieve a certain autonomy and to navigate an individual route through the unfriendly waters of commerce.

While Sid’s star rises in his London bicycle shop, the machine plays a key role in the radical change that occurs in Kipps’s fortune thanks to his chance encounter with Chitterlow, a character whom Michael Draper describes as ‘an amusingly disruptive figure whose vitality is associated with rule-breaking and intoxication.’⁵² Walking through Folkestone one evening, thinking about his desirable but unattainable woodcarving teacher Helen Walshingham ‘in a state of profound melancholia [...] Fortune came upon him, in disguise and with a loud shout [...] followed immediately by a violent blow in the back’ (KP 59). A series of confused sensations ensues, until Kipps is helped up from the ground and finds himself ‘confronting a figure holding a bicycle.’ ‘The bicyclist’ – as Chitterlow is metonymically called during the whole four-page scene – proceeds to excuse himself, alternately blaming the accident on his handlebars, the hill he was descending, or his own lack of skill. The sympathy of the cyclist is perhaps spurred by the approach of a policeman (who could fine him for ‘scorching’ and for having no lamp), and he offers to bring Kipps to his house so he can clean his wounds and repair his ripped trousers. ‘Accidents *will* happen,’ he remarks as they walk to his home ‘Especially when you get *me* on a bicycle’ (KP 60). Chitterlow thanks Kipps for pretending there had been no accident in the policeman’s presence, prophetically telling him ‘You acted like a gentleman over that slop’ (KP 60). As we shall see, this collision does in fact have the

51 Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life,’ [1903] in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt H Wolff (London: Free Press, 1950), 422.

52 Draper, *H. G. Wells*, 77.

unlikely result of transforming humble Kipps into a gentleman.

Once he has served Kipps a glass of whisky, Chitterlow remarks 'it's curious how one runs up against people bicycling! [...] half an hour ago we didn't know we existed. Leastaways we didn't know each other existed. I might have passed you in the street, perhaps, and you might have passed me' (KP 63). This central scene highlights the contingency of modern experience, and the paradoxical role played by transportation and communication technologies in both hindering and facilitating human encounters. In an increasingly anonymised, fast-paced urban environment, Simmel observed, human contact is sidelined or limited to monetary exchange; we cultivate 'a necessary indifference to those around us.'⁵³ As Chitterlow's slip 'we didn't know we existed' suggests, the metropolis also dulls the human sensorium through over-stimulation, leading to a certain loss of our sense of self.⁵⁴ Cycling participated in the acceleration of urban environments, yet its individual nature and its openness to its surroundings meant that it was a propitious vehicle for encouraging human contact. It is significant that this crucial meeting takes the form of an accident. As I discuss further in Chapter 3, many critics point to the importance of technological shocks in the constitution of the modern subject, and the bicycle was one of several technologies which made such shocks more frequent.⁵⁵ For Kipps, the bicycle plays a very different role than it did for the newly mobile draper Hoopdriver, or for the enterprising mechanic Sid. It is an external force which acts upon him, a point of entry into another social reality unchosen by him. The bicycle acts as an intermediary, unexpectedly allowing a well-educated if struggling playwright's path to cross with that of a lowly draper's assistant.

⁵³ Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', 415.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 410.

⁵⁵ See, for instance Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992); Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

The pair stay up drinking until morning; Kipps arrives late and hungover to work and consequently receives his dismissal. Yet two days later Chitterlow calls on the despondent Kipps with a cutting from a newspaper, which he fishes out from his pocket along with ‘a bicycle pump’ and various other paraphernalia (KP 83). The barely literate Kipps struggles to understand the meaning of the advertisement, and Chitterlow is obliged to explain to him that ‘It means [...] that you’re going to strike it Rich’ (KP 83). With Chitterlow’s help, and after some hesitation, Kipps responds to the letter and discovers his grandfather (who, as an illegitimate child, he never knew) has bequeathed him a house and an income of twelve hundred pounds a year. Here the democratising potential of the bicycle is clearly underlined. Upper middle class Chitterlow has access to both modes of transport and forms of knowledge which are denied to poorly educated Kipps. The advertisement about Kipps’s inheritance, placed in a newspaper read by the higher social classes, was unlikely to be read by him nor by any of his circle; a fact that uncovers the closed nature of the social and economic establishment, where information is only circulated between the initiated. It is the draper’s fortuitous collision with the cycling playwright that tears the fabric of this unjust logic, allowing Kipps access into the carefully guarded higher echelons of society.

In the initial shock of the discovery, Kipps glimpses Chitterlow crossing the street, remembering ‘Of course, it was Chitterlow who had told him first of the whole thing!’ (KP 91). He rushes after him to tell him the news, but he loses sight of him in the maze of streets. Nonetheless, he reflects that ‘the sight of Chitterlow was a wholesome thing, it connected events together, joined him on again to the past at a new point, and that was what he so badly needed’ (KP 91). Although the cyclist is on foot in this scene, his initial identity as ‘the bicyclist’ is recalled by his rapid movement and his sudden disappearance round a corner. He

has been instrumental in leading Kipps to his fortune, yet he remains elusive and aloof at this moment of realisation of the extent of the young man's fortune and subsequent change in status. Moreover, the temporal continuity that Kipps craves is enshrined in the image of the cyclist, a traveller on a fluid, gradual journey rather than one who is simply transported to destination in a train, car or airplane. The brutal, sudden nature of Kipps's change in status recalls mechanised means of transport or communication, that negate the agency of the human in a complete abandonment to the machine.

As Kipps gradually comes to appreciate the implications of the wealth he has acquired, he connects the bicycle to an almost medieval idea of social hierarchy, wondering 'Over a thousand a year made him an Esquire, didn't it? [...] In which case, wouldn't he have to be presented at court? Velvet breeches, like you wear cycling, and a sword!' (KP 116). His flights of fancy about possible purchases include 'a motor-car' and 'a bicycle and a cyclist suit' (KP 103) and he soon begins a course of private cycling lessons (KP 134). As Kipps is rocketed into Folkestone high society, he is mentored in etiquette, elocution and reading by a certain Mr Cootes, but his social shortcomings are painfully clear to the new company he keeps. Cootes looks benevolently upon Kipps's interest in cycling, while insisting on the importance of continuing his education in manners, literature and other subjects. When Mrs Walsingham observes 'He's going in for his bicycle now,' Cootes replies 'That's all right for summer, [...] but he wants to go in for some serious intellectual interest' (KP 167). As a new member of the upper class, it is now expected of Kipps to demonstrate intellectual and cultural capital. Rather than aiming to genuinely extend Kipps's range of experience, however, his tutor simply aims to make him appear cultivated, to enable him to convincingly play the role of a member of the leisured upper classes. Recalling the Bahktinian

carnavalesque use of the bicycle as an external marker of social status in *The Wheels of Chance*, Kipps's attempts to emulate the accent, habits and intellectual pursuits of the upper class only reveal the arbitrariness of such a system, inviting a critical outlook on contemporary social organisation.

One morning soon after Kipps has become a rich man, Chitterlow calls on him, acting as 'a reminder of a world quite outside those spheres of ordered gentility' (KP 118) in which he has been strenuously attempting to immerse himself. Although he had planned to spend the day reading 'a precious little volume called *Don't* that Coote had sent round for him – a book of invaluable hints, a summary of British deportment' and attempt a 'difficult exercise called an Afternoon Call' (KP 123), Chitterlow takes him for 'a great walk, not a long one, but a great one', into 'a wilderness of thorn and bramble, wild rose and wayfaring tree', suggestive of 'Alpine adventure' (KP 120). The playwright, meanwhile, waxes lyrical on his art, and urges his friend to buy a half-share in his next play. After their walk, they enjoy a 'simple but sufficient meal [...] distributed with careless spontaneity' by Mrs Chitterlow. Their Romantic ramble and simple repast could not contrast more sharply with the idle, sophisticated lifestyle that Kipps is vainly attempting to emulate. Although at the end of the day Kipps finds himself slightly irritated by his friend's intrusion – and especially at his financial request, to which he eventually agrees – it is clear where the narrator's sympathies lie, as he steps forward to beg the reader's indulgence, advising 'You must not think too hardly of him' (KP 123). It will take some time before Kipps, greatly relieved, is forced to climb back down the social ladder, but Chitterlow's frank, simple presence at this early stage in his social ascendancy acts as a counterfoil to the disingenuous nature of upper class life. Although it was indeed the cyclist who initially pointed Kipps's way out of enslavement to

the vast 'machine of retail trade' (KP 37), the route he suggests is a very different one from that encouraged by the superficial world into which Kipps has just been projected.

In the fourth chapter, entitled 'The Bicycle Manufacturer', Kipps hires a motor car to make his first trip back to his home town after coming into his inheritance, ostensibly to tell his aunt and uncle about his engagement to Helen Walshingham. In New Romney, he bumps into his childhood friend, Sid, now a successful bicycle manufacturer who boasts that he produces the 'best machine at a democratic price in London. No guineas and no discounts – honest trade. I build 'em – to order. I've built [...] seventeen. Counting orders in 'and...' (KP 154). When Kipps reveals he has inherited money, a house, and become engaged to educated, upper-middle class Helen, Sid is both surprised and indignant. He points to the hypocrisy of a system that pays most to the most idle in society, affirming 'I'm a Socialist, you see' (KP 155). Sid offers his frank opinion on 'the Present distribution of Wealth' (KP 155), suggesting an alternative organisation of society; he imagines that if he came into such money, he would 'start an Owenite profit-sharing factory perhaps. Or a new Socialist paper' (KP 156). He exhibits 'disgust' at the price Kipps paid to hire his motor car, as as he watches his friend drive off the narrator remarks, 'The young mechanic had just discovered that to have manufactured seventeen bicycles, including orders in hand, is not so big a thing as he had supposed, and such discoveries try one's manhood' (KP 157).

Sid the self-made bicycle manufacturer is of course participating in a profit-driven system, drawing revenue from the sale of an object in high demand. 'Money and credit are as much human contrivances as bicycles,' Wells wrote in *Anticipations*, and as liable to expansion and modification as any other sort of prevalent but imperfect machine.'⁵⁶ Overproduction and falling prices during the bicycle boom provoked a financial crisis in

⁵⁶ Wells, *Anticipations*, 315.

1898, most keenly felt in the US, and bicycle manufacturers such as Alexander Pope developed mass production techniques on a proto-Fordian model.⁵⁷ In addition, the manufacture of bicycles relied on colonial rubber extracted at the cost of many lives in central Africa.⁵⁸ On a global scale, then, bicycle production can hardly be seen as establishing a socialist paradigm, yet locally the mushrooming of bicycle manufacturers often revived flagging economies and suggested alternative forms of economic organisation. The prime example in the UK is Coventry, where bicycle manufacture took over from the production of watches and sewing machines as the new cottage industry; by the 1890s, 248 different cycle manufacturers employed approximately 40,000 workers in the city.⁵⁹ Glen Norcliffe characterises the bicycle industry in Coventry as creative and collaborative, consisting of an ‘interconnected network of “actors” and innovative firms [...] a pool of skilled entrepreneurs and workers’ in which ‘ideas were shared, and the actors, although competitive, were also to a degree cooperative.’⁶⁰ Sid’s small scale production of bicycles in Hammersmith enshrines a refusal of the generation of surplus value through large scale mechanised production. Sid’s seventeen hand-built bicycles stand in silent, humble opposition to Kipps’s noisy motor car and the fortune that lies behind it. The manual skills required for the construction of bicycles, and on which Sid builds his modest living, contrast sharply with the suddenly idle Kipps, who is able to abandon manual trade because of his wealth. The self-perpetuating wealth the hero has inherited recalls his hired motor car, as both rely on complex, capitalist processes

57 Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 290.

58 See William Woodruff, *The Rise of the British Rubber Industry During the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1958).

59 See Geoffrey Williamson, *Wheels within Wheels: The Story of the Starleys of Coventry*. (London: Bles, 1966); Glen Norcliffe, ‘The Rise of the Coventry Bicycle Industry and the Geographical Construction of Technology’, *Cycle History* 15 (2004): 41–58.

60 Norcliffe, ‘The Rise of the Coventry Bicycle Industry and the Geographical Construction of Technology,’ 55. In this article, Norcliffe offers a critique of Bijker et al.’s SCOT model of socio-technological change (see Introduction).

(extracting rent from the poor; extracting petrol from the ground). Sid and his bicycles propose a simpler model of mobility and economy, founded on a non-exploitative use of human labour and energy.

The opening pages of Chapter 6 relate Kipps's first bicycle journey, and are rich in details that explore the bicycle's complex and somewhat paradoxical effect on an individual's interaction with environment and society.⁶¹ While Chitterlow and Sid's bicycles have thus far acted as external forces on the protagonist, respectively helping him discover of his fortune and suggesting an alternative economic model, Kipps's own experience of cycling forces him to consider the subjective impact of his sudden change in status. Kipps rides to New Romney in a second attempt at informing his family of his engagement (and his corresponding social ascendancy, including a change of name from Kipps to Cuyps), something he had neglected to do on his previous visit. The chapter begins: 'One day Kipps set out upon his newly mastered bicycle to New Romney, to break the news of his engagement to his uncle and aunt – positively. He was now a finished cyclist, but as yet an unseasoned one [...] ever and again he got off and refreshed himself by a spell of walking' (KP 173). His slow-paced approach to his home town invites significant insights about 'the atmosphere of New Romney', which had 'some faint and impalpable quality that was missing in the great world of Folkestone' (KP 173). The 'homeliness' and 'familiarity' Kipps senses are certainly linked to the fact that he grew up in these surroundings, yet the close observation permitted by his chosen forms of locomotion (cycling and walking alternately) allows for a specific, nostalgic engagement with place, as illustrated in the following passage:

He had noted as he passed that old Mr Clifferdown's gate had been mended with a fresh piece of string. In Folkestone he didn't take notice, and he didn't

61 Chapters 3 and 4 specifically examine the sensory and spatial experience of cycling as represented in literature.

care if they built three hundred houses. [...] It was fine and grand to have twelve hundred a year; it was fine to go about on trams and omnibuses and think not a person on board was as rich as oneself [...] but yet there had been a zest in the old time out here, a rare zest in the holidays, in sunlight, on the sea beach, and in the High Street, that failed from these new things. (KP 173)

Modes of locomotion come to the fore as Kipps begins to gain awareness that wealth will not bring him happiness, and that the latter is the more precious of the two. It is by slowing his movement to walking or cycling pace, and being observant of small details in his surroundings, that this crucial realisation – inaccessible to the unobservant, passive tram or omnibus passenger – comes to him.

On the road into New Romney, Kipps bumps into his childhood sweetheart Ann Pornick, who is now employed in domestic service. He neglects to mention his change in status to her, and they walk companionably together, talking ‘with remarkable ease to one each other’ (KP 174). Ann incarnates the nostalgia in which Kipps had been absorbed before meeting her, and he is deeply moved by the encounter – so much so, that he once again forgets to share the news of his engagement with his aunt and uncle. On his journey back to Folkestone, the bicycle’s role is transformed; it becomes a vector of his social distance from the people and places he knew as a child, and engenders a fragmented, subjective interaction with place that brings to mind modernist narrative technique, as illustrated in the following description:

The south-west wind perhaps held him back; at any rate he found himself through Dymchurch without having noticed the place. There came an odd effect as he drew near Hythe. The hills on the left and the trees on the right seemed to draw together and close in upon him until his way was straight and narrow. He could not turn round on that treacherous half-tamed machine, but he knew that behind him, he knew so well, spread the wide vast flatness of the Marsh shining under the afternoon sky. In some way this was material to his thoughts. And as he rode through Hythe, he came upon the idea that there was a considerable amount of incompatibility between the existence of one who was practically a gentleman and of Ann. (KP 176)

Kipps's skills of close observation have now evaporated: the machine and his incomplete mastery of it – he is not yet a proficient enough cyclist to look over his shoulder while riding – now give him tunnel vision, making him oblivious to the localities he passes through. The regular, rhythmic sentences of this passage reflect the cyclist's steady movement on his machine. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the landscape is reflected in the syntax, with phrases drawing to an abrupt end rather than opening out onto a wider vista. This closed-in vision is contrasted to 'the vast flatness of the Marsh shining under the afternoon sky' which Kipps imagines behind him but is unable to see. Kipps's concentration on pedalling denies him a view of the Marsh he knew in his childhood, and the straight and narrow road on which he is travelling reflects the constraints of his new-found social superiority and the yawning gap between himself and the servant Ann. Although Wells is not generally thought of as a modernist writer, the depiction of the landscape as an emanation of Kipps's psychological and social reality suggests an affinity with the emerging modernist narrative technique.

It is the bicycle's liminal position between corporeal and mechanical means of locomotion that allows it to play an equivocal role in this sequence. On his slow-paced, observant journey to New Romney, the bicycle encourages Kipps to reconnect with his past and question the value of his new life as a gentleman. Yet on the return trip, his bicycle provides a means by which he accelerates into his new lifestyle, away from the people and places of his childhood. It is important to note that a condition of this latter function is Kipps's inability to fully control his bicycle, leaving him at the mercy of the 'treacherous' machine. Unable to turn around to glance at the landscape that vividly recalls his past, Kipps feels the machine has taken over, negating his own agency as its rider. Although none of Kipps's further bicycle rides are related in any detail in the novel, it is fair to presume that as

the cyclist becomes a more proficient rider and gains mastery over the machine, he may find a balance between the extreme observant/ nostalgic and unobservant/ progressive ways of seeing both evoked in connection with the bicycle in this chapter.

Following this visit to New Romney, Kipps feels increasingly ill at ease and out of place in his new social circle in Folkestone. He returns to see Ann, and is unable to face Helen Walshingham, but nonetheless writes to his aunt and uncle to inform them of his engagement to her. On receiving the reply that they are coming directly to Folkestone to meet his fiancée, Kipps takes flight to London, fearing the coming collision between his old world and the new one, which he imagines would be 'a hideous, impossible disaster' (KP 188). London provides Kipps with a comforting temporary anonymity, but even there his ambiguous social identity is a source of constant anxiety; unsure that his table manners are up to the task, he avoids dining at the Royal Grand Hotel, yet he feels too well dressed to go into a fish shop. While erring hungrily through the streets, he meets Sid by chance, who invites him home for mutton. They travel third class on the Underground to Sid's shop in Hammersmith, 'a practical-looking establishment, stocked with the most remarkable collection of bicycles and pieces of bicycle that [Kipps] had ever beheld' (KP 194). The bicycle shop acts as the setting for what the critic Ivan Melada has seen as an important instance of socialist propaganda appearing in Wells's novels.⁶²

Here, Kipps meets Sid's lodger Masterman, an impoverished socialist intellectual suffering from tuberculosis.⁶³ His conversation with Kipps acts as a moment of epiphany for the unenlightened protagonist, whom the narrator has consistently depicted as the eponymous

62 Ivan Melada, review of *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth Century British Novel*, by David Smith, *Studies in the Novel* 12, no. 1 (1980): 95.

63 We may presume that Wells named this character after his contemporary, the socialist writer C. F. G. Masterman, who wrote *The Condition of England* in 1909.

‘simple soul.’ Masterman asks Kipps how it feels to be rich, and goes on to argue that individual and collective happiness cannot be achieved by the accumulation of wealth. ‘As for happiness,’ Masterman maintains, ‘you want a world in order before money or property or any of those things have any real value, and this world, I tell you, is hopelessly out of joint’ (KP 198). Masterman’s judgement is illustrated by Kipps’s dilemma; although he has found wealth, he is far from happy, as he feels himself to be in contradiction with the world around him. Masterman illustrates his conviction that people are essentially similar through a transport metaphor, arguing that ‘your cads in a bank holiday train, and your cads on a two thousand pound motor, except for a difference in scale, there’s not a pin to choose between them’ (KP 199). These modes of transport, while functioning as markers of false distinctions between people, also shape people’s behaviour, and often in harmful ways. Masterman decries the senseless waste in the current application of technology, arguing that ‘God gives [the rich] a power like the motor-car, and all they can do with it is to go careering about the roads in goggled masks killing children and making machinery hateful to the souls of men!’ (KP 201).⁶⁴ Occurring within the confines of Sid’s bicycle shop, Masterman’s speech is an invitation to more sober, compassionate ways of living that could not be further from the pretentious, unfulfilling, wasteful lifestyle of the English upper classes.

On returning to Folkestone, Kipps breaks off his engagement with Helen, marries his childhood sweetheart Ann and settles down to ‘a quiet little life’ with her, including trips to New Romney by bicycle (KP 235). Finally, in a familiar Wellsian trope (partly based on the author’s own biography), Kipps loses most of his fortune due to speculation by Helen’s brother and by undertaking to build a grand house. In the closing pages of the novel, the

⁶⁴ This mirrors C. F. G. Masterman’s view of motor cars as an ‘extravagance of wealth and waste.’ See C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen, 1909), 23.

couple have set up a bookshop and are raising their first born, receiving occasional cheques from Chitterlow, thanks to Kipps's share in his play, which turned out to be a great success. Thus, the eccentric cyclist who first announced Kipps's change in status makes an understated return as the novel draws to a close. Rather than bringing a great fortune, he assures them a small income that allows them to live modestly and happily. Thus, both *The Wheels of Chance* and *Kipps* portray the bicycle as a means of freeing their lower middle class protagonists from the drudgery of a life of servitude. While Hoopdriver manages to blur and question class boundaries by adopting an upper class pursuit, in *Kipps* the bicycle begins to play the role of a counter-cultural, subversive force, actively rejecting a profit-driven outlook in order to concentrate on alternative routes to human happiness. It is this aspect of the bicycle's symbolism which comes to the fore in the figure of a third Wellsian cyclist, Mr Polly.

2.1.5 Alternative routes to happiness in *The History of Mr Polly*

Wells invents a final semi-autobiographical cycling draper in *The History of Mr Polly* (1910). We have seen how, in *The Wheels of Chance*, the bicycle stands for temporary, subversive social ascendancy, while in *Kipps* it is an equivocal symbol, suggesting an alternative path to personal betterment. In *Mr Polly* the activity of cycling participates in a broader rejection of a wealth driven, capitalist organisation of society. This evolution in the symbolism of the bicycle across the three novels can at least partly be explained by their temporal span; while the pursuit was associated with the upper class in 1896, by the early twentieth century the aristocracy had become enamoured by the motor car, and the bicycle's

modernity had become tarnished. As such, by the time Wells wrote *Mr Polly*, the bicycle was no longer a status symbol but potentially a means for critiquing high capitalist society. Mr Polly does just this, not by backing any definite social or political program, but by championing sociability, creativity, spontaneity and happiness over the pursuit of wealth.

Although he does not learn to ride a bicycle in his youth, the machine plays a background role in Alfred Polly's life from its beginning, since his retired father had run a 'music and bicycle shop' (MP 45). While Polly's education, like that of Kipps, has left him with little more than a confused jumble of ideas, he is sensitive and intelligent character who loves literature and 'dreamt always of picturesque and mellow things' (MP 49). Indeed, as Michael Draper points out, Alfred Polly combines Kipps's 'comic rebelliousness' with Chitterlow's 'transforming imagination,' thus resulting in 'Wells's most heroic, most memorable and least patronised character.'⁶⁵ Polly is still patronised to an extent, and John Carey groups him together with Wells's 'lower-middle-class types – Polly, Hoopdriver, Kipps' towards whom Wells has an equivocal stance: 'Wells's attitude to them [...] is divided. He feels for them, but does not quite treat them as men.'⁶⁶ In spite of the persistence of a somewhat condescending narrative tone, the portrait of Polly contains much more psychological detail than his predecessors. The bicycle plays an important role in his characterisation, contributing to both the imaginative and rebellious aspects of Polly's personality.

Polly seems to have a disposition that is singularly unsuited to the demeaning work of shop-keeping; yet just like Hoopdriver and Kipps, he trained as a draper and works in an emporium. Disgusted at the violent dismissal of his friend Parsons (for his over-creative

⁶⁵ Draper, *H. G. Wells*, 82.

⁶⁶ Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 144.

decorating of a shop window), he quits his stable job in the emporium; then follows a period of unemployment and various short-term jobs, which leave him feeling like a rabbit 'in a net' (MP 53). All this is to change on the death of his father, when Polly inherits a modest three hundred and fifty pounds, thanks to an insurance policy and his father's savings (MP 55). It is his small inheritance that frees him from life as an employee, allowing him to begin to reflect on different ways of living. While the bicycle plays a more direct role in allowing Kipps to come into a much greater fortune, there are echoes of the earlier novel here, as Polly's father made part of his small capital from selling bicycles. It is this very object that will allow the inheritor to begin to question and reject the logic of the system in which he is living.

Mr Polly leaves his job in London and goes to stay with his cousin Harold Johnson in Easewood (a fictional name suggesting the lifestyle dreamy Polly aspires to), where he 'translated his restless craving for joy and leisure into Harold Johnsonese by saying that he meant to look about him for a bit before going into another situation' (MP 77). Indeed, the advice from his family is to marry and invest his capital in the purchase of a draper's shop at the earliest possible opportunity. Polly, however, delays his decision: his first purchase with his new capital is 'a safety bicycle which he proposed to study and master in the sandy lane below the Johnson's house', soon followed by 'a number of books' (MP 77). The bicycle and literature here stand as emblems of Polly's resistance to the profit-centred attitude he is being encouraged to adopt. They allow him to reconnect with the adolescent 'Joy de Vive' he had experienced during long walks in the countryside with his friends from the drapery emporium. We are told that during Polly's youth 'the bicycle was still rare and costly, and the motor-car had yet to come and stir up rural serenities' (MP 31). As it lost its status as a luxury item, however, the bicycle increasingly began to take on the counter-cultural symbolism that

rambling had enshrined for certain writers in the Romantic era.⁶⁷ The bicycle was mobilised in various other contemporary narratives as an anti-capitalist symbol; J. W. Allen's cycle touring account *Wheel Magic; or, Revolutions of an Impressionist* (1906) contains a chapter about a character who, rather than investing an inheritance he comes into, quits his job, buys a bicycle and begins a life as a cycling nomad. To him it is the society around him that seems insane: 'It amuses me [...] to think of all the nonsensical advice that was dumped on me then. I was told how I could double my capital in two years! [...] I didn't mean to shut myself up in a poky business. What on earth should a sane man do such things for?'⁶⁸ Polly adopts a similar attitude, making the most of the freedom he is suddenly able to enjoy rather than seeking to perpetuate the system that had imprisoned him as a toiling draper.

It appears that the cyclist inherently rejects the accumulation of goods and capital, perhaps due to the fact that very few superfluous objects can physically be carried on a bicycle. The cycling author A. W. Rumney writes that 'If I were asked to express the needs of the cycling tourist in one word, I should reply "Simplicity"',⁶⁹ stressing the importance of packing lightly and efficiently when embarking on a cycling tour. In Mary Kennard's novel *The Golf Lunatic and his Cycling Wife*, during a cycling tour the heroine's friend Dora has to renounce her desire to go shopping because of the limited space in their luggage. The narrator is grateful that:

Fortunately, any increase in our luggage was an impossibility. She was therefore forced to refrain from blouses, hats, jackets and all the rest of it. Bicycling has that advantage. You cannot spend money on personal attire, and the ordinary female when touring saves considerably in this direction alone. It is good for her, too, to exercise self-control. To admire without possessing is a salutary lesson for some of the sex.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ A well known example is John Thelwall's *Peripatetic* [1793]. See Robinson, *The Walk*, 52.

⁶⁸ J. W. Allen, *Wheel Magic; Or, Revolutions of an Impressionist* (London: J. Lane, 1909), 62–63.

⁶⁹ Abraham Wren Rumney, *A Cyclist's Note Book* (Edinburgh: W. and A.K. Johnston, 1901), 22.

⁷⁰ Mary E. Kennard, *The Golf Lunatic and His Cycling Wife* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1902), 200.

The sparing, practical tone of Kennard's writing here mirrors the ascetic outlook of the touring cyclist, who must refuse any superfluous elements in her luggage. The bicycle therefore placed a limit on the number of personal effects one could transport, perhaps encouraging a more sober outlook than that being encouraged by consumer society at the time, especially as promoted to women.⁷¹

Mr Polly, rather than taking up the advice of those around him to invest in a shop, begins to travel through the local vicinity on 'explorations meanderings' (MP 79),⁷² experiences which allow him to reflect creatively on his surroundings and develop a healthier relationship with his emotions and his body after long years of confinement on the shop floor:

He did not ride at the even pace sensible people use who have marked out a journey from one place to another, and settled what time it will take them. He rode at variable speeds, and always as though he was looking for something that, missing, left life attractive still, but a little wanting in significance. And sometimes he was so unreasonably happy he had to whistle and sing, and sometimes he was incredibly, but not at all painfully, sad. His indigestion vanished with air and exercise [...] (MP 78)

Wells's prose here mirrors the meandering approach to life favoured by Polly, with the accumulation of successive subclauses reflecting an ongoing search rather than a journey with a clear beginning and end. The free, winding path followed by the sentences mirrors Polly's erratic bicycle riding, which refuses the idea of departure, destination, and uniform speed encouraged by other means of transport. Rather, Polly sets his own speed, performing an active, present engagement with his surroundings, constantly 'looking for something', and ever willing to enact an open exchange with the world. As the texture of the writing suggests, Polly actively questions the dominant model of society based on acceleration, accumulation and efficiency.

⁷¹ I return to the question of cycling women's conspicuous consumption in the next section.

⁷² Mr Polly's speciality is inventing words.

By means of his bicycle rides Polly begins to lead a ‘double life’, telling his cousin he is ‘looking for an opening’ and in fact going to enjoy the company of his three young female cousins in a nearby town (MP 85). One day his explorations take him to a picturesque wood, where he surprises a young girl attempting to climb over the stone wall marking the boundary of her boarding school. Polly falls in love at first sight, feeling himself to be ‘like one of those old knights [...] who rode about the country looking for dragons and beautiful maidens and chivalresque adventures’ (MP 88).⁷³ The first thing Christabel notices about Polly is his bicycle – she tells him that she cycles, too – and the object (as well as his complicity with her part-flight from school) at once allows them to establish a certain intimacy. Like Jessie in *The Wheels of Chance*, upper class Christabel is initially unable to ascertain Mr Polly’s social class, and she uses the bicycle in an attempt to do so:

“I say,” she said, in the pause that followed, “why are you riding about the country on a bicycle?”
“I’m doing it because I like it.”
She sought to estimate his social status on her limited basis of experience. (MP 90)

The leisure time Mr Polly enjoys hints at a superior class status, yet Christabel’s questions ‘probed ever nearer to the hateful secret of the shop and his normal servitude’ (MP 90). Nonetheless, they continue to meet at the same spot for the next ten days, Christabel sitting on the wall with Polly serenading her from below. The liaison ends abruptly when school term starts again, wrenching Polly from ‘the happy dream in which he had been living, of long, warm days, of open roads, of limitless, unchecked hours, of infinite time to look about him’ (MP 103). Polly’s life as a cycling *flâneur* comes to a sudden end when he takes stock of his dwindling inheritance and conforms to society’s expectations by marrying his cousin

⁷³ This is an instance of the connection between cycling and the adventure and romance genres, analysed in Chapter 1.

Miriam and investing in a shop. His bicycle, however, allows him to make one last imaginary and geographical flight 'towards the tropics and the equator and the south coast of England' (MP 106), where he finally takes a shop in the little village of Fishbourne 'to escape the doom of Johnson's choice' in Easewood (MP 123).

For the next fifteen years, Polly leads a miserable life as the owner of a business, managing to find occasional release from daily drudgery in cycling and reading: 'on summer evenings he would ride his bicycle about the country, and if he discovered a sale where there were books, he would as often as not waste half the next day in going to acquire a job lot of them haphazard' (MP 126). Yet his overall mood is despondency, and this is clearly linked to his lack of physical, outdoor activity; 'he got little exercise; indigestion grew with him until it ruled all his moods; he fattened and deteriorated physically' (MP 129). The narrator intervenes here in an attempt to provide a structural justification for Polly's dissatisfaction, citing a certain fictitious social theorist who has developed the concept of 'collective intelligence' in opposition to individualism (MP 129). He 'quotes' this imaginary thinker for a number of pages, developing the following bodily metaphor of a sick society:

A rapidly complicating society [...] which as a whole declines to contemplate its future or face the intricate problems of its organisation, is in exactly the position of a man who takes no thought of dietary or regimen, who abstains from baths and exercise and gives his appetites free play. It accumulates useless and aimless lives as a man accumulates fat and morbid products in his blood, it declines in its collective efficiency and vigour and secretes discomfort and misery. (MP 130)

Polly here becomes 'a microcosm of society' and a 'rather crude political symbol',⁷⁴ as Michael Draper observes, functioning to throw the ailments of society into sharp relief. Wells insists on the parallel between social organisation and our individual relationship to our bodies. One of the reasons reason the bicycle stands in opposition to the contemporary

⁷⁴ Draper, *H. G. Wells*, 87.

organisation of society is that it encourages us to reconnect with our bodies, our surroundings and others (see Chapters 3 and 4), encouraging a vision of society that is more far-sighted and humane, in contrast to the individualist, profit-seeking society in which Polly finds himself trapped.

The final straw for Polly comes when he crashes his bicycle into his neighbour's ironmongery stall. Estranged from all his other neighbours, he had developed a friendship with Mr Rusper the ironmonger, but this collision leads to insults and a physical fight. The cause of the accident is explained as such:

His bicycle was now very old, and it is one of the concomitants of a bicycle's senility that its free wheel should one day obstinately cease to be free. It corresponds to that epoch in human decay when an old gentleman loses an incisor tooth. It happened just as Mr Polly was approaching Mr Rusper's shop, and the untoward chance of a motor car trying to pass a waggon on the wrong side gave Mr Polly no choice but to get on to the pavement and dismount. (MP 140)

The bicycle's senility mirrors the lamentable physical and mental state of its owner. Due to the machine's jammed freewheel, Polly's attempt to dismount causes him to crash into his neighbour's goods, which sparks off an argument. Where, in his youth, Polly had used the bicycle as a tool for exploring more interactive, collective, non-materialist ways of being in the world, he has now become a taciturn, unwilling victim of the capitalist system. Just as the bicycle's freewheel refuses to function, Polly has become incapable of free, independent thought, imprisoned in a life he resents. Although this scene relies on the malfunctioning of the machine,⁷⁵ the bicycle displays evidence of agency here, forcing a crisis that makes Polly face up to his reality and take action.

Following the bicycle accident, Polly sinks deeper into depression and decides to commit suicide. He makes a plan to burn down his house, in order to make his death look

⁷⁵ As I showed in Chapter 1, the bicycle often plays its most crucial narrative role when it malfunctions.

accidental. When he sets his house alight, however, a sudden survival instinct takes over. Polly manages to escape from his burning house, but the fire spreads to the rest of the town. The unexpected result of Polly's attempted suicide is a rare pulling together of Fishbourne society in an attempt to extinguish the blaze and save lives. Previously the pariah of the town, Polly becomes a local hero by saving an old woman from a burning house; 'everyone thought well of him and was anxious to show it, more especially by shaking his hand painfully and repeatedly' (MP 162). As well as drawing the community together, the event brings the perverse nature of capitalism into sharp focus; those who have lost their shops and homes in the fire will in fact be better-off thanks to their insurance policies. 'It's cleared me out of a lot of old stock [...] that's one good thing' (MP 164) Mr Wintershed remarks, highlighting the consumerist logic of an economic system built on ever-renewed commodities and capital.

The fire changes Polly's life in a very different way; it leads him to the discovery that 'if the world does not please you, *you can change it*' (MP 167).⁷⁶ Rather than cashing in on his insurance policy (which he leaves to his wife), he makes the resolution to 'walk and loiter by the way [...] and get an odd job here and there, and talk to strange people' (MP 168). This phase of the middle-aged man's life mirrors his flight from society's expectations in his youth, when his bicycle offered him the means of temporarily delaying his integration into the world of commerce and matrimony. The correlation between Polly's youthful meanderings by bicycle and his adoption of the life of a tramp in middle age is emphasised by the fact that his wandering on foot soon leads him back to the very same 'lichenous stone wall' to which Polly had cycled to meet the schoolgirl Christabel many years previously (MP 171). Just as the bicycle had encouraged him to adopt a more attentive relationship with both his body, the environment and others, walking allows him to lead 'a healthy human life,

⁷⁶ Author's italics.

living constantly in the open air [...] After a lapse of fifteen years he rediscovered this interesting world, about which so many people go incredibly blind and bored' (MP 169). The contrast between Polly's simple, pastoral existence and the general tendency of society is underlined by the evocation of modern means of transport. He is woken from his sleep on a pile of brushwood 'by the distant rattle of a racing motor-car breaking all the speed regulations' (MP 170), and he is described from the perspective of a car driver in the following terms: 'A tramp sat by the roadside, thinking, and it seemed to the man in the passing motor-car he must needs be plotting for another pot of beer. But, as a matter of fact, what the tramp was saying to himself over and over again, was a variant upon a well-known Hebrew word' (MP 171). Polly is reflecting on the Biblical term 'Itchabod', translating as 'the glory has departed'. With this word Polly solemnly bids farewell to the conventional life he had struggled to adopt from his youth. The senseless acceleration of the motor car Polly hears, and the warped, erroneous viewpoint of the passing driver, stand in sharp contrast to the human-powered, contemplative existence the hero has finally chosen.

The bicycle, then, has quite a straightforward symbolism in *Mr Polly*, in contrast to its more complex portrayal in *The Wheels of Chance* and especially *Kipps*. Wells's final cyclist hero uses the vehicle as a means to engage in a peripatetic, alternative lifestyle, actively rejecting the tenets of the capitalist society he inhabits. His bicycle rides during his youth act as an apprenticeship in liberty, a foretaste of the life he will eventually adopt as a tramp, where he rejects possessions in order to engage actively with the world and the people he encounters. All of these novels share in common their vision of the bicycle as a technology that serves humanity rather than distorting our relationship to people and our environment, themes that are further explored in Chapters 3 and 4. Wells's heroes use the vehicle to engage

more meaningfully with their bodies, their surroundings and others. Marc Augé asks ‘si ce n’est pas finalement la pratique de la bicyclette qui aura permis d’inventer la troisième voie, celle qui, entre libéralisme et socialisme, se préoccupe d’abord du bonheur des individus.’⁷⁷ It would seem that for Wells, whatever the political role of the bicycle, it is above all a means to find personal fulfilment and happiness. And what better basis for a just society?

2.2 Spinning wheels: representations of female cyclists in British literature

The lady novelist of today resembles the “literary bicyclist” so delightfully satirised by the late Lord Justice Bowen. She covers a vast extent of ground, and sometimes her machine takes her along some sadly muddy roads, where her petticoats – or her knickerbockers – are apt to get soiled.⁷⁸

The bicycle has been credited with radically changing women’s lives. While many critics have examined women’s adoption of cycling from the 1890s, Glen Norcliffe reminds us that women’s general accession to the activity actually began around 1880 with the appearance of the tricycle, alongside the still popular high wheeler.⁷⁹ Eugen Weber recalls how at an international feminist congress in Paris in 1896, Maria Pognon, the president of La Ligue française pour les droits des femmes, raised her glass in a toast to the ‘egalitarian and levelling bicycle’ that was about to liberate her sex.⁸⁰ In the same year, the North American feminist Susan B. Anthony also famously deemed the bicycle an agent of women’s emancipation, arguing in 1896 that ‘it has done more to emancipate women than anything

77 Augé, *Éloge de la bicyclette*, 80. ‘whether, in the end, the use of the bicycle could allow us to invent a third way, between liberalism and socialism, which concerns itself principally with the happiness of individuals.’

78 Hugh Stutfield, ‘Tommyrotics’, *Blackwood’s* 157, June 1895.

79 Glen B. Norcliffe, *Critical Geographies of Cycling: History, Political Economy and Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 5; there are also some accounts of women velocipedists, and Denis Johnson issued a ladies’ draisine as early as 1819. See Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 38.

80 Eugen Weber, *Fin de siècle: la France à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: A. Fayard, 1986), 203.

else in the world. It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a wheel [...] the picture of free, untrammelled womanhood.’⁸¹ Women’s cycling contributed to momentous changes in female clothing and mobility, helping to challenge the prevailing patriarchal cast of society while stoking the emerging movement for women’s suffrage. At the same time, women’s sudden ability and demand to wear more practical clothing and move freely aroused furious debates over the moral and health dangers of cycling. As Christopher Thompson and Fiona Ratkoff argue, in France many observers ‘voyaient dans les femmes cyclistes les sources d’un chaos social fatal’, and held the bicycle responsible for *fin-de-siècle* spectres such as degeneration or depopulation.⁸² In this chapter I examine this compelling moment in the history of feminist struggles in the UK and France through the lens of contemporary fiction. Both bicycles and the New Woman novels I examine interacted with contemporary debates about the changing place of women in society. I present a nuanced view of the complex and contradictory role the bicycle played in alternately liberating women and reinforcing their subordination in a society that remained decidedly patriarchal.

This area of study is already amply furnished; several books and articles examine the historical role of the bicycle in women’s emancipation and in connection with the literary figure of the New Woman.⁸³ A significant cultural icon at the turn of the century, the New Woman was widely discussed and written about in newspapers and fiction of the period; it

81 Susan B. Anthony in ‘Champion of her sex,’ by Nellie Bly, *New York World*, 2 February, 1896: 9-10.

82 Christopher Thompson and Fiona Ratkoff, ‘Un troisième sexe ? Les bourgeoises et la bicyclette dans la France fin de siècle’, *Le mouvement social* 192 (September 2000): 36. ‘saw women cyclists as the source of fatal social chaos’.

83 See, for example Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Carolyn Christensen Nelson, *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2001); Angelique Richardson et al., *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin de Siècle Feminisms* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Sue Macy, *Wheels of Change: How Women Rode the Bicycle to Freedom* (Washington D.C: National Geographic Society, 2011).

has been estimated that between 1883 and 1900 over a hundred novels were written about the figure.⁸⁴ Part caricature, part reflection of the new lifestyles being adopted by certain women, she was depicted in novels such as Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895) as someone who cast off Victorian conventionality in order to seek education, reject marriage and gain an independent living. Sally Ledger writes that 'the New Woman was a very *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon [...] she was part of that concatenation of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s.'⁸⁵ Another cultural novelty, the bicycle, rapidly became associated with this image of mobile, emancipated women in literature. Yet studies which have engaged with the connection between the New Woman and cycling generally present the bicycle as an unambiguous symbol of women's liberation in the period, failing to take into account the contemporary debates raging around its use and attempts to diffuse the dangerously emancipatory image of female cycling.⁸⁶ Here I take a fresh look at New Women awheel in a British context by examining fictional works by authors including H. G. Wells, Emile Zola, Grant Allen, George Gissing, Arthur Conan Doyle, Bodkin Mc Donnell, Mary Kennard, Ada L. Harris and Dorothy Richardson. This literary examination highlights some of the unexpected ways in which cycling changed the lives of women, while drawing attention to the limits of this redefinition of women's place in private and public spheres.

2.2.1 'New women': appropriating mobility

The bicycle has powerful symbolic value in New Woman literature. As Chris Willis

84 Ann L. Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 4.

85 Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1.

86 An exception is Anita Rush, 'The Bicycle Boom of the Gay Nineties: A Reassessment', *Material Culture Review / Revue de La Culture Matérielle* 18 (June 1983). This article claims that the importance of the bicycle in social movements has been exaggerated, and that it reflected rather than sparked feminist and socialist struggles.

rightly observes:

Popular fiction of the time often uses the figure of the female cyclist as a paradigm of the New Woman. If a character makes her first appearance on a bicycle, it is almost inevitable that she will turn out to be single and well-educated, with strong views on women's rights.⁸⁷

Indeed, many New Woman authors are keen to draw the reader's attention to the bicycle as an introduction to their emancipated female characters, even if it only plays a minor role in the rest of the narrative. For example, an image of a female cyclist is placed prominently on the cover of Mc Donnell Bodkin's *Dora Myrl* (the lady detective also makes her appearance on a bicycle on the first page), and the title of Harris's *A Widow on Wheels* draws attention to the activity of cycling, even though the bicycle subsequently plays a very minor role in the narrative. A striking illustration of a lady cyclist appears on the cover of Harris's book (see Figure 7), and the novel opens with a lively discussion of cycling at a ladies' sewing circle. The eponymous widow Mrs Gresham Green rides her bicycle 'in the face of outraged local propriety, which was inclined to regard a widow on wheels as almost as great an anomaly as one of the visionary creatures mentioned in Ezekiel.'⁸⁸ Similarly, in Wells's New Woman novel, *Ann Veronica* (1913), the bicycle figures as a symbol of the eponymous young woman's perceived liberation. When she tells her father she feels 'cooped up' at home, he protests, asking 'Did I stand in the way of your going to college? Have I ever prevented you going about at any reasonable hour? You've got a bicycle!'⁸⁹ It is as though the mere mention of a woman's bicycle were sufficient to denote the extent of her perceived freedom from the authority of her husband or father.

Beyond these somewhat token references to the bicycle as an outward symbol of

87 Chris Willis, 'Heaven Defend Me from Political or Highly-Educated Women!: Packaging the New Woman for Mass Consumption', in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin de Siècle Feminisms*, ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 53.

88 Ada L. Harris, *A Widow on Wheels* (London: Hutchinson, 1896), 3–4.

89 H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* [1913] (London: Dent, 1962), 24.

women's emancipation, fiction from the turn of the century provides an insight into the manifold ways in which cycling brought real changes to women's lives in this period. Of course, within a patriarchal society there were limits to this emancipation (as I show in the next section), yet cycling did provide many women with a certain measure of physical and geographical freedom. A crucial aspect of this was clothing. The physical and mechanical requirements of the bicycle rendered Victorian corsets and heavy skirts obsolete, and women rejoiced in the very literal liberation this conferred. In Virginia Niles Leeds's 1897 story 'A Coast and a Capture', the narrator Josephine describes how, on donning her brother's trousers for a secret nocturnal bike ride, she is finally able to benefit freely from a freedom of movement that would have been impossible in a heavy ankle-length skirt:

Oh, the luxury of jumping on! The words convey nothing to those who, like myself, have always had to wait until the right pedal is just exactly at a certain angle; then, placing one foot upon it, have had to balance in mid-air, as it were, while we divided our skirt and wriggled into position on the saddle. Nothing of that now. I gave the machine a little shove-off first, then I hopped on as easily as you please, and I felt as I fancy the slaves must have felt after the Emancipation Act.⁹⁰

This vivid description of the difficulty of mounting a bicycle in a long skirt and the corresponding ease of 'jumping on' in trousers provides a clear illustration of the tangible changes cycling dress could make in women's experience. The simplicity and delight of riding in trousers is reflected in the exclamatory opening sentence, while the complex syntax of the following sentence mirrors the difficulty of mounting a bicycle in a heavy skirt. However, it is important to note that in the above story the heroine must wait for the cover of darkness in order to secretly don her brother's clothes and take his bicycle out for a ride. Indeed, American-invented bloomers remained taboo in the UK into the twentieth century,

⁹⁰ Virginia Niles Leeds, 'A Coast and a Capture: A Bicycling Story', in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897), 87.

and the majority of early female cyclists in Britain wore either specially adapted skirts or ‘rational dress,’ consisting of knickerbockers, leggings and a long coat.⁹¹ Even this costume was hotly contested; in 1898 Lady Harberton, president of the Rational Dress Society, took the proprietor of a coffee room to court for refusing her service on account of her dress. In Dorothy Richardson’s *The Tunnel* (1919), set in the 1890s, Miriam’s progressive friends Jan and Mag confide that ‘We went out – last night -after dark – and rode – round Russell Square– twice – in our knickers’ (TL 148). Although they do also ride



Figure 10: 16 year-old Tessie Reynolds, who controversially rode from Brighton to London in rational dress in 1893.

bicycles in the daytime, they are unable to enjoy the experience fully due to the clothes and deportment they are still required to adopt. Like Josephine in the above story, it is only the cover of darkness that allows these women to experience the true ‘freedom of movement’ that comes from riding a bicycle in loose, practical clothes that were still thought of as ‘unfeminine’ (TL 148).

Emile Zola’s *Paris* (1898), the final novel in his trilogy *Les Trois Villes*, provides a vivid impression of the contemporary debate on women cyclists’ clothing in a French context. Marie and Pierre wear outfits that are ‘presque identiques’ to ride their bicycles.⁹² Both characters are in the process of liberating themselves from society’s dress codes, since Pierre is a priest who abandons his vocation in the course of the novel, and their cycling

91 In France, however, *culottes* were popular with female cyclists from the 1890s, as we shall see in the next section.

92 Émile Zola, *Paris. Œuvres complètes. Tome 17.*, ed. Henri Mitterand, Jacques Noiray, and Jean-Louis Cabanès (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2008), 234. ‘almost identical.’

outfits permit them a certain ‘liberté d’allures’ as well as encouraging a sentiment of ‘fraternité joyeuse’ between the pair.⁹³ Dressing in a similar fashion places the two characters on a level footing, while the bicycle provides the opportunity for ‘les sorties en commun qui mêlent et égalisent les sexes, la femme et les enfants qui suivent le mari partout, les camarades comme nous deux qui peuvent s’en aller à travers champs, à travers bois, sans qu’on s’en étonne.’⁹⁴ Here Marie emphasises the fact that cycling allowed men and women to socialise without the presence of a chaperone, providing new opportunities for male-female friendship that challenged society’s insistence on marriage as the desired outcome of interaction between the sexes. Overjoyed by this new freedom, Marie expresses surprise at the reticence of some women to embrace *culottes* in order to have ‘les jambes enfin dégagées de leur prison.’⁹⁵ Practical rather than fashionable principles should be paramount when it comes to clothing, Marie argues, asking ‘est-ce qu’on pense à tout ça, lorsqu’on roule ?... Il n’y a que la culotte, la jupe est hérétique.’⁹⁶ Female cyclists’ rejection of long skirts in favour of more practical clothing remained a deeply controversial issue in France, yet Marie’s standpoint (and the fact that she wears a near identical costume to Pierre, in broad daylight) reflects the fact that French women were able to adopt these new costumes with greater ease than their British sisters.

In British fiction of the time, the image of rational dress is often used by male authors as an emblem of women’s controversial challenge to societal codes. Wells’s hero Hoopdriver in *The Wheels of Chance* is transfixed by the ‘Young Lady in Grey’ he beholds cycling towards him on the Surbiton road, while ‘strange doubts possessed him as to the nature of her

93 *Ibid.* ‘freedom of movement’ ; ‘joyous fraternity.’

94 *Ibid.*, 237. ‘shared outings that allow the sexes to mix, putting them on the same level, women and children following the husband everywhere, friends like us striking out across fields and woods, without shocking anybody.’

95 *Ibid.*, 235. ‘their legs finally freed from their prison.’

96 *Ibid.* ‘do you think about any of that, when you’re riding?... The *culotte* is all, the skirt is heretical.’

nether costume. He had heard of such things of course – French perhaps’ (WC 20). On closer inspection he realises that ‘the things were – yes – *rational*s!’ , a discovery which leads him to lose control of his bicycle and fall off (WC 21). The barmaid in an inn they stay at is equally shocked by Jessie’s dress, remarking on its lack of gender specificity: ‘There’ll be no knowing which is which in a year or two’ (WC 74). Even though Hoopdriver later learns Jessie’s name, she is referred to as the ‘Young Lady in Grey’ throughout the narrative. Interestingly, Alice Meynell published an essay entitled ‘A Woman in Grey’ in the same year as Wells’ s novel, in which she depicts a woman cycling down Oxford Street.⁹⁷ As Alyssa Straight observes, Meynell uses this illustration as a means to counteract ‘hereditary theory,’ or the then widespread idea that women inherited limited physical capacities from their mothers and grandmothers, while the male hereditary line passed on and consolidated strength and vigour.⁹⁸ For Meynell, the autonomous female cyclist ‘dependent on no nerves but her own’ provides a striking counter-example to this sexist theory, which circumscribed women’s relationship to their bodies and their surroundings.⁹⁹ In Well’s novel, the metonymic designation of the novel’s heroine as a ‘Lady in Grey’ perhaps makes a nod at Meynell’s essay, while drawing attention to the importance of Jessie’s unconventional clothing as a symbol of her refusal of the traditional role society reserves for her. Yet, as we shall see in due course, the stress placed on Jessie’s clothing is also symptomatic of the strict codification of women’s cycling clothing, which allowed only a limited measure of comfort and mobility.

In various novels of the period, clothing associated with cycling enshrines female resistance to patriarchal authority. Mary E. Kennard provides a portrait of an upper class

97 Alice Meynell, ‘The Woman in Grey,’ [1896] in *Literature and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Talia Schaffer (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 236–39.

98 Alyssa Straight, “‘The Face of the Bicyclist’: Women’s Cycling and the Altered Body in *The Type-Writer Girl*”, in *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film*, ed. Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 57.

99 Meynell, ‘The Woman in Grey’, 239.

woman's love affair with the bicycle in her novel *The Golf Lunatic and his Cycling Wife* (1902), where Cynthia asserts 'truly it may be said that woman a-wheel is woman emancipated.'¹⁰⁰ When Cynthia, on returning from a bicycle tour of several weeks, is asked by her unfaithful husband to entertain his new love interest, she hesitates between two outfits. One denotes submission to, the other rejection of, her subordinate position as a cheated wife: 'I debated whether to put on my oldest clothes and go out bicycling, or to dress myself nicely and do as my husband had bidden me. I was racked by indecision. I [...] descended to my room in order to don my cycling skirt.'¹⁰¹ Here Cynthia expresses resistance to her tyrannical husband's demeaning request through her choice of clothing, which can denote either acceptance or refusal of the traditional domestic role of women. Moreover, Grant Allen's heroines wear their cycling costumes in unexpected contexts, highlighting the bicycle's role as a facilitator of female involvement in areas of life, work and leisure previously reserved for men. In *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897), Juliet wears her 'cycling suit in the fields, and laboured like a man' at an anarchist settlement,¹⁰² while in *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899) Lois remarks that in India 'my short bicycling skirt did beautifully for tiger-hunting.'¹⁰³ The stereotypically masculine activities in which these women participate while wearing cycling costumes draw attention to the symbolically loaded potential of the activity. Women's discovery of mobility gave them the possibility to venture beyond the domestic sphere, providing access to areas of work and recreation previously reserved for men.

In addition to the liberating potential of cycling apparel, the activity itself is presented as a lesson in autonomy for women by certain authors. Moving alone through city streets and

100 Kennard, *The Golf Lunatic and His Cycling Wife*, 71.

101 *Ibid.*, 307–8.

102 Allen, *The Type-Writer Girl* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1897), 74.

103 Allen, *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2008), 157.

country roads was a novel and emancipating experience for women. Juliet notes in *The Type-Writer Girl*: 'A woman on a bicycle has all the world before her where to choose; she can go where she will, no man hindering.'¹⁰⁴ Mary Kennard insists on the importance of this new-found mobility in her *Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (1896), arguing that:

[a bicycle] widens the general vista in a most extraordinary manner, and enlarges the limitations by which, ordinary women are surrounded. It thrusts back the prison walls, and gives her freedom and independence, such as she had never even dreamed of. Instead of a two-mile area, she can now rejoice in one of forty or fifty miles.¹⁰⁵

While opening up a new geography to women, especially those living in rural areas, cycling allowed women to cultivate new physical and mental capabilities. In Emile Zola's *Paris* (1897), Marie claims that cycling allows women to 'apprendre à se conduire dans la vie.'¹⁰⁶ Discussing the matter with the priest Pierre, she makes a strong case for the transformation cycling can provoke in women's habits, minds and outlooks:

Voyez ces grandes filles que les mères élèvent dans leurs jupons. On leur fait peur de tout, on leur défend toute initiative, on n'exerce ni leur jugement ni leur volonté, de sorte qu'elles ne savent pas même traverser une rue, paralysées par l'idée des obstacles... Mettez-en une toute jeune sur une bicyclette, et lâchez-la moi sur les routes : il faudra bien qu'elle ouvre les yeux, pour voir et éviter le caillou, pour tourner à propos, et dans le bon sens, quand un coude se présentera [...] En somme, n'y a-t-il pas là un continuel apprentissage de la volonté, une admirable leçon de conduite et de défense ? [...] j'entends que celles qui éviteront les cailloux, qui tourneront à propos sur les routes, sauront aussi, dans la vie sociale et sentimentale, franchir les difficultés, prendre le meilleur parti, d'une intelligence ouverte, honnête et solide.¹⁰⁷

104 Allen, *The Type-Writer Girl*, 50.

105 Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists*, 22.

106 Zola, *Paris. Œuvres complètes. Tome 17.*, 236. 'learn to navigate through life'.

107 *Ibid.* 'Think of those girls whose mothers bring them up sheltered under their skirts. They are taught to be afraid of everything, they are forbidden from taking any initiative, their judgement and willpower are never called upon, so that they do not even know how to cross the street, paralysed by the idea of obstacles... Put a young girl upon a bicycle, and set her free on the roads: she will have to open her eyes, to see and avoid the pebble, to turn at the right moment and in the right direction, when a bend in the road appears [...] Overall, is this not a continual apprenticeship in willpower, an admirable lesson in conduct and defence? [...] I mean that those who can avoid pebbles, who turn at the right moment on the road, will also know how to overcome difficulties and make the best decisions in their social and emotional lives, with a clear, honest, solid intelligence.'

Marie here makes a compelling association between the physical negotiation of obstacles on the road and the ability to carve out an individual path in the world. Her confident tone, rhetorical questions and frequent use of imperatives provide a vivid illustration of her argument, revealing that she herself is a self-reliant and intelligent young woman. She clearly recognises that women's subservience is socially conditioned, starting from infancy when young girls are taught to be afraid of obstacles rather than attempt to overcome them. The bicycle gave women the possibility to decide on their own geographical itineraries, which were no longer dictated by male family members who strictly proscribed the limits of their mobility. As Marie recognises, this physical mobility had crucial psychological implications; it provided women with a practical means to cast off their dependent role and learn to make autonomous choices. Similarly, for the eponymous narrator of Allen's *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899), the ability to ride a bicycle is closely linked to an enterprising approach to life. The heroine describes herself in the following terms: 'having large dark eyes, with a bit of a twinkle in them, and being as well able to pilot a bicycle as any girl of my acquaintance, I have inherited or acquired an outlook on the world which distinctly leans rather towards cheeriness than despondency.'¹⁰⁸ In addition to giving her good humour, cycling has taught Lois Cayley how to be savvy, resourceful and independent. Indeed, at the start of the novel she is able to make the decision to 'Put on my hat and walk out'¹⁰⁹ into London in search of opportunity as a result of the sense of adventure and self-reliance cycling has taught her. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the bicycle is unique amongst other transportation technologies in that it enhances rather than diminishes faith in the body's abilities. New Women along with other cyclists in literature tend to express a sense of physical and spiritual empowerment;

¹⁰⁸ Allen, *Miss Cayley's Adventures*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

they remain aware of their natural limits while reaping the benefits of a machine that optimises their locomotive capacities.

In contemporary societies, just as in the Victorian era, cycling may give women the opportunity to feel secure and legitimate in potentially hostile environments. The bicycle effectively functions as a weapon of self defence, allowing women to travel safely through or away from localities where they may otherwise be at risk. In Wells's *The Wheels of Chance*, when Jessie suffers from the unwanted sexual advances of her fellow cyclist Bechamel, it is her bicycle that allows her to flee from him in order to avoid sharing his hotel room for the night (WC 92). In *The Type-Writer Girl* the male members of the anarchist settlement initially use the bicycle lessons offered by Juliet as a means to 'entice [her] away from the common field towards remoter lanes where occasions for private talk were more easily obtained.'¹¹⁰ Yet the bicycle ultimately acts as her way out of this uncomfortable situation. The men's uninvited attention motivates her decision to leave, at which point the community attempts to confiscate her bicycle. Juliet flatly refuses and hastily cycles off, in a vivid demonstration of the vehicle's potential to allow women to ensure their own safety in hostile environments. Allen's other cycling heroine, Lois Cayley, also makes a getaway from an unknown male cyclist who begins pursuing her. Despite his opening remark when he finally corners her – 'you're a lady of considerable personal attractions'¹¹¹ – her pursuer's motives turn out to be economic rather than sexual; he is an American inventor and offers her a job racing his machine in a promotional event. As I show below, the image of women cyclists could also be commodified, with promoters objectifying the female body as a means to sell bicycles and other goods.

¹¹⁰ Allen, *The Type-Writer Girl*, 76–77.

¹¹¹ Allen, *Miss Cayley's Adventures*, 45.

While the bicycle offered women the means to protect themselves, some authors depicted female cyclists as fearless knights in shining armour, physically and mentally equipped to rescue their lover where he had once rescued her.¹¹² One example of this trope may be found in *Miss Cayley's Adventures*, in a scene where Lois rescues her lover Harold after he has fallen over a precipice. In her hurry to reach him, Lois does not heed her more conventional friend Elsie's advice to 'hurry down on our cycles to Lungern and call some men from the village to help us.'¹¹³ Instead, she rescues him herself, scaling down a sheer cliff face on a rope wearing her 'dog-skin bicycling gloves',¹¹⁴ and thus proving her belief that 'women are almost always brave in the great emergencies.'¹¹⁵ In the story 'A Fin de Cycle Incident' (1897) by Edna C. Jackson (from the United States, but published in the British collection *The Humours of Cycling*), another melodramatic woman-rescues-man scene takes place. The young cycling heroine Renie Raine resolves to give up cycling for her fiancé Horace Waldon, who harbours very conventional ideas about suitable female conduct and dress. However, on what Renie decides will be her last ride before her marriage, she overhears some men in a wood plotting to rob and kill her lover during his journey home by horse. In order to reach him before the robbers, she casts off her 'encumbering skirt' and rides speedily in bloomers along the railway tracks. She takes a short cut through a tunnel, and manages to jump off her bike – which is crushed by a train arriving behind her – into Harold's grateful arms. Although the bicycle's ritual sacrifice at the end of the story may appear to be in fitting with Harold's traditional ideas, in fact this rescue scene changes his

112 While Grant Allen made use of the trope of the female knight, both of his New Women cyclists are also 'rescued' by modern-day male knights in the course of these novels. In *The Type-Writer Girl* (p. 90), Juliet is saved by a 'St George' in a dog-cart after a bicycle accident, and in *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (p.44) the American inventor is termed 'St George' when he intervenes with a policeman to save Lois from paying a fine for not having a license for her bicycle.

113 Allen, *Miss Cayley's Adventures*, 83.

114 *Ibid.*, 86.

115 *Ibid.*, 88.

outlook women and cycling. Following their marriage, the couple enjoy bicycle rides together, with the wrecked bicycle being kept as ‘a precious relic in Mr Waldon’s library.’¹¹⁶

As well as providing new opportunities for heroic action in fiction, cycling affords precious moments of female homosociality within the space of these novels.¹¹⁷ As Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) remarked in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), representations of women in fiction throughout history have consistently reduced them to their role as wives and mothers, neglecting to portray ties of friendship or love between women. ‘All these relationships between women [...] are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted’, Woolf argues.¹¹⁸ She goes on to observe that ‘almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men [...] all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen’s day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex.’¹¹⁹ Wells and Allen generally omit scenes of female bonding in their New Women novels; in fact, female characters are more often portrayed as having antagonistic relationships with each other, as we shall see in the next section. Moreover, each of their heroines conforms to patriarchal expectations by either directly or implicitly heading for matrimony at the end of the novel. However, the female authors Mary Kennard and L. T. Meade both draw attention to the empowering women-only spaces bicycles helped create. Kennard draws on autobiographical details from a

116 Edna C. Jackson, ‘A Fin de Cycle Incident’, in *The Humours of Cycling*. (James Bowden: London, 1897), 56–65.

117 In sociology, homosocial is a term referring to same-sex non-sexual relationships, such as friendship. The term was popularised by Eve Sedgwick in her discussion of male homosocial relationships, which often perpetuate patterns of male dominance. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Joseph W Childers and Gary Hentzi, *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 138.

118 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 82.

119 *Ibid.* Woolf’s observation inspired comic book writer Alison Bechdel to devise the Bechdel test, a means of gauging the degree of sexism of a film or work of fiction. The test asks whether, in the course of the story, two named female characters talk to each other about anything other than a man. The majority of modern-day films fail the test. In my estimation Wells’s *The Wheels of Chance* would fail, as would Allen’s *The Type-Writer Girl* (the only relationship between women is part of a love triangle), while *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* is saved by the friendship between Lois and Elsie.

journey with her sister¹²⁰ in order to narrate Cynthia and her friend Dora's cycle trip to Scotland, which leaves them 'proud of the muscles and the energy which in six days had accomplished a distance of over three hundred miles.'¹²¹ On arriving at their destination, Cynthia asks 'After that, who will dare affirm that women can't get on together, and are helpless without a man to look after them?'¹²² Cycling was thus a practical means for women to create ties beyond the domestic sphere and perform a societal role independent of their relationship to men.

Systems of mutual support between women were fostered by the activity of cycling, allowing them to liberate themselves from traditional reliance on their fathers or husbands. In L. T. Meade's *The Cleverest Woman in England* (1898), a New Woman novel brimming with scenes of female bonding bordering on the erotic, the bicycle plays a small but significant role. When her maid Lucy is unwell, the feminist campaigner Dagmar prescribes cycling as 'one of the grandest cures for indigestion,' and makes sure her protégée is able to acquire a bicycle.¹²³ Dagmar's prescription is particularly significant in the context of the contemporary medical debate around cycling, in which some outspoken male doctors discouraged the activity, maintaining it could provoke various health disorders for women.¹²⁴ Although this advice eventually results in Lucy's dismissal – Dagmar's mother-in-law is scandalised to see their maid on a bicycle – it provides a significant instance of women cutting themselves free from the male-dominated medical establishment in order to seek new modes of female sociability and support. The bicycle facilitated this by providing the means for women to independently socialise and foster relationships beyond those prescribed by their marital or

120 See Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists*, 70–84.

121 Kennard, *The Golf Lunatic and His Cycling Wife*, 207.

122 *Ibid.*, 210.

123 L. T. Meade, *The Cleverest Woman in England* (London: J. Nisbet, 1898), 101.

124 Thompson and Ratkoff, 'Un troisième sexe?'

familial status.

A final instance of the bicycle's positive role in transforming the lives of women is the fact that it could provide new sources of paid employment. In 1896, the cycling periodical *The Hub* published an article entitled 'How Some Wheelwomen Earn Money', which included interviews of female bicycle mechanics and cycle instructors.¹²⁵ Sissie, an antipathetic character in Grant Allen's *Hilda Wade* (1899), describes her particular technique for bringing business to her brother's bicycle shop: 'when [the customers] weren't looking, I'd dab the business end of a darning-needle, so, just plump into their tyres; and of course, as soon as they went off, they were back again in a minute to get a puncture mended! I call *that* business.'¹²⁶ Mary Kennard's cycling heroine Cynthia earns money by testing out and reviewing bicycles for a magazine.¹²⁷ Matthias Mc Donnell Bodkin places his female detective on wheels in *Dora Myrl, Lady Detective* (1900),¹²⁸ while Ada L. Harris's *A Widow on Wheels* (1896) and Mrs Westmacott in Arthur Conan Doyle's *Beyond the City* (1891) provide further portraits of financially autonomous cycling women.¹²⁹ Allen's Lois Cayley is an independent globe trotter who manages to make her living first from bicycle racing, and subsequently by becoming a cycle saleswoman.¹³⁰ As such, the bicycle was portrayed in literature as a technology, amongst many others at the turn of the century, that accompanied and facilitated women's gradual accession to the sphere of paid employment.

I have pointed to the manifold ways in which literature reflects the bicycle's social impact in bringing real changes to the lives of women, while hinting that the meanings and

125 'How Some Wheelwomen Earn Money', *The Hub*, 12 September 1896.

126 Grant Allen, *Hilda Wade, a Woman with Tenacity of Purpose* (New York: Jefferson Publication, 2015), 23. Author's italics.

127 *Ibid.*, 69.

128 Matthias Mc Donnell Bodkin, *Dora Myrl, the Lady Detective*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1900).

129 Harris, *A Widow on Wheels*; Arthur Conan Doyle, *Beyond the City* (London: George Newnes, 1921).

130 Allen, *Miss Cayley's Adventures*.

limits of these changes were largely dictated by society at large, two of whose main driving forces were patriarchy and capitalism. The bicycle, as well as the New Woman, played a role in emerging commodity culture. As Chris Willis argues, at the turn of the century ‘the New Woman had become a marketable novelty figure whose presence in a story increased its chance of good sales.’¹³¹ As we saw in Chapter 1, the inclusion of the fashionable bicycle in new literature could function as a sales pitch, drawing readers’ attention to a specific book because of the desirability and novelty of the object it displayed. Moreover, the cycling New Woman has been viewed by Andrew Shrimpton as ‘perfectly attuned to the demands of a mass consumption economy’, in that she is a glamorous woman, well patronised by advertising, who uses consumer goods for the purposes of self-fulfilment, to express her own ‘individuality’ along lines that are considered ‘daring’ or ‘risqué.’¹³² The bicycle is one of the most conspicuous means by which the New Woman expressed her identity, thus performing the role of a consumer which the twentieth century held specially in store for housewives. Despite the many lively descriptions of liberated, adventurous young cycling women we have seen in literature of the period, the majority of these intrepid heroines are heading for matrimony, motherhood and domesticity by the end of the story. I shall now turn my attention to the attempt made to contain the dangerous spectre of the female cyclist within another image: that of the lady cyclist.

2.2.2 Domesticated mobility: the lady cyclist and consumer culture

New Woman fiction was born of – and played an important role in shaping –

¹³¹ Willis, ‘Heaven Defend Me from Political or Highly-Educated Women!: Packaging the New Woman for Mass Consumption’, 64.

¹³² Andrew Shrimpton, ‘The Cultural Significance of Cycling c. 1870-1900’ (Master’s dissertation, University of York, 1991), 43.

contemporary debates around the changing societal, professional and economic roles of women. Yet the cycling women who appeared both in fiction and on the streets should not be seen simply as messiahs of the demise of patriarchy. Society at large remained decidedly hostile towards women's emancipation, and technology could be put to use to elaborate discourses that reinforced or simply reformulated women's subservient role. Kittler argues that around 1900, the image of woman as sexual object and mother was replaced in the cultural imagination by woman as information worker; typist, telegraphist, secretary. He points out how the character Mina Harker in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), for instance, becomes 'the central relay station of an immense information network' which is largely controlled by men.¹³³ Kittler's example goes to show that new technologies are not necessarily liberating; depending on the uses to which they are put, and the meanings given to them, they may become means of bolstering patterns of domination.¹³⁴ The liberated cycling New Woman was a fictional stereotype; in society as well as in literature a domesticated, ladylike paradigm of female cycling emerged, seeking to defuse the threat of overly liberated women.

Ellen Gruber Garvey has studied a number of fictional portrayals of female cyclists in newspapers and periodicals in the US in the 1890s and argued that such literature, alongside contemporary advertising and journalism, functioned to foster an acceptable image of female cycling, one which reaffirmed rather than challenged the prevailing social order:

Because the fears women's bicycling raised were primarily social, fiction, with its articulation of social relationships, was better suited than medical articles or other coverage to take the sting out of those fears. It reconfigured the relationships the bicycle seemed to be changing as assigned new meanings to those changes. Fiction carried the burden of instructing readers in the

133 Friedrich A Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 354.

134 Similarly, some have argued that the array of household gadgets marketed at women throughout the twentieth century, rather than liberating women from domestic chores, reinforced their role as housewives.

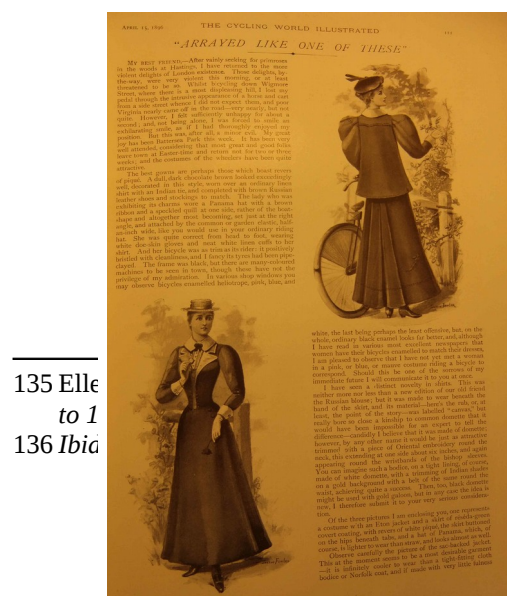
complexities of the bicycle's social meaning, investing it with romance and glamour, and reassuring readers that riding would not disrupt the social order.¹³⁵

Behind the emancipatory image of the bicycle lurked deep misgivings about women's evolving status, and a desire to assign meanings to such changes that would not threaten the established order. Gruber Garvey further shows how the bicycle manufacturing industry in the 1890s (which was closely tied to cycling newspapers and magazines) was keenly interested in doubling its market by selling its wares to women, but in order to do so it was obliged to tackle contemporary fears around the health and moral dangers of the activity. Some doctors maintained that reproductive capacities would be jeopardised while others claimed women would experience sexual pleasure on their bicycles. As Garvey argues, these debates mirrored and masked the revolutionary potential of autonomous mobility for women:

[...] the medicalized masturbation metaphor was a particularly compelling one because both the bicycling woman and the masturbating woman were out of male control, possibly doing damage to "the race" [...] Of course the real issue at stake was not masturbation but women's mobility and independence.¹³⁶

Gruber Garvey points out how, in order to foster an acceptable image of female cycling, specialised saddles, frames and clothes were marketed to women, with both fiction writers and the press cultivating a domesticated image of the activity.

With Gruber Garvey's findings in mind, the dress question discussed in the previous



135 Elle
to 1
136 Ibia

or: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s

Figure 11: 'Arrayed like one of these.' *The Cycling World Illustrated*. 18 March 1896.

section takes on a new light. While the clothing associated with cycling could allow women more physical comfort, it could also coerce them into respecting a very strict set of cultural codes. By placing undue emphasis on the question of clothing, writers contributed to the perpetuation of the male gaze and, along with the medical debate, shrouded the most important issue: women's mobility. Many cycling periodicals from this period contain columns on 'Cycling for Ladies', which are predominantly concerned with the subject of fashion. In the first edition of the successful periodical *The Cycling World Illustrated*, for

Figure 12: 'Some Fancy
Costumes at the Brighton Cycle
Carnival.' *The Cycling World
Illustrated*. 18 March 1896.

instance, the ladies' column was baptised 'Arrayed like one of these', a title that hints at the still controversial status of women's cycling dress.¹³⁷ The column dealt solely with the question of clothing, and promoted a markedly conservative approach, as can be seen in the images in Figure 11. The renaming of the column as 'Array yourself becomingly' in the following month is indicative of an explicit injunction for women cyclists to adhere to

¹³⁷ Virginia, 'Arrayed like one of these.' *The Cycling World Illustrated* 18th March 1896: 20. Print.

society's dress codes, rather than choose the most practical outfit for their activity, or the one in which they felt most comfortable.¹³⁸ Indeed, the pinched waists, long skirts and complicated hats recommended by *The Cycling World Illustrated* do not suggest that practicality is its main concern. Rather, women's priority should be to continue to appear ladylike, despite their indulgence in this novel physical activity.

Mary Kennard's *Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* includes two chapters on 'The Great Dress Question.' Kennard offers a number of practical suggestions, including how to make one's own cycling skirt,¹³⁹ yet ultimately she remains compliant with the late Victorian society in which she lives, and rejects the still controversial rational dress. She advises:

The female cyclist is wise to make concessions to public opinion [...] If it were the fashion in this country for ladies of good standing and position to wear knickerbockers, and if they could appear as freely in them as in France, without shocking the non-cycling portion of the community, then, no doubt much might be adduced in their favour. [...] The English are essentially a modest nation, and the male portion of the community are, as a rule, particular about their womenkind. Men like them to be feminine and lady-like in appearance, and more especially so, when they begin to intrude a little on what they have hitherto considered their province.¹⁴⁰

Here Kennard puts her finger on the real issue at hand: bicycles allowed women to 'intrude' on the male province of mobility. In response to this threat, a larger discourse established a domesticated, safe image of female cyclists by defining the clothes they were and were not permitted to wear. Kennard later emphasises that 'the wheel-woman of the upper class should do everything in her power to conciliate, and prove that she does not desire to rival man, but only to enjoy a delightful and exhilarating sport in a quiet, unobtrusive and ladylike fashion.'¹⁴¹ Clothing that accorded with the expectations of patriarchal society was one of the

138 'Array yourself becomingly.' *The Cycling World Illustrated* 29th April 1896: 19. Print.

139 Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists*, 39–54.

140 *Ibid.*, 44.

141 *Ibid.*, 52.

main means by which cycling women were constrained to adopt a heavily gendered version of mobility. Rather than empowering them, cycling could be used to deny women the physical comfort enjoyed by men while reinforcing their objectified role. Alongside discourses on acceptable cycle clothing for women, bicycle manufacturers adapted the vehicle itself to women's clothing in order to foster a respectable image of the activity. Nicolas Oddy has examined the precocious gendering of the bicycle, noting that the concept of differentiated men's and women's bicycles was established in the late nineteenth century and has persisted to the present day. This is in spite of the fact that the 'assumptions about women's clothing which were current a century ago [...] are now severely out of date if not completely irrelevant.'¹⁴² As we have seen, even at the time, assumptions about women's clothing were being radically questioned, and the fact that bicycles were designed to accommodate long, bulky skirts tells us much about the bicycle industry's reproduction of social norms.

The dropped frame marketed to women (and priests) was weaker and heavier than the standard diamond frame, a fact well recognised by the seasoned cyclist and novelist Mary Kennard. It is worth quoting her opinion on the subject at length, once again taken from her non-fiction *Guide Book for Lady Cyclists*:

A great many ladies prefer the dropped or rounded frame, which consists of one or two curved tubes. They are supposed to give more room for the dress, and beginners find them easier for mounting and dismounting. Otherwise it is hard to account for their preponderance. At this year's National Show, I was surprised at the number exhibited, and on enquiring the reason of several manufacturers, was informed that the frames were so constructed in compliance with the demand for them which had arisen in fashionable circles. In every instance, however, the makers deprecated the design, considering that, if extra comfort were gained, it was obtained at the expense of strength and rigidity. Now, if any lady once mounts a gentleman's machine, she will be

¹⁴² Nicholas Oddy, 'Bicycles', in *The Gendered Object*, ed. Pat Kirkham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 66. Oddy is here partly quoting an unpublished conference paper by Paul Rosen.

surprised at the ease with which she propels it in comparison with her own. It runs much more lightly. This, in great measure, is attributable to the diamond-shaped frame. The dropped frame is structurally weak, in spite of all the stays that have been devised to add to its support. It is also comparatively heavy.¹⁴³

Despite the mechanical superiority of the diamond frame, Kennard's observations demonstrate that the demand in 'fashionable circles' to keep women in skirts took precedence over considerations of efficiency. The weight and design of women's bicycles made them more difficult to ride as quickly as men's machines, encouraging women not to 'scorch' and to respect the feminine ideal of slow, graceful riding. Kennard admits, when discussing the dress question, that 'there is one point which the divided style of costume undoubtedly possesses; it enables the rider to ride a diamond-framed machine.'¹⁴⁴ In Kennard's fiction, female characters gladly cast off social conventions in order to ride their bicycles. Cynthia, for instance, describes how she 'loved wandering about alone, looking at sky and earth, not as a dressed-up puppet afraid of spoiling her clothes, but as an unconventional individual.'¹⁴⁵ When Cynthia becomes a cycling correspondent for a magazine, she tests out a light, high-g geared machine. Many readers' letters respond to her positive review, allowing Cynthia to discover 'that a very large section of the feminine element liked going a good pace, and being able to keep up with their husbands and brothers. In fact, they showed a considerable hankering after speed.'¹⁴⁶ In spite of certain women's equal desire for speedy, efficient and robust machines, the bicycle industry continued to produce ladies' models which mainly responded to the criterion of female modesty. The determination to keep women in long skirts led to the promotion of a model that refused women the ease with which men piloted their machines, and offered them a compromised and feminised vehicle which, incongruously, is

143 Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists*, 27.

144 *Ibid.*, 44.

145 Kennard, *The Golf Lunatic and His Cycling Wife*, 73.

146 *Ibid.*, 69.

still thought of as a 'ladies' bicycle' to the present day. Thus, even if cycling women gained a measure of equality with men, it should not be forgotten that some cyclists were more equal than others.

These discourses around clothing and the machine itself emerged alongside certain decorative, ladylike uses of the bicycle. Philip Gordon Mackintosh has carefully illustrated how a 'domesticating' and 'womanly' discourse was constructed around cycling in Canada at the turn of the century.¹⁴⁷ This was effected by such means as bicycle gymkhanas and parades, during which the machines and their riders were decorated with flowers, ribbons and banners, and various games were played (see Figure 12). Images and accounts of such events frequently recur in the British cycling press, especially in those publications aimed at women, such as *The Cycling World Illustrated*. While Mackintosh focuses on the class issue, portraying such events as manifestations of 'a bourgeois attempt to control the public use of the bicycle',¹⁴⁸ this discourse also had an important gender dimension. It promoted a purely decorative image of an object that had the potential to liberate both women and workers from their limited spheres of activity. Such ornamental use of the bicycle contrasts sharply with the masculine ideal of cycle racing and fast riding being heavily developed at this time.

While women's velocipede races had been organised in Paris as early as 1868, female competitive cycling was a marginalised, taboo or ridiculed activity in both France and the UK, and women were strongly sanctioned against fast riding in general. As Claire Simpson observes, women's cycle racing at the turn of century was often used as humorous entertainment or a publicity stunt, giving men the opportunity to enjoy the sight of scantily-clad women. Simpson records how 'women's races were routinely staged between acts at the

147 Mackintosh, 'A Bourgeois Geography of Domestic Bicycling.'

148 *Ibid.*, 144.

theatre and music hall, or on the programmes of freak shows, commercial advertising shows, acrobatics exhibitions and so forth.’¹⁴⁹ Grant Allen’s heroine Lois Cayley is hired as a racing cyclist purely due to the selling power of her gender and physical appearance, as the inventor frankly admits in his strangely transcribed American accent: ‘ef a female wins, it makes success all the more striking and con-spicuous. The world to-day is ruled by advertizement.’¹⁵⁰ He later emphasises ‘It ain’t only your skill, you see [...] It’s your personal attractiveness as well that I go upon.’¹⁵¹ Moreover, even when used as a means of locomotion rather than a decorative object, the political meaning attached to the activity could be heavily circumscribed by specific groups. For instance, Linda Walker notes that the Conservative Party established a cycling group for women in the 1890s called the Primrose Cycling Corps. Walker quotes the Duke of Malborough, who noted that ‘if women were out canvassing for the Conservative Party in the 1895 election, we can safely assume that by then the bicycle had become an acceptable expression of femininity.’¹⁵² When mobilised by the party ruling the country at the time, one which held an ambivalent attitude to women’s suffrage and promoted a domestic view of women’s responsibilities, the revolutionary potential of cycling could indeed be radically curtailed.

This consideration of the social context allows us to return anew to some of the literature examined in the previous section, in order to examine how authors attempted to defuse the threat of emancipated, cycling women. In contrast to the above positive images of female friendships offered by Kennard and L. T. Meade, the male authors in our corpus more

149 Claire S. Simpson, ‘Capitalising on Curiosity: Women’s Professional Cycle Racing in the Late-Nineteenth Century’, in *Cycling and Society*, ed. Dave Horton, Paul Rosen, and Peter Cox (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 51.

150 Allen, *Miss Cayley’s Adventures*, 50.

151 *Ibid.*, 51.

152 Linda Walker, ‘Party Political Women: A Comparative Study of Liberal Women and the Primrose League, 1890-1914’, in *Equal or Different: Women’s Politics, 1800-1914*, ed. Jane Rendall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 179.

often portray antagonistic relationships between female cyclists and other women. A case in point is the relationship between Jessie and her stepmother Mrs Milton in Wells's *The Wheels of Chance*. When the novel's protagonist Hoopdriver first encounters her, Jessie has pedalled away from her stepmother's stifling home and is travelling around the south of England in order 'to come out into the world, to be a human being – not a thing in a hutch' (WC 99). Yet the home she has fled is that of an independent widow, and a New Woman novelist to boot. Jessie's desire for freedom, the novel makes clear, emerged from her reading of the type of literature her stepmother produces. 'Her motives are bookish', the narrator affirms, 'written by a haphazard syndicate of authors, novelists, biographers, on her white inexperience' (WC 66). Yet her stepmother claims that her books have been 'misunderstood, misapplied' by young women such as Jessie, who take their message too literally (WC 139). 'I want people to *think* as I recommend, not to *do* as I recommend,' Mrs Milton maintains, arguing that unlike her wayward stepdaughter, the heroine of her most famous novel 'never flaunted her freedom – on a bicycle, in country places' (WC 140). The dispute between Jessie and her stepmother suggests that even those women who claim to be working for emancipation are unable to agree on the degrees and forms of freedom women should be accorded. In Wells's novel the bicycle thus functions as a symbol of the tension between the theoretical and practical application of women's liberation.

A similar clash between the opinions of a cyclist and those of women with a more traditional outlook occurs in Arthur Conan Doyle's *Beyond the City* (1891). The boisterous widow Mrs Westmacott is an identikit New Woman: she smokes, drinks stout, and distributes posters for meetings on the enfranchisement of woman from her tandem tricycle (piloted along with her compliant nephew). Her widower neighbour Mr Walker admires her, and

professes to share her opinions on the equality of the sexes. Yet when his more conservative daughters fear he is planning to propose to Mrs Westmacott, they devise a cunning plan to prevent the union, which they think would be doomed to failure. These once demure young women begin to conduct science experiments, think up career plans, dress in rational costume, smoke and hold dinner parties with young men. On witnessing this transformation in his darling daughters, their father is appalled. On seeing he is upset, Mrs Westmacott advises cycling as a calmant ('You should come with me for a ten-mile spin upon the tandem'),¹⁵³ before firmly reminding him that 'You must live up to your principles – you must give your daughters the same liberty as you advocate for other women.'¹⁵⁴ Yet Mr Walker instead abandons the idea of proposing to Mrs Westmacott, ordering his daughters to 'forget these odious notions which you have imbibed [...] dress and act as you used to do before ever you saw this woman.'¹⁵⁵ Even Mrs Westmacott, who saw through the sisters' ruse, admits to them after they have given up their act that 'really I think I like you better as you are.'¹⁵⁶ Like Wells, Doyle stages a confrontation between those who profess a belief in gender equality and those who put it into action, with the female cyclist clearly designating the latter category. The conclusion that both authors draw is that women's liberation cannot work in practice, perhaps because society at large is not yet ready for it, or perhaps because people will never agree on the degrees of freedom women should enjoy.

To return to *The Wheels of Chance*, Jessie's attempt to liberate herself is initially portrayed as an admirable undertaking, yet the narrative effectively functions to disqualify her bid for freedom. Jessie's confident flight from the villas of Surbiton mirrors the somewhat

¹⁵³ Doyle, *Beyond the City*, 100.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

more hesitant ‘Riding Forth of Mr Hoopdriver’ a few chapters earlier, and her desire to create a new identity for herself as a liberated woman clearly parallels Hoopdriver’s will to reinvent himself beyond class divisions. The draper goes on a cycling holiday in order to refuse ‘being put in the cage’ (WC 12), a phrase that foreshadows Jessie’s later description of her condition of ‘a thing in a hutch’ (WC 99). However, Wells finally favours Hoopdriver’s struggle for class equality over Jessie’s attempt to emancipate herself. Jessie and Hoopdriver are only able to remain on the run from Mrs Milton and her various male admirers as long as their funds last. This realisation comes as a surprise to the young woman: “‘Money!’ said Jessie. “Is it possible - ? Surely! Conventionality! May only people of assured means Live their own Lives? What a curious light - !”’ (WC 178). As Lena Wanggren has pointed out, the capitalisation of Jessie’s phrases stresses her perceived naivety: ‘Like the capitalization of the initial letters of New Woman, the initial capital letters here [...] signify these as concepts, abstract ideas, more than concrete objects and occupations.’¹⁵⁷ The reader is already under the impression that Jessie’s ideas of freedom are vague and ill informed, but her aspirations are dealt the final death-blow by the following admission in the closing pages of the novel, during her upbraiding by her stepmother, a clergyman and a former teacher. ‘Women write in books about being free, and living our own life, and all that kind of thing,’ Jessie remarks, but she concludes ‘No one is free, free even from working for a living, unless at the expense of someone else. I did not think of that’ (WC 188).

As Simon J. James remarks, Wells’s revisions to *The Wheels of Chance* in 1901 and 1925 silence Jessie’s proto-Woolfian plea for female equality.¹⁵⁸ Whereas in the original 1896

157 Lena Wanggren, ‘The Freedom Machine: The New Woman and the Bicycle’, in *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940*, ed. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew Humphries (London: Palgrave, 2015), 132.

158 James, ‘Fin-de-Cycle: Romance and the Real in *The Wheels of Chance*’, 43.

edition Jessie only agrees to return home on her stepmother's acceptance of certain demands – 'I want a room of my own, what books I need to read, to be free to go out by myself alone'¹⁵⁹ – in the final cut she silences her appeal and plainly states that economic realities come before considerations of gender equality. Similarly, in Wells's dramatic adaptation of his novel *Hoopdriver's Holiday* (1904), Jessie manages to escape her stepmother and go live with a more liberal aunt, yet Hoopdriver gets the final word, making a lengthy closing speech about class inequalities.¹⁶⁰ In this tale Wells displays a clear interest in the feminist cause, but his class focus effectively establishes a hierarchy in which patriarchy may only be overthrown after capitalism, rather than reflecting on the ways in which the two struggles might converge. Thus, while appearing to recognise and integrate contemporary women's demands for equality in the figure of the cyclist Jessie, Wells's cycling novella (especially in the revised version from 1901) functions to portray the futility of her appeal for liberty.

In George Gissing's story 'A Daughter of the Lodge' (1901), the bicycle is also mobilised as a means to point to the supremacy of the class struggle over gender considerations. When the women's rights campaigner May Rockett returns to visit her parents, the keepers of the lodge for the aristocratic Shale family, her class difference from the Shales' daughter Hilda is accentuated by the latter's possession of a bicycle. 'It's a pity the machines can't be sold cheaper',¹⁶¹ Hilda remarks ironically, in order to draw attention to May's inferior class at a social gathering where one of the main topics is women's emancipation. May, who 'would have long ago bought a bicycle had she been able to afford it',¹⁶² leaves the gathering angrily and, on reaching home at the same time as Hilda, refuses to

159 H. G. Wells, *The Wheels of Chance, A Bicycling Idyll* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), chap. 39.

160 H. G. Wells, *Hoopdriver's Holiday* [1904] ed. Michael Timko (Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University, 1964); see also Simon J. James, *Maps of Utopia: H. G. Wells, Modernity and the End of Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

161 George Gissing, *The House of Cobwebs, and Other Stories* (London: A. Constable, 1906), 183.

162 *Ibid.*

open the gate for the upper class cyclist. This lack of respect for her parents' employers leads to a crisis in which the Rocketts are almost evicted, but May's grovelling apology saves them from disaster at the last minute. Gissing's tale, like that of his contemporaries Wells and Doyle, complicates the bicycle's role in emancipating women. In common with Wells, Gissing suggests that considerations of class are paramount. Both May and Hilda are battling for gender equality, yet their diverging classes prevent them from co-operating, and the bicycle acts as an outward symbol of the antagonism between them. It is interesting to recall here that in Wells's first novel *The Time Machine* (1895), the cyclist-like Time Traveller travels to a nearly genderless future; where, however, class divisions have become tragically salient. 'In costume, and in all the differences of texture and bearing that now mark the sexes from each other, these people of the future were alike,'¹⁶³ the Time Traveller remarks of the idle Eloi, before he discovers they are both looked after and preyed on by the subterranean worker Morlocks. It appears that for authors such as Wells and Gissing, sexual inequality would organically disappear or resolve itself in the future, while the class struggle must be actively fought in order to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

While cycling allowed women a certain degree of freedom, discourses around the activity were largely shaped by the patriarchal society in which these newly mobile women lived. A focus on fashion, the design of the 'ladies' frame', vehement medical debates and the promotion of certain ornamental interpretations of women's cycling all amounted to the exclusion of women from the full benefits of this levelling form of transport. In literature, the bicycle became a symbol of women who went 'too far' in their demand for equality; cyclists like Jessie became stereotypes of the overly liberated woman, who eventually returned to the fold of society and matrimony with their tails between their legs.

¹⁶³ Wells, *The Time Machine*, 35.

2.2.3 Women in the public sphere in Dorothy Richardson's *The Tunnel*

To conclude this section, I turn to Dorothy Richardson's *The Tunnel* (1919) in order to take a closer look at the specific importance of the bicycle as a feminist tool. The passages on cycling in this modernist novel offer a more nuanced view than that presented in popular fiction of the 1890s, allowing us to reflect on the alternatively liberating and inhibiting potential of the activity. Miriam faces many obstacles during her apprenticeship of cycling, yet her first solo bicycle ride allows her to begin to break down the barriers between inside and outside, self and other, male and female. This leads to a radically altered view of gender relations. As Elisabeth Bronfen notes, 'Frequently, it is only in solitude that Miriam is able to experience her own aliveness as well as her own reality',¹⁶⁴ and the solitary activity of riding provides the protagonist with the right combination of introspection and external engagement needed to feel present in the world. In cycling, Miriam discovers a practical means of escaping the traditional domesticated sphere of female activity. She performs a renewed relationship to public spaces, carving out a place for herself beyond the strictly defined boundaries of the home.

Set in the 1890s, *The Tunnel* follows the life of 21-year-old dental secretary Miriam, who receives a gift of two cycling lessons from an upper class acquaintance, Miss Szigmondy. The learning process is difficult; Miriam's first lesson leaves her feeling 'shamed and helpless' (TL 144), yet she is determined to master the skill, as she is convinced it will utterly change her life. Remembering her teacher's demonstration, she reflects:

¹⁶⁴ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, trans. Victoria Appelbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 130.

To be able to go down the quiet street and on into the squares – on a bicycle... I must learn somehow to get my balance. To go along, like in that moment when he took his hands off the handle-bars, in knickers and a short skirt and all the summer to come... Everything shone with a greater intensity. Friends and thought and work were nothing compared to being able to ride alone, balanced, going along through the air. (TL 146)

This passage reveals how Miriam's ambition to ride a bicycle is founded on a desire for a novel sensory experience, freedom of movement, comfortable clothing, agency and solitude. The infinitives which open the first two sentences and the use of ellipsis between one reflection and the next draw attention to the dreamlike, virtual nature of Miriam's thoughts, which represent an idealised future rather than present reality. The accumulative nature of the phrases describing cycling reflect the enthusiasm of the protagonist, for whom cycling seems to open the door to a new life. The patriarchal society which she inhabits does not make the learning process easy for her, however; after her humiliating experience at the cycling school, her male work colleagues make patronising remarks about her attempts to ride a bicycle: "‘You'll never learn cycling like *that*," said Mr Leyton, with the superior chuckle of the owner of a secret' (TL 171). These men subsequently offer her ineffectual lessons that merely provide pretexts for showing off their own speed and skill, further humiliating the apprentice cyclist.

During the passages recounting Miriam's difficult apprenticeship of cycling, and just before her first lengthy bicycle ride, the heroine reflects bitterly on male hegemony, which limits women to their reproductive function while treating them as inferior 'half-human[s].' She imagines that such a situation could only be resolved 'If, by one thought, all the men in the world could be stopped, shaken and slapped' (TL 220), or alternatively if 'all women [agreed] to commit suicide' (TL 221). In a society whose canon is dominated by men, her literary aspirations seem to be in vain; she reflects that: 'Books were poisoned. Art. All the

achievements of men were poisoned at the root [...] Life is poisoned, for women, at the very source' (TL 222). Despite her intelligence, curiosity and keen desire to write, Miriam feels alienated when attempting to engage with scientific or literary circles, since they are domains on which patriarchy has left an indelible mark, and in which she feels her own voice as a woman is purposefully marginalised. Yet the chapter comes to a somewhat less gloomy conclusion, as Miriam reflects 'I've made all sorts of plans for the holidays' (TL 223). As it turns out, these plans involve cycling.

Cycling initially seems at risk of becoming one of these 'achievements of men', giving men freedom of movement while leaving Miriam feeling 'shamed and helpless' in front of her male colleagues. Yet Miriam continues to recognise the potential of the mobility that she is gradually acquiring, remarking to her forward-thinking female friends Jan and Mag: 'To be able to bicycle would make life utterly different; on a bicycle you feel a different person; nothing can come near you, you forget who you are. Aren't you glad you are alive today, when all these things are happening?' (TL 149). By gradually appropriating the activity, she makes inroads on a masculine domain, becoming 'a different person' in the process. This prefigures her literary ambition which gradually takes shape and affirms itself throughout the *Pilgrimage* series. As we saw in the previous two sections, female cyclists' clothing could be both a source of emancipation and an opportunity to reinforce traditional views of femininity. The bicycle permits a certain liberation from the dictates of fashion, as it allows Miriam an excuse to choose practical clothing and exclaim to her friends Jan and Mag 'I can't face doing my hair and brushing skirts and keeping more or less in fashion' (TL 149). She goes on to remark on the subject of clothing: 'But aren't clothes awful, anyhow? I've been four and eleven on my knickers and I can't possibly get a skirt till next year if then, or

afford to hire a machine' (TL 150). Miriam's reflection draws attention to the difficult financial choices faced by women who earned their own living. Miriam professes a disregard for stylishness, yet she admits that the necessary expense of clothes prevents her from spending her money in other ways, such as hiring a bicycle. Jan and Mag, who also work, but are better off than Miriam, are able to advise:

Why don't you ask them to raise your salary? [...] If I were you I should tell them. I should say "Gentlemen – I wish for a skirt and a bicycle." [...] *They* would benefit by your improved health and spirits. Jan and I are new women since we have learned riding. *I* thinking of telling the governor I must have a rise to meet the increased demands of my appetite. (TL 151)¹⁶⁵

Miriam's friends' use of the term 'new women' highlights the precocious association of this figure with the bicycle, and they clearly recognise the physical, mental and social benefits that cycling brings for women. Yet Miriam faces not only social ridicule but economic difficulties in acquiring a machine and the clothing associated with it. These barriers to adopting this new form of transport are significant, as they reflect the hesitancy of society at large to encourage women and the lower classes to adopt this freeing means of transport.

When Miriam finally sets off from London by bicycle, she feels 'so strong riding through London, everything dropping away, nothing to think of; off and free, the holiday ahead, nothing but lovely, lonely freedom all round one' (TL 224). This exploration beyond London's limits corresponds to the spatial structure of the text identified by Elisabeth Bronfen, who argues that Miriam constantly seeks a balance between interior and exterior spaces, often respectively represented as her room and the various 'islands' to which she journeys.¹⁶⁶ The movement beyond the privileged space of her room in London represents an outward impulse by means of which Miriam tries to come to a closer understanding of her

¹⁶⁵ Author's italics.

¹⁶⁶ Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory*, 27.

relation to other people and places. The beginning of her cycle ride acts as a counterfoil to the sentiment of alienation expressed in the ‘poisoned at the root’ passage, just before the bicycle ride, as Miriam establishes a frank and easy contact with the spaces and people around her. Her first remark to a fellow cyclist, ‘Is this Reading?’ (a question to which she already knows the answer), gives her a rare sense of communion with others: ‘If she had yelled Have you got a *soul*, it would have been just the same. If everyone were on bicycles all the time you could talk to everybody, all the time, about anything...’ (TL 230).¹⁶⁷ The rhetorical nature of Miriam’s real and imagined questions suggests that she has gained a clear awareness of the existence of her fellow cyclist’s soul, which leads her to formulate a rare expression of a belief in frank communication between people. The day’s ride gives her a keener sense of the communion between herself, others and the objects surrounding her, a topic I examine at greater length in Chapter 3. As Pamela Thurschwell notes, physical or spiritual communion between people was a question that preoccupied *fin-de-siècle* thought. This was given impetus both by technological progress and a growing interest in the occult, since ‘talking to the dead and talking on the phone both hold out the promise of previously unimaginable contact between people.’¹⁶⁸ The bicycle, like the telephone, was a technology that made possible this previously unimaginable contact, notably between strangers of different genders and social classes. Here Miriam mobilises the bicycle as a levelling device, one that makes possible a free and frank exchange between people.

Despite her joyous exchange with the other cyclist early in the morning, and her confident belief in an egalitarian community of cyclists, Miriam panics when she comes across a lone pedestrian on a country road in the twilight. The presence of this man appears as

¹⁶⁷ Author’s italics.

¹⁶⁸ Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

a grim necessity, a reality check after a joyous day of freedom: ‘She recognized the figure the instant she saw it. It was as if she had been riding the whole day to meet it. Completely forgotten, it had been all the time at the edge of the zest of her ride’ (TL 231). The sight of the man brings Miriam crashing back to earth and the patriarchal society she inhabits, where she is first and foremost a young woman, perceived as vulnerable, and expected to conform to certain behavioural codes. Miriam’s vision becomes fixed on this Other while her hearing remains attuned to her bicycle – ‘there was no sound of anything coming along; nothing but the squeak squeak of her gear-case’ (TL 232). In the midst of her panicked imaginings about the homicidal intentions of the man, the elliptical statement ‘... he is myself... ’ (TL 232) hints at the subjective significance of this destabilising encounter. She rides past him, ‘her eyes fixed on the far-off spaces of the world she used to know’ (TL 232). By forcing her vision into the distance, she attempts to negate her involvement in the scene in which she has found herself. After having experienced a sense of intimate communion with her surroundings, Miriam is not yet ready to enact ‘a supernatural erotics of bodily transmission’ with another human being, to borrow Thurschwell’s phrase.¹⁶⁹ Up close, Miriam realises the man is drunk and talking to himself and she passes him without incident. She instantly upbraids herself for her fear, which she attributes to her gender, reflecting that ‘A man would not have been afraid’ (TL 232). This intense yet anti-climactic encounter with the Other gains its intensity and meaning from the male gaze to which the young woman is subjected. The bicycle at once places Miriam in a hostile situation and provides her with the means to travel through it unmolested, in a manner recalling various similar scenes explored earlier in this chapter. Although Miriam has gained insight into a new way of interacting with her surroundings, it is unclear whether she has mastered being present to others, especially when

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

the Other is male.

In Marlborough, where a flat tyre obliges Miriam to stop, she is subjected to the male customers' incredulous looks, questions and comments such as 'Good Lord – it's a woman.' and 'You don't think of riding up over the downs at this time of night?' (TL 234). Her alienation from men intensifies with this second unpleasant experience. She attributes the men's 'wicked[ness]' to their immobility, their rootedness in a fixed context, thinking: 'Marlborough was all round them all the time', thus pointing to the value of her own insight-giving mobility (TL 234). Miriam's defiant response to their questions, 'Oh yes I do', conveys her sentiment of superiority, her feeling of having gained access to a realm of which these rustic, static men have no understanding. Interestingly, this exchange occurs as 'She stood squarely in front of the grating' of a telegram booth (TL 234). The identities of her antagonists merge with the process of filling out the telegraph that will allow her to communicate with people far away, just as her bicycle allows her to move between previously distant places: 'The people became angrily gliding forms [...] the man began thoughtfully ticking off the words' (TL 234). The narrative suggests that she is writing the message (presumably to her sister, informing her she will be late) on a paper form as these angry human forms float in her head. As Pamela Thurschwell argues, the 'externalizing impetus of new communication technologies'¹⁷⁰ at the turn of the century encouraged new forms of intimacy with strangers. The fact that these unpleasant men preoccupy Miriam's thoughts as she writes a short message to someone many miles away reveals a crucial modernist concern with the effect of technologies such as the telegram and the bicycle on our relations with each other. Yet the two technologies operate in opposite directions here: the bicycle allows her to establish contact with the strangers in Marlborough, while the telegram

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

transports her attention away from the present scene by creating virtual contact with her sister. After leaving the shop, a sudden change of heart leads Miriam to turn back and change her telegram. She decides that the puncture is ‘the loveliest thing that could have happened’ and opts to stay the night in a hotel, thus making ‘the day [...] complete, from morning to night’ (TL 235). As we saw in the analysis of Wells’s *Wheels of Chance* in Chapter 1, it is thanks to the machine’s dysfunction that the character gains insight and access to a deeper realm of meaning or experience. For Miriam, staying a night alone in an unknown town is the ultimate expression of her new-found freedom as a young woman, and one that she could not have hoped for without both the bicycle and its mechanical failure, since she was expected at her sister’s house that night.

The sequences recounting Miriam’s discovery of cycling and her joyous first bicycle ride in *The Tunnel* represent an epiphanic moment of insight for the young woman. The shame and humiliation she undergoes both when learning to ride and during her long trip to Marlborough highlight patriarchal society’s reluctance to allow women access to this liberating form of transport. Yet Miriam’s will to appropriate the activity in the face of ridicule emphasises the potential of the technology to open up a new space for women in the public sphere, beyond the traditional, domestic view of women’s responsibilities. By adopting cycling Miriam occupies a liminal position, recalling her earlier description of herself as ‘somehow between two worlds, neither quite sheltered, nor quite free...’ (TL 167). Miriam reflects during her ride ‘If you went on, it was alright [...] That cyclist knew, as long as he was on his bicycle [...] Men can always get away. I am going to lead a man’s life, always getting away’ (TL 230). Yet while Miriam strives to be as independent and mobile as a man, she is aware that she has to find her own unique means of being present in the world. Cycling

is an activity by means of which ‘Miriam synthesises the polarity between the sexes by assuming a third position, in between’,¹⁷¹ to borrow Bronfen’s terms. Throughout *Pilgrimage*, Miriam struggles to find a genuine means of female presence and expression that avoids simply mimicking masculine behaviour and speech, a characteristic she resents in her liberated friends Jan and Mag. As Donna Haraway argues, ‘we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos.’¹⁷² By collaborating closely with a machine, Miriam explores fresh means of formulating an individual identity beyond established boundaries. The alternation of cycling scenes with Miriam’s bitter reflections on men’s domination of intellectual life functions to present the bicycle as a possible antidote to this state of affairs. Miriam’s apprenticeship and appropriation of cycling allow her to find a genuine place and voice in society, vividly prefiguring her emerging vocation as a writer.

171 Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson’s Art of Memory*, 134.

172 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 173.

2.3 Albertine the Cyclist: A Queer Feminist Bicycle Ride through Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*.¹⁷³

We have thus far been examining the bicycle's interaction with issues of class and gender principally in a British context. I now propose to turn to French literature in order to examine the bicycle's crucial role in allowing its users to transgress social and sexual boundaries and formulate new identities. The previous section showed how problematic it is to view the bicycle purely as a 'freedom machine' for women, as patriarchal society formulated a heavily gendered interpretation of the activity, continuing to circumscribe women to a restrictive, domestic role. In examining Proust's use of the bicycle, I extend the themes Richardson engages with in order to explore what was perhaps the bicycle's most important interaction with questions of gender and class: its blurring of the distinctions between sexes and social groups. As we have seen throughout this chapter, the clothes cyclists wore and the attitudes they adopted as a result of contact with this new technology boldly declared that gender and class were not fixed states, but fluctuating social constructions.

The period of the bicycle boom in France corresponds chronologically with the events of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (published 1913-1927). The seven novels are set in the time period spanning c.1879 to 1919, and given Proust's commitment to reviving every detail of a lost world, it comes as little surprise that the then hugely popular machine features in his universe.¹⁷⁴ The bicycle makes its appearance towards the end of the second volume, *À*

¹⁷³ An earlier version of this section was originally published as a chapter in Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea, eds., *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 116–35.

¹⁷⁴ On the history of bicycling in turn-of-the-century France see Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1986); Christopher Thompson, 'The Third Republic On Wheels: A Social, Cultural, and Political History of Bicycling in France from the Nineteenth Century to World War II' (PhD thesis, New York University, 1997).

l'ombre de jeunes filles en fleurs (1919), pushed along the beach by the young woman who will remain central to much of the rest of the work, Albertine. This emblematic scene has been examined by several critics, but until now little attention has been given to subsequent appearances of cyclists, notably in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (1921-22), *La Prisonnière* (1923) and *Albertine disparue* (1925).¹⁷⁵ By following the bicycle's complex itinerary through the universe of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, I unravel the machine's rich contribution to the ever-shifting portrait of the novel's heroine, a woman who dares to challenge the strict moral codes of bourgeois society. Albertine's bicycle, I argue, is mobilised in order to trace the outlines of a radical new social order, one which would not only embrace new gender and class identities, but also subversive sexual orientations.

2.3.1 The apparition of a cyclist

As was the case in Great Britain, the United States and elsewhere, the bicycle played an important role in the struggle of early French feminists, who saw in it both the symbolic and the actual means to achieving freedom in clothing, movement and lifestyle. Yet in the politically and socially strained context of *fin-de-siècle* France, many saw the rapidly evolving position of women as a sign of social decay, with traditional family and societal values being dangerously eroded. Detractors of the bicycle railed against women's newly-discovered freedom to roam, deplored their adoption of the bloomers (*culottes*) required to ride the machine comfortably, and published articles on the supposed health dangers posed to

175 Anne-Marie Clais, 'Portrait de femmes en cyclistes ou l'invention du féminin pluriel', *Les cahiers de médiologie* 5, no. 1 (1998): 69–79; Siân Reynolds, 'Albertine's Bicycle, or: Women and French Identity during the Belle Epoque', *Literature & History* 10, no. 1 (April 2001); an important exception is Agnès Barathieu, *Les mobiles de Marcel Proust: une sémantique du déplacement* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2002). This volume provides a rich discussion of bicycles in Proust's work and my research is much indebted to it.

women cyclists, claiming for example that bicycle saddles afforded women masturbatory pleasures or reduced their fertility.¹⁷⁶ In a society that still considered the main function of women to be reproductive, female cycling habits were partly held responsible for the country's falling birth rate, which dropped by 27.4% in the period between 1870 and 1914.¹⁷⁷ Theories of social degeneration (*dégénérescence*), influenced by social Darwinism and eugenics, helped spread the fear that the decadent bourgeois nation was on the decline.¹⁷⁸ As Christopher Thompson and Fiona Ratkoff have convincingly argued, the panic around degeneration 's'est focalisée sur la femme cycliste',¹⁷⁹ an emblematic figure whose unexpected arrival in urban and rural France was indeed a striking symbol of the new zeitgeist.

This loaded social symbolism of cycling for women is effectively conveyed in the memorable scene in which Albertine and her friends make their first appearance in *À l'ombre de jeunes filles en fleurs*. There is no doubt in Proust's young narrator's mind, as he stands before the Grand Hôtel in the stylish French seaside resort of Balbec, that the young women he suddenly beholds striding across the beach are an entirely unknown and fascinating phenomenon. In this masterful sequence resembling an impressionist painting, the group first appears as a moving blur and gradually acquires detail as the narrative progresses, as though the viewer were slowly stepping back from a canvas. One of the first observations the narrator makes about the indistinct group is that 'Une de ces inconnues poussait devant elle, de la main, sa bicyclette.'¹⁸⁰ The anonymous cyclist is Albertine, and it is her bicycle which

176 See, for example Ludovic O'Followell, *Bicyclette et organes génitaux*. (Paris: Baillière, 1900), 63–64.

177 Thompson and Ratkoff, 'Un troisième sexe?', 13.

178 See Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 35–59; Christopher Thompson, 'Regeneration, Dégénérescence, and the Medical Debate about Bicycling in Fin-de-Siècle France,' in *Sport et Santé Dans L'histoire/ Sport and Health in History* (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 1999), 339–46.

179 'became focused on the female cyclist.' Thompson and Ratkoff, 'Un troisième sexe?', 10.

180 'One of these strangers was pushing in front of her, with one hand, her bicycle.' Marcel Proust, *À la*

will repeatedly be used as a means to identify her, until her name is learned some time later. As Marie-Agnès Barathieu notes in her excellent study of the semantics of journeys in *La Recherche*, Proust constitutes ‘un métalangage autour et à partir de la bicyclette’ in the characterisation of Albertine.¹⁸¹ The bicycle stands defiantly at the end of the first phrase describing the protagonist, and will return in subsequent layers added to her portrait. As we shall see, her unconventional clothing, rough language and robust body are all connected to her initial identity as a cyclist.

The young women make their dramatic entry at the moment of the day when the bourgeois hotel guests are taking their daily stroll on the beach, and the awkward gestures of the latter (described as ‘peu harmonieuses’) could not stand in greater contrast to the graceful, purposeful movement of the youthful ‘bande de mouettes’ clothed in their ‘tenue spéciale’ designed for playing sports.¹⁸² These women are clearly at ease in their ‘beaux corps aux belles jambes, aux belles hanches, aux visages sains et reposés, avec un air d’agilité et de ruse’ as they move effortlessly across the beach.¹⁸³ Although they are walking, their bold, almost mechanised movements recall those of speedy cyclists: rather than avoiding obstacles, ‘elles [...] forçaient les personnes arrêtées à s’écarter ainsi que sur le passage d’une machine.’¹⁸⁴ The young women move much more quickly than the stuffy bourgeois walkers, and one of them even leaps over a terrified old man (‘un vieillard épouvanté’) as he sits on his deckchair.¹⁸⁵ The transfixed narrator overhears the loud slang emitted by the group: ‘des

recherche du temps perdu II. À l’ombre de jeunes filles en fleurs. Le côté de Guermantes. Esquisses. (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 146.

181 ‘a metalanguage around and starting from the bicycle.’ Barathieu, *Les mobiles de Marcel Proust*, 174.

182 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 146–47. ‘unharmonious’; ‘flock of seagulls’; ‘special outfits.’

183 *Ibid.*, 149. ‘beautiful bodies with beautiful legs, beautiful hips, healthy and calm faces, which looked agile and clever.’

184 *Ibid.* ‘They [...] forced stationary people to move aside as though a machine were advancing’.

185 *Ibid.*, 150. ‘horried old man’; for some contemporary portraits of and reactions to vélodépédards, see Pierre Thieset and Quentin Thomasset, *Les bienfaits de la vélocipédie: anthologie* (Vierzon: le Pas de côté, 2013), 161–65.

termes d'argot si voyous et criés si fort... (parmi lesquelles je distinguai cependant la phrase fâcheuse de “vivre sa vie”).¹⁸⁶ This battle-cry of young womanhood instantly convinces the narrator that these women must have an even deeper involvement in the world of cycling than he had previously imagined. Abandoning the hypothesis that they are of a bourgeois background, he remarks, ‘je conclus plutôt que toutes ces filles appartenaient à la population qui fréquente les vélodromes, et devaient être les très jeunes maîtresses de coureurs cyclistes.’¹⁸⁷ Thompson and Weber both point out that French cycling clubs and velodromes were increasingly frequented by the working class in the 1890s,¹⁸⁸ the narrator thus connects them with the social class at the polar opposite from his own, adding to his fascination for these strange creatures. As it turns out, however, these young women belong to ‘une petite bourgeoisie fort riche, du monde de l’industrie et des affaires.’¹⁸⁹ This increasingly wealthy middle class sought to mimic the habits of the aristocracy, thus explaining the young women’s presence in the chic resort of Balbec.¹⁹⁰ Yet their irreverent behaviour as they cross the beach implies an audacious challenge rather than conformity to the dominant social hierarchy. Their erroneous association with working-class racing cyclists establishes them as radical, subversive elements in a carefully guarded social reality.

This memorable sequence, central to the rest of the work since it introduces Albertine, provides a compelling portrait of the changes being wrought in contemporary French society, and it is fitting that Proust should place ‘la jeune fille à la bicyclette’ at its centre.¹⁹¹ Siân

186 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 151. ‘slang words which were so uncouth and cried so loudly... (amongst which I nonetheless made out the unpleasant phrase “live my own life”).’

187 *Ibid.* ‘I concluded rather that all these young women belonged to the population which frequents velodromes, and must be the very young mistresses of racing cyclists.’

188 See Thompson and Ratkoff, ‘Un troisième sexe?’, 32; Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle*, 200.

189 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 200. ‘the very wealthy petite bourgeoisie, from the world of business and industry.’

190 For a fascinating discussion of the social significance of bourgeois leisure and sports, with consideration of *La Recherche*, see Alain Corbin, ed., *L’avènement des loisirs: 1850-1960* (Paris: Aubier, 1995).

191 *Ibid.*, 186. ‘the young woman with the bicycle.’

Reynolds points to the British affectations in the speech and mannerisms of Albertine and her friends to argue that the New Woman was chiefly a cultural construct in the US and Great Britain, maintaining that attempts to import her to France were forced and unsuccessful.¹⁹² However, I would argue that such behaviour was typical of the climate of Anglomania in *fin-de-siècle* France, present throughout *La Recherche*, and does not necessarily imply that the French only inherited a watered-down version of feminism. Albertine's bicycle, pushed in front of the group, acts as a banner announcing the birth of a new society. Françoise Gaillard points out that 'la jeune fille à bicyclette est une force qui va, et qui ne bouscule pas seulement des estivants en promenade, mais des barrières sociales, des codes mondains, des rapports générationnels.'¹⁹³ Through their daring behaviour, dress and language, the figures on the beach produce their own social space ('se font un espace social en tant que filles et en tant que jeunes'¹⁹⁴) and provide a triumphant portrait of *la femme nouvelle*, a figure alternatively respected or reviled but in all events recognised as an important presence in turn-of-the-century France.

While certain contemporary commentators held that the bicycle contributed to social degeneration through its adverse effects on fertility and by facilitating women's freedom of movement, others argued that this new technology could play an important role in the regeneration of the declining nation through physical activity. Dr. Juste Lucas-Championnière argued that 'La bicyclette, c'est l'avènement de la femme aux exercices du corps; et la pratique des exercices du corps pour la femme, c'est pour l'avenir la régénération de la part de la nation appelée fatalement à dégénérer.'¹⁹⁵ The supreme feats of physical endurance

¹⁹² Reynolds, 'Albertine's Bicycle', 36.

¹⁹³ Françoise Gaillard, 'A l'ombre des jeunes filles en vélo ou l'invention de la jeunesse', *Les cahiers de médiologie* 5, no. 1 (1998): 84. 'the young woman with the bicycle is an unstoppable force that not only shakes up strolling holidaymakers, but also social barriers, cultural codes and generational relations.'

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 'carve out a social space for themselves as women and as young people.'

¹⁹⁵ Juste Lucas-Championnière, *La Bicyclette* (Paris: L. Chailley, 1894), 47. 'The bicycle represents women's

accomplished by early racing cyclists even led some to imagine that a new race of super humans would result from the invention of the bicycle, as we shall see in the analysis of Alfred Jarry's novel *Le Surmâle* in Chapter 3. Though Albertine does not win a ten thousand mile race against a steam train like Jarry's hero, she boasts she could ride to the races at la Sogne three times faster than the tram.¹⁹⁶ In a rare manifestation of physical vigour, even the sickly narrator finds the energy to accompany the young women on their bicycling day trips.¹⁹⁷ Thus, while presenting a challenge to conservative bourgeois society, Albertine and her friends also reflect the contemporary view that physical exercise and greater independence for women were part of the solution to preventing the decline of the privileged social classes.¹⁹⁸

2.3.2 Desirable, androgynous cyclists

As the narrator gradually grows closer to Albertine, the bicycle continues to be mobilised as means of identifying her and in order to symbolise the budding desire of the young man. Proust is not alone in recognising the erotic power of the machine; I explore in Chapter 3 how the bicycle was used by a range of authors as a means to explore and awaken sexual desire. The bicycle makes a passing appearance earlier in *À l'ombre de jeunes filles en fleurs*, when the machine is first glimpsed by the narrator from the seat of Madame de Villeparisis's carriage, and ridden by an anonymous, desirable 'fille de ferme', 'fille de

accession to physical exercise; and physical exercise for women means the future regeneration of that part of the nation doomed to degeneration.' Author's italics.

196 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 231.

197 *Ibid.*, 251.

198 On this debate, see Thompson, 'Regeneration, Dégénérescence, and the Medical Debate about Bicycling in Fin-de-Siècle France.'

boutiquier’ or an ‘élégante demoiselle.’¹⁹⁹ These initial evocations of the object simply bring it into the narrator’s field of vision, associating it with desire and fleeting visions of feminine beauty but attributing it to no one character in particular.²⁰⁰ Its specific role becomes more concrete in the passage just examined, where we saw how the bicycle serves as a point of reference in a moving mass, and is subsequently used to identify Albertine in her different degrees of individualisation. As Barathieu observes, ‘L’étiquette de cycliste est un moyen pratique de la différencier des autres, et en même temps, cette désignation toute métonymique confirme l’élément caractéristique distingué par le dynamique du texte.’²⁰¹ Indeed, the metonymic identification of Albertine as a cyclist provides us with a microcosmic example of Proust’s aesthetics of perception, in which phenomena are first apprehended by their outward features, before gradually acquiring definition and meaning. Proust’s writing seeks to mirror this accumulative and deceptive process of perception which constantly presents us with optical illusions (‘des erreurs d’optique’), since the object itself is ever changing: ‘nous pensons le rattraper, il se déplace.’²⁰² This description of perception itself vividly recalls the fragmentary viewpoint of a passing cyclist, which will be further examined in Chapter 3.²⁰³

It is within this moving field of perception that desire takes root. Indeed, Albertine’s identity as a fleeting, unattainable cyclist is key to her attraction. When she is finally introduced to her admirer in the painter Elstir’s studio – seated in ‘une robe de soie’ – the narrator finds her merely ‘mediocre et touchante’ compared with the ravishing ‘bacchante à

199 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 71. ‘farm girl’; ‘shopkeeper’s daughter’; ‘elegant young lady.’

200 Barathieu shows how the bicycle is also used to introduce Jean, a character desired by the narrator in Proust’s first novel *Jean Santeuil* (1895, published 1952). See Barathieu, *Les mobiles de Marcel Proust*, 122.

201 *Ibid.*, 126. ‘The label of cyclist is a practical means of differentiating [Albertine] from the others, and at the same time, this entirely metonymic designation confirms the characteristic element pointed to by the dynamics of the text.’

202 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 226. ‘optical errors’; ‘we think we are catching up on it, it moves again.’

203 This fragmentary perception of cyclists also recalls contemporary movements in visual arts, such as Impressionism and Futurism.

bicyclette’ he had glimpsed on several occasions in Balbec.²⁰⁴ Later, in *La Prisonnière*, the narrator will characterize Albertine as ‘un être de fuite’²⁰⁵ and repeatedly recall her ‘filant sur sa bicyclette’ when trying to get to the root of his desperate jealousy and desire for her.²⁰⁶ Thus, an appreciation of her beauty cannot simply rely on the fact of her physical attractiveness, but must also take into account her movement through space, her dynamism and speed.

Figure 13: Jean Béraud, *Le Chalet du cycle au bois de Boulogne* (1900).

The connection between desire and movement is recalled in a further portrait of bicyclists in *La Prisonnière*, when the narrator and Albertine make an outing to the fashionable bois de Boulogne. In a portrait reminiscent of Jean Béraud’s 1900 painting *Le Chalet du cycle au bois de Boulogne* (see Figure 13), the narrator describes how ‘trois jeunes filles étaient assises à côté de l’arc immense de leurs bicyclettes posées à côté d’elles, comme trois immortelles accoudées au nuage ou au coursier fabuleux sur lesquels elles accomplissent

204 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 228. ‘silk dress’; ‘mediocre and touching’; ‘bicycling bacchante.’

205 Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu III. Sodome et Gomorrhe. La Prisonnière. Esquisses*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 600. ‘a being of flight.’

206 *Ibid.*, 576. ‘flying by on her bicycle.’

leurs voyages mythologiques.’²⁰⁷ These ‘Déesses’²⁰⁸ provide their admiring onlookers with a glimpse into another realm, and the classical imagery suggests a fascination with a mythical past. Observing these beings, the narrator reflects on ‘les similitudes même du désir et du voyage’,²⁰⁹ two themes wonderfully represented by the bicycles against which the women are leaning. Elsewhere in the park, we are provided with a rare portrait of a cyclist in movement:

Plus loin une autre fillette était agenouillée près de sa bicyclette qu’elle arrangeait. Une fois la réparation faite, la jeune coureuse monta sur sa bicyclette, mais sans l’enfourcher comme eût fait un homme. Pendant un instant la bicyclette tangua, et le jeune corps semblait s’être accru d’une voile, d’une aile immense ; et bientôt nous vîmes s’éloigner à toute vitesse la jeune créature mi-humaine, mi-ailée, ange ou péri, poursuivant son voyage.²¹⁰

This glimpse of a self-sufficient cyclist, who repairs and then mounts her bicycle before disappearing into the distance, provides an evocative illustration of women’s new social horizons. The flight and bird metaphors used in this passage also echo turn-of-the-century literature and advertising posters, which frequently likened cycling to flight, often through images of winged young women.²¹¹ While recalling mythology, this part-human part-bird, part-machine cyclist subversively reinvents these very myths. She could belong to Donna Haraway’s cyborg world, in which ‘people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.’²¹² Haraway emphasises how ‘in retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths

207 *Ibid.*, 675. ‘three young women were sitting beside the immense arch of their bicycles which stood next to them, like three immortals leaning on a cloud or on a fabulous steed on which they made their mythological journeys.’

208 *Ibid.* ‘Goddesses.’

209 *Ibid.*, 677. ‘the similarities between desire and travel.’

210 *Ibid.*, 677–78. ‘Further along another young girl was kneeling near her bicycle, fixing it. Once the repair was finished, the young racer got on her bicycle, but without straddling it as a man would have done. For an instant the bicycle swayed, the young body seemed to have grown a sail, an immense wing; and soon we saw the young creature, half-human, half-winged, angel or peri, disappearing at full speed, continuing her voyage.’

211 See Nadine Besse and André Vant, ‘A New View of Late 19th Century Cycle Publicity Posters’, *Cycle History* 5, 1994, 117–23.

212 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 154.

of origin of Western culture’,²¹³ reinventing the vulnerable, exploited image of femininity through contact with non-human elements. Proust’s depiction of a winged female cyclist participates in a radical rethinking of the boundaries of both gender and the human by means of an intimate partnership with the machine.

At a time when, according to Michel Foucault, medical authorities were attempting to rigidly classify sexuality according to fixed categories and repress any deviant forms of sexual desire,²¹⁴ Proust’s narrative provides a subtle, subversive and very modern portrait of a fluid spectrum of gender and sexual identities. Rather than attempting to establish boundaries, Proust carefully points to new modes of identification through various characters and symbols. The bicycle proves to be a productive symbol for the author, as from its earliest days it was a technology that aroused suspicions of gender-blurring. It is interesting to note that in French there are at least two words for ‘bicycle,’ one of which is feminine, *bicyclette*, and the other, *vélo*, masculine.²¹⁵ Although there are historical reasons for this and some variation in their meaning (the former often alludes to old-fashioned town bicycles while the latter is used more generally and also applies to racers), they are essentially interchangeable and refer to the same object. Yet the bicycle’s lack of gender specificity is more than just a linguistic peculiarity. Some nineteenth-century observers were particularly alarmed by the de-gendering of female cyclists. Sarah Bernhardt and Stéphane Mallarmé, for example, both deplored the adoption of bloomers by women cyclists, claiming that such a practice necessarily entailed a loss of femininity.²¹⁶ An article in the newspaper *l’Auto-Vélo* in 1897

213 *Ibid.*, 175.

214 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité.*, vol. 1: La volonté de savoir (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 9–22.

215 There are also several informal words for the bicycle, including *bécane* (f), *biclou* (m) and *petite reine* (f).

For an etymological consideration of these various words see Odon Vallet, ‘Vélo, bicyclette: histoire des mots’, *Les cahiers de médiologie* 5, no. 1 (1998): 15–18; for a more philosophical reflection on the difference between *bicyclette* and *vélo*, see Philippe Delerm, *La première gorgée de bière et autres plaisirs minuscules: récits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 88–89.

216 Thieset and Thomasset, *Les bienfaits de la vélocipédie*, 110–14.

satirically announced the birth of a new species: ‘la femme-vélo [...] qui paraît tenir à la fois du mâle et de la femelle sans sexe bien défini.’²¹⁷ These fears highlighted the social contingency of the very concept of femininity, which was purely defined by the activities, clothes and attitudes women were encouraged to adopt.

Albertine offers us a vision of a character who exhibits both male and female traits, using her bicycle to perform the less conventional sides of her personality. A masculine woman also features in Leblanc’s cycling novel *Voici des ailes*, where Pascal admires Madeleine’s ‘allures de jeune garçon’ (VA 9)²¹⁸ and later describes her ‘silhouette mâle qu’atténuait l’harmonie de ses gestes’ (VA 27).²¹⁹ Writing in the early 1920s, when communities of cross-dressing women or ‘inverts’ had, according to Judith Halberstam, ‘developed into visible and elaborate subcultures,’²²⁰ Proust looks back to the world in which such identities were just beginning to crystallise, in part helped by the activity of cycling. Both Proust and Leblanc’s narratives take place amidst what Halberstam terms ‘the momentous negotiations about gender that took place at and around the turn of the century’, which ‘played a part in untangling once and for all the knots that appeared to bind gender to sex and sexuality in some mysterious and organic way.’²²¹ Albertine represents for the narrator ‘une nouvelle variété de la beauté féminine’²²² but one which goes beyond the boundaries of the conventionally feminine and is instead one of the myriad manifestations of what Halberstam terms ‘female masculinity.’²²³

References to Albertine’s masculinity are already present when we first encounter the

217 *Ibid.*, 105–6. ‘the bicycle-woman, who seems to have both male and female traits, without having any clearly defined sex.’

218 ‘boyish looks.’

219 ‘male silhouette which dulled the harmony of her gestures.’

220 Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 75.

221 *Ibid.*, 48.

222 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 165. ‘a new variety of female beauty.’

223 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 1–43.

young woman using slang, wearing unusual clothing and ‘qui poussait une bicyclette avec un dandinement des hanches’ along the beach in Balbec.²²⁴ In the painter Elstir’s studio, when the narrator catches a glimpse of ‘la jeune cycliste’ framed in the window like one of the impressionist paintings hanging on the walls, she greets the painter mid-ride, ‘sans s’arrêter’, provoking a flurry of desire in the narrator.²²⁵ Burning to follow Albertine but waiting for Elstir to accompany him outside, the young hero paces impatiently around the studio until he discovers a portrait of ‘une jeune actrice d’autrefois en demi-travesti.’²²⁶ The pleasure the narrator derives from looking at this portrait is a result of the subject’s fluid, ambiguous gender: ‘le sexe avait l’air d’être sur le point d’avouer qu’il était celui d’une fille un peu garçonnière, s’évanouissait, et plus loin se retrouvait, suggérant plutôt l’idée d’un jeune efféminé vicieux et songeur, puis fuyant encore, restait insaisissable.’²²⁷ Although he does not recognise her, the portrait is of a young Madame Swann, who is an object of the narrator’s desire in the first part of *À l’ombre*. The discovery of this gender-ambiguous portrait and the pleasure the narrator takes in it are directly connected to the fleeting glimpse he has just had of the androgynous young cyclist through the window.

This association between mobile cyclists and fluctuating gender reoccurs in *La Prisonnière*. The narrator, watching the morning traffic from his window, first mistakes a male pedestrian for ‘une femme peu élégante.’²²⁸ This instance of gender confusion is immediately followed by a description of speeding, blurred, sexless cyclists, at one with their machines: ‘les chasseurs ailés, aux teintes changeantes, filaient vers les gares, au ras de leur

224 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 151. ‘who was pushing a bicycle and walking with a swagger.’

225 *Ibid.*, 199–200. ‘the young cyclist’; ‘without stopping.’

226 *Ibid.*, 204. ‘a young actress from another time half-dressed as a man.’

227 *Ibid.*, 205. ‘the gender seemed to be on the verge of admitting that it belonged to a slightly boyish girl, then it evaporated and appeared again later, giving the impression of a depraved, pensive and effeminate young man, then fleeing again, it remained elusive.’

228 ‘an inelegant woman.’ Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu III*, 643.

bicyclette.’²²⁹ This image is in turn reflected in *Albertine disparue* (1925), when the narrator recalls a memory of Albertine as an androgynous cyclist-warrior, ‘penchée sur la roue mythologique de sa bicyclette, sanglée les jours de pluie sous la tunique guerrière de caoutchouc qui faisait bomber ses seins.’²³⁰ As in the earlier description of cyclists in the bois de Boulogne, this metaphorical depiction integrates mythical, masculine and feminine traits into the portrait of Albertine. The ambiguity surrounding cyclists’ gender is one of the reasons why the bicycle is such a productive image for Proust, a writer for whom an individual’s identity is not a fixed state but a constant dialogue. It is as elusive as any of our impressions and as fleeting as a passing cyclist.

2.3.3 Bisexual bicyclists

In addition to contributing to the destabilisation of gender divisions, the bicycle plays a compelling role in expressing queer desire in *La Recherche*.²³¹ In Balbec, the narrator is jealous of Albertine’s visits to female friends, and associates his suspicions with her incessant bicycle riding. It is only after her death that he receives evidence of her sexual encounters with women, in the form of a letter from Aimé, the maître d’hôtel at the Grand Hôtel in Balbec. Aimé confirms that Albertine had bribed staff so that she could bring many different women with her into the shower.²³² In the jealous confusion which follows this discovery, the narrator tortuously imagines her walking and cycling from one lover’s house to the next:

229 *Ibid.*, 644. ‘the winged hunters, in changing hues, sped towards the stations, their bodies hugging their bicycles.’

230 Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu IV. Albertine disparue. Le temps retrouvé. Esquisses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 70. ‘leaning over her mythological bicycle wheel, on wet days shrouded in her warrior’s tunic made of rubber that defined the curve of her breasts.’

231 It is interesting to note that in French *pédale* is not only a part of a bicycle but also a slang term for a queer man.

232 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu IV*, 97.

‘Albertine avait habité l’une, s’était promenée jusqu’à l’autre, avait pu aller souvent en bicyclette à la troisième.’²³³ While the narrator and Albertine are living together in *La Prisonnière*, the narrator recounts how Albertine ‘me racontait sans précision aucune, en de sortes de fausses confidences, des promenades en bicyclette qu’elle faisait à Balbec.’²³⁴ Although she does not divulge what was secret about her bicycle rides, she goes on to admit being propositioned in a carriage by the narrator’s childhood friend, Gilberte, and clandestinely staying at a female friend’s house for three days, only emerging onto the street once, ‘déguisée en homme, histoire de rigoler plutôt.’²³⁵ In this rare moment of openness between the narrator and Albertine, we are provided with a glimpse of the lives of turn-of-the-century, cross-dressing, cycling lesbians; a lively portrait which reflects the emergence of female cross-dressers visible in Europe by the early 1920s. Living in a society which shunned queer desire, Proust’s characters must come up with their own lifestyles and languages to express it. When referring to desire between women, the narrator employs the term ‘gomorrhéen’²³⁶ (from the Biblical city Gomorrah, destroyed by God for its sinfulness) while Albertine uses the euphemism ‘mauvais genre.’²³⁷ Along with this coded language and cross-dressing, the bicycle plays a key role in Albertine’s attempts to explore and communicate her sexuality.

The bicycle is also used to point to this unnameable sexuality in the depiction of the novel’s other queer hero, baron de Charlus. The violent dispute overheard between Charlus and his lover Jupien which opens the fourth volume, *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, contains a telling

233 *Ibid.*, 99–100. ‘Albertine had lived in one place, walked to the next and ridden her bicycle to the next.’

234 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu III*, 886. ‘would tell me in the vaguest of terms, as though it were a secret, about her bicycle rides in Balbec.’

235 *Ibid.*, 878; 838. ‘disguised as a man, just for fun.’

236 *Ibid.*, 592.

237 *Ibid.*, 878. ‘bad taste’ or ‘wrong kind/ gender.’

mention of ‘un cycliste très gentil’ who makes deliveries for the pharmacist.²³⁸ As Barathieu points out, Ghislain de Diesbach explains with reference to Proust’s correspondence that male delivery cyclists acquired an unexpected role at this time, being occasionally solicited to meet the sexual demands of rich men.²³⁹ We may therefore safely presume that Charlus’s reference to a nice delivery cyclist is an attempt to arouse Jupien’s jealousy. Moreover, in *La Prisonnière*, a young dairywoman’s offhand reference to her plans to go cycling that afternoon acts as a trigger for the narrator’s fit of jealousy about Albertine’s desire for women. On the mention of cycling, he suddenly catches sight of a newspaper advertisement that informs him that the actress Léa (who is known to be queer) is performing at the play which Albertine has gone to see that morning.²⁴⁰ Panicked, the narrator sends his servant to retrieve her from the theatre, and a bicycle once again plays a role in carrying a message from Albertine to her jealous lover: ‘j’arrive moins vite que ce cycliste dont je voudrais bien prendre la bécane pour être plus tôt près de vous.’²⁴¹ Although in this second instance the cyclist is carrying an apparently devoted message, the context of the bicycle’s two appearances here – framing the jealous outburst – reveals its symbolic role as a vehicle for the expression of Albertine’s unutterable sexuality. It is significant that while Albertine pedalled freely to see women in Balbec, in her performed role of a bourgeois heterosexual

238 *Ibid.*, 11. ‘a very nice cyclist.’

239 Ghislain de Diesbach, *Proust* (Paris: Perrin, 1991), 418. ‘Une spécialité nouvelle est apparue, grâce aux progrès de la technique, spécialité particulièrement appréciée des messieurs d’un certain âge : les petits télégraphistes. La pratique de la bicyclette leur donne du muscle, le vent de la course de la fraîcheur. Ces tout jeunes gens, qui n’hésitent pas à monter cinq étages pour délivrer un « petit bleu », sont en général bien reçus et le seul fait de leur glisser dans la main un gros pourboire est une façon discrète de leur faire comprendre que l’on attend d’eux un service supplémentaire.’ / ‘A new speciality appeared, thanks to technological progress, a speciality which was particularly appreciated by gentlemen of a certain age: telegram delivery boys. Cycling gave them muscles, they were fresh from the outside air. These young men, who could easily climb five floors to deliver a telegram, were in general very well received and one only had to slip a large tip into their hands to discreetly let them know that an additional service was expected of them.’

240 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu III*, 651.

241 *Ibid.*, 663. ‘I am on my way, though slower than this cyclist whose bike I would gladly take so I could be at your side sooner.’

woman in Paris she cannot ride a bicycle back to her lover's house, but is instead confined to a carriage.

The narrator appears to be appalled by Albertine's queer desire. However, it is thanks to his recognition of the slippage between queer and straight relationships that the artist comes to an appreciation of the variegated continuums that exist in human experience and that are reflected in art. A fluctuating spectrum of sexuality is clearly evoked in the scene where the narrator recounts Charlus's discovery of the actress Léa's sexually explicit letter to his lover Morel. This letter undermines Charlus's preconceptions on strictly defined sexualities, as he realises that his potential rivals for Morel's love include 'pas seulement ceux qu'il avait crus, mais toute une immense partie de la planète, composée aussi bien de femmes que d'hommes, d'hommes aimant non seulement les hommes mais les femmes.'²⁴² In this way, Charlus comes face to face with 'l'insuffisance soudaine d'une définition'²⁴³ when it comes to attempting to characterise sexuality or indeed any aspect of human nature. Attending Madame Verdurin's salon, the narrator is racked by jealousy over Albertine's potential desire for Mademoiselle Vinteuil's lover, the woman who has brought to life the unfinished last work of the great composer Vinteuil. As the narrator is transported by the septet he is hearing for the first time performed by the violinist Morel, Charlus's lover and protégé, he gains a crucial insight: it is thanks to two queer relationships – characterised as 'des éléments impurs'²⁴⁴ – that this major work has at last seen the light of day.

Albertine is ultimately too radical for the society in which she lives. Indeed, the second time the narrator catches sight of her at the seaside, it is as she is being marched home

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 720–21. 'not just those he had thought, but an entire, huge part of the planet, made up of women as well as men, of men who loved not only men but also women.'

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 721. 'the sudden insufficiency of a definition.'

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 769. 'impure elements.'

by her English governess, ‘tête basse comme un animal qu’on fait rentrer malgré lui dans l’étable.’²⁴⁵ It is only thanks to her trademark machine – ‘elle poussait une bicyclette pareille’²⁴⁶ – that the narrator is able to recognize the independent young woman he beheld on the beach, now under the yoke of ‘une personne autoritaire.’²⁴⁷ This scene prefigures the narrator’s own sequestration of Albertine in his Paris home in *La Prisonnière*. Finally it is the narrator, as a representative of the conservative bourgeois class the young woman is challenging, who will be responsible for the tragic transformation of his lover. He himself notes the striking contrast between ‘cette Albertine cloîtrée dans ma maison’ and the young woman whom ‘jadis tout le monde suivait, que j’avais tant de peine à rattraper, filant sur sa bicyclette.’²⁴⁸ In Judith Butler’s terms, he actively encourages her to ‘perform’ femininity once under his roof; that is, to dress and behave in the manner expected of well-to-do young women.²⁴⁹ Rejecting her cycling bloomers of old, he goes to great lengths and expense to acquire fashionable new dresses for Albertine. He seeks very precise advice from his aristocrat neighbour the duchesse de Guermantes on the most appropriate styles and materials in which to clothe his captive.²⁵⁰

Albertine’s new status as a ‘bête sauvage domestiquée’²⁵¹ is brought vividly to life in a scene in the narrator’s bedroom where, asked to play the pianola, the movements of her limbs both recall and deform those which previously she had employed to ride her bicycle. The pianola is described as ‘une lanterne magique scientifique’ whose music, like the bicycle,

245 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 185. ‘her head bent like an animal being made to go back into the stable against its will.’

246 *Ibid.* ‘she was pushing the same bicycle.’

247 *Ibid.* ‘an authoritarian person.’

248 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu III*, 576. ‘this Albertine shut up in my house’; ‘everybody used to follow, whom I had such difficulty catching up on, flying by on her bicycle.’

249 Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–31.

250 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu III*, 541.

251 *Ibid.*, 884. ‘domesticated wild animal.’

allows its listeners to be transported in space and time.²⁵² This instrument, however, is firstly a symbol of her sequestration. Her legs which had once been used to pedal a bicycle ('manoeuvré pendant toute son adolescence les pédales d'une bicyclette') now compliantly action a mechanical piano ('montaient et descendaient tour à tour sur celles du pianola.')²⁵³ Examining her hands, the narrator is once again reminded of a cyclist's pose: 'Ses doigts, jadis familiers du guidon, se posaient maintenant sur les *touches* comme ceux d'une sainte Cécile.'²⁵⁴ The narrator and the society in which he lives have broken this once vigorously independent cyclist. She has become an incarnation of the virgin patron saint of music, constrained to perform and to conform to Christian, bourgeois norms.

On the final page of *La Prisonnière*, the narrator discovers Albertine has disappeared. His desperate attempts to win her back at the start of the sixth volume, *Albertine disparue*, are in vain as she is soon thrown from a horse and dies. Some critics have pointed out that this death mirrors that of Alfred Agostinelli, Proust's driver and secretary, who died in a plane crash in 1914.²⁵⁵ It is significant that it is a horse and not a modern vehicle such as a bicycle, a car or a plane, that is to blame for Albertine's death. A symbol of the old world, of both the aristocracy and the wealthy and aspiring bourgeoisie, the horse comes to deal the *coup de grâce* (after the blows dealt by the narrator himself) to this radical new cyclist who dared to challenge distinctions of gender, sexuality and class. Yet the society which destroys her will itself perish in the trenches of the First World War, and Albertine's challenge will not be forgotten in the post-war re-exploration of identities she helped pioneer.

In turn-of-the-century France and Britain, bicycles – and specifically the female

252 *Ibid.*, 883. 'a magic scientific lantern.'

253 *Ibid.*, 884. 'turned the pedals of a bicycle throughout her adolescence'; 'moved up and down in turn on those of the pianola.'

254 *Ibid.* 'Her fingers, which had previously been familiar with handlebars, now lay upon the keys like the fingers of a Saint Cecilia.' Author's italics.

255 Barathieu, *Les mobiles de Marcel Proust*, 192.

cyclist – were intimately tied to contemporary debates. Cycling was attacked and praised with equal fervour and held up alternately as a symbol of social progress or decay. Just as a spinning bicycle wheel gives the illusion of remaining static, during the *Belle Époque* radical change was occurring beneath a veneer of stasis. In Proust's evocation of a lost world the bicycle proves to be an extremely productive metaphor not only thanks to its incarnation of the conflicting forces shaping modernity, but also because of the way in which it reflects fragmentary perception and evokes the fluctuating nature of desire and gender. Poised between two centuries, the bicycle allows us to conceptualise the 'diversité double'²⁵⁶ of an era on the brink of extinction. Proust, along with British authors such as H. G. Wells and Dorothy Richardson, mobilise the bicycle to illustrate how, through contact with a new technology, fixed ideas of class, gender and sexuality can gradually be broken down. As Pamela Thurschwell notes of this period, 'cultural imaginings of technologically uncanny contact are intertwined with an expanding sense of sex and gender flexibility.'²⁵⁷ The uncanny contact with technology I examine in the next chapter opens up a space for the formation of diverse new subjects, who refuse the distinctions formulated by and for the society that preceded them.

256 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu II*, 665. 'double diversity.'

257 Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4.

Chapter 3. The body and the machine: the sensory discoveries of the cyclist

The bicycle is almost unique among human-powered machines in that it uses human muscles in a near-optimum way.¹

Throughout the nineteenth century, the dividing line between humans and machines, the organic and the mechanical, seemed to grow more and more salient. Raymond Williams points out that ‘mechanic’ and ‘organic’ were near synonyms before the industrial era, when Romantic poets began to formulate opposing definitions of the two.² This schism was partly the result of the appearance of modern machinery, which was powered by steam and capable of outstripping human labour. The antithesis that was formulated between the organic and mechanical spheres continued to be emphasised throughout the Victorian era, while the relationship between humans and machines became a recurrent subject of scientific and literary speculation. By the end of the nineteenth century, with the multiplication of new technologies resulting from the second industrial revolution, this question was of particular pertinence. Mark Seltzer, writing about the United States, suggests that turn-of-the-century discourses on bodies and machines were articulated around four main concepts: machines replacing bodies, people becoming more machine-like, technologies creating bodies, and finally the possibility of an intimate coupling of bodies and machines.³ As we shall see in the course of this chapter, elements of all of these possibilities recurred and overlapped in literature written about cycling in the period. I begin by presenting the various ways in which

1 David Gordon Wilson, Jim Papadopoulos, and Frank Rowland Whitt, *Bicycling Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), blurb.

2 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1988), 201.

3 Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 12.

texts on cycling attest to a mechanisation of human movements and perception, industrialising the body's motion while exposing it to the possibility of shock and injury. In the second part of this chapter, I examine literary treatments of the intense sensory experience of the cyclist, a figure who re-engaged with the perceptive and physical capabilities of the human body, becoming part of a *fin de siècle* shift towards more empirical and embodied experience. Finally, the turn-of-the-century bicycle is explored as a means of achieving a unique synthesis of human and mechanical elements. The bicycle was technology on a human scale, capable of reconnecting its users with all five senses, while encouraging a porous, reciprocal exchange with the landscapes, people and objects encountered by the mobile, modern subject. Although it has been largely overlooked by cultural and literary theorists, the bicycle offered a mechanised yet embodied experience of movement and interaction, in contrast to the disembodied, predominantly visual experience of travelling in motorised vehicles. The uniquely close relationship between bodies, mechanism and environment afforded by cycling was at once a constitutive element in the cultural project of modernity, and an expression of an alternative, counter-cultural attitude to technology and progress.

3.1 Mechanised motion

Human means of engaging with and making sense of the world have been the subject of philosophical inquiry since Antiquity. In the eighteenth century, French Enlightenment thinkers such as Denis Diderot and British empiricists such as John Locke and David Hume attempted to unravel the processes behind perception. Underlying such lines of questioning was the empiricist's affirmation that all knowledge of the world is gained through the senses.

Scientific, philosophical and aesthetic theories must be tested against or proven by means of the human senses, which are our sole means of interaction with the world. This school of thinking remained influential into the nineteenth century in the work of associationist philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, and can also be traced in the works of French positivists such as Auguste Comte, who privileged sensory data over intuition for the purposes of scientific investigation. Yet the empirical tradition was seriously challenged in industrial Britain, when machines began to outstrip the capacities of the human body. As Sue Zemka notes, in the ‘technologically mediated reality’ of Victorian reasoning, the ‘senses came to play a secondary role to the mind’s exploration of hidden depths of meaning.’⁴ Jonathon Crary also identifies, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a ‘general epistemological crisis in which perceptual experience had none of the primal guarantees that had once upheld its privileged relation to the foundation of knowledge.’⁵ Where the classical subject passively received stimuli from the outside world, the turn of the century witnessed an epistemological shift in which sensory perception occurred in a newly mobile, mutable environment, whose meanings were not fixed, but rather continually constructed through ‘a layered complex of sensory and cognitive processes.’⁶

In *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948), Sigfried Giedion highlights the impact of machines on human civilization. Outlining the replacement of human labour with mechanism, Giedion’s survey concentrates on the tangible effects of industrialisation on society. As well as resulting in large-scale changes, Giedion focuses on the capacity of machines to alter the impulses and reflexes of the human body. In 1932, Oswald Spengler

4 Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 15–16.

5 Jonathan Crary, ‘Unbinding Vision: Manet and the Attentive Observer in the Late Nineteenth Century’, in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 46.

6 *Ibid.*, 56.

also feared that ‘the lord of the World is becoming the slave of the Machine, which is forcing him – forcing us all, whether we are aware of it or not – to follow its course.’⁷ As many of the first cyclists noted, the mechanisation of human movement by an industrial artefact implied a distinct movement away from innate human means of locomotion. Cycling comes as second nature to most European adults nowadays; mastering the skill is an important rite of passage in childhood, anticipating the later right to the city conferred by a driving license. It is therefore difficult for contemporaries to appreciate the uncanny, mechanised sensations experienced by nineteenth-century cyclists. Yet at the time of the appearance of the technology, writers vividly described disciplining their bodies in order to learn how to ride a bicycle. Apprentice cyclists learnt the idiosyncrasies of the machine and integrated them into their own reflexes in order to master the basic skills required to cycle: steering, balancing and pedalling. Moreover, cyclists were reliant on tarred roads, rubber tyres and steel frames, all of which were an outcome of industrialisation and colonial expansion. Rather than testifying to a direct connection to the body and the senses, many authors on cycling bore witness to a sense of bodily mechanisation reliant on a complex technology. Considering the industrial legacy of the bicycle presented in various texts, we shall come into fresh contact with a now familiar object that asked the body to do very unfamiliar things.

3.1.1 Counter-intuitive cycling: industrialised bodies, mechanised senses

Cycling as a means of progression takes a considerable amount of training to learn, and the first cyclists made surprising discoveries about balancing on two wheels. Mary

7 Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), 90.

Kennard explains in the opening pages of her *Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* that ‘To recover the balance when riding a bicycle, the rider should always steer on the falling side.’⁸ Although this gesture becomes instinctive once learnt, it is one that takes many weeks or months of practice to achieve, as it is contrary to the balancing instinct learnt from walking. In his essay ‘Taming the Bicycle’ (1886), Mark Twain expressed his surprise on discovering that:

[...] the big wheel must be turned in the direction in which you are falling. It is hard to believe this, when you are told it. And not merely hard to believe it, but impossible; it is opposed to all your notions. [...] The intellect has to come to the front, now. It has to teach the limbs to discard their old education and adopt the new.⁹

Twain’s humorous account of learning to cycle suggests the novice cyclist has to disregard his innate reflections, in order to train his body to act in the way the machine requires. Moreover, in contrast to bipedal stability, balance on a bicycle is coupled with forward movement rather than immobility. Reflecting on this paradox encountered by early cyclists, François Rachline notes:

[...] l’utilisateur devait non seulement accepter le déséquilibre à l’arrêt, mais admettre par surcroît que l’équilibre viendrait du mouvement. Il lui fallait donc renverser une logique familière, celle qui semblait régir l’ensemble des corps célestes, suivant Newton, et même le “corps” social, suivant la théorie économique. Autrement dit, l’amateur devait agir contre son intuition. Il lui fallait lutter contre l’évidence. La lenteur devenait l’ennemie de l’équilibre. La stabilité sur le sol, d’ordinaire assurée au repos, provenait du déplacement rapide.¹⁰

8 Mary E. Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (London: F.V. White & Co., 1896), 5.

9 Mark Twain, ‘Taming the Bicycle’ [1886] in *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches & Essays, 1852-1890* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1992), 893–94.

10 François Rachline, ‘Le vélo du baron’, *L’Économie Politique* 38, no. 2 (2008): 105. ‘[...] the cyclist not only had to accept imbalance when stationary, but also admit that balance would result from movement. He therefore had to turn familiar logic on its head, the logic that ruled all celestial bodies, according to Newton, and even the social “body,” according to economic theory. In other words, the cyclist had to act against his intuition. He had to fight against the obvious. Slowness became the enemy of balance. Stability on the ground, normally a given when at rest, would come from rapid movement’.

The strangeness of learning to lean towards the falling side – while turning one’s legs in circles in order to move forward and achieve balance – implied a significant mechanisation of the human body’s own movement. Far from being a heritage from walking, this signalled an important industrialisation of human locomotion. As such, the bicycle may be thought of as a ‘prosthesis’, a term Tim Armstrong employs to point to the dual potentialities of modern technologies: extending and perfecting the body’s capabilities, or limiting and fragmenting the body.¹¹ Paul Virilio similarly underlines the potentially disabling effect of technologies, writing of ‘l’urbanisation de ce corps propre branché sur diverses interfaces.’¹² The connected body is both transcended and undermined by its technological prosthesis: ‘prothèses qui font du valide suréquipé, l’équivalent presque parfait de l’invalidé équipé.’¹³ While the machine gives the body the ability for smooth, rapid movement, the subject has to conform to the machine which takes over its natural capacity for movement.

Once early cyclists had taught their bodies to steer and balance, they could experiment with the unusual sensation of moving smoothly across land on two wheels. In spite of its long association with human civilisation, the wheel had only recently been disassociated from animal traction. In the early days of rail travel, James Adamson noted some important differences between mechanised and animal-powered locomotion on wheels. Schivelbusch quotes the following passage from Adamson’s 1826 work:

Even in walking and running one does not move regularly forward. The body is raised and depressed at every step of our progress; it is this incessant lifting of the mass which constitutes that drag on our motions which checks their speed, and confines it within such moderate limits [...] With machinery this inconvenience is not felt; the locomotive engine rolls regularly and

11 Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

12 Paul Virilio, *La Vitesse de libération: essai* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), 23. ‘the urbanisation of the body, plugged into diverse interfaces’.

13 *Ibid.* ‘protheses which make the overequipped able-bodied person the near equivalent of the equipped disabled person’.

progressively along the smooth tracks of the way, wholly unimpeded by the speed of its own motions; and this, independent of its economy, is one of the great advantages it possesses over animal power.¹⁴

Regardless of the energy powering it, wheeled transportation implies a smooth and economical locomotive experience, in contrast to the wearisome and inefficient task of placing one foot (or hoof) in front of the other. Wheels carry our weight and remove the need to spend energy balancing on two feet. Wheel technology made great leaps forward from the 1870s, resulting in highly sophisticated bicycle wheels by the late century. With the addition of ball bearings and tangent, wire spoked wheels in the 1880s, cyclists were mounted upon light, strong and efficient machines that radically transformed the locomotive experience.

A ‘machine’ was a common appellation for the bicycle at this time and, as Jeremy Withers argues, ‘to most Victorians the word bicycle was synonymous with sophisticated machinery and technology.’¹⁵ Several writers in the Victorian period present the wheel as ‘unnatural.’ In *The War of the Worlds* (1898), for instance, H. G. Wells’s narrator paternally reminds his readers that there is nothing natural about the wheel. Surveying the machines brought to earth by the Martians, he notes:

And of their appliances, perhaps nothing is more wonderful to a man than the curious fact that what is the dominant feature of almost all human devices in mechanism is absent – the *wheel* is absent; among all the things they brought to earth there is no trace or suggestion of their use of wheels. One would have at least expected it in locomotion. And in this connection it is curious to remark that even on this earth Nature has never hit upon the wheel, or has preferred other expedients to its development.¹⁶

In a scathing attack on human invention, Wells’s narrator points to the wheel’s artificiality and inferiority due to its absence in the animal and plant kingdom on earth, as well as in the

14 James Adamson, *Sketches of Our Information as to Railroads* (Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1826), 51–52.

15 Jeremy Withers, ‘Bicycles, Tricycles, and Tripods: Late Victorian Cycling and Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*’, *The Wellsian* 36 (2013): 42.

16 H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* [1898] (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 135.

impressive array of devices from Mars. Contributing to what Jeremy Withers terms ‘the novel’s overall project of undercutting humanity’s smugness regarding its own accomplishments,’¹⁷ this passage points to the evolutionary inferiority of the technology of the wheel. Wells’s contemporary G. K. Chesterton mused in a similar vein in his short essay ‘The Wheel’, where he remarks that ‘the wheel, as a mode of movement, is a purely human thing.’¹⁸ He insists on the wheel’s absence in the animal kingdom, noting that ‘wings, fins, flappers, claws, hoofs, webs, trotters, with all these the fantastic families of the earth come against us and close around us, fluttering and flapping and rustling and galloping and lumbering and thundering; but there is no sound of wheels.’¹⁹ In this wonderfully sonorous portrayal of modes of locomotion, Chesterton contrasts the consonantal, vibrant, organic sounds of the animal kingdom with the mute wheel. The accumulation of modes of locomotion found in the animal kingdom is complemented by the alliterative description of the primal sounds they produce. In contrast, the wheel’s silence simultaneously reflects its absence amongst animals or plants while evoking its eerie, soundless rotation on a bicycle. Chesterton also points to the strangeness of steering as a means of determining direction, noting that ‘man is the only thing to steer; the only thing to be conceived as steering.’ The experience of steering bicycles contributed to transforming walking man into ‘the Man at the Wheel’, whom Chesterton characterises as a crucial figure of the twentieth century. In this period heavily influenced by theories of evolution and discoveries in pre-history, the remark that wheels were not to be found amongst animals constituted a direct attack on man’s achievements, seen as futile attempts to better nature’s (or, for Chesterton, God’s) designs.²⁰

17 Withers, ‘Bicycles, Tricycles, and Tripods’, 39.

18 G. K. Chesterton, ‘The Wheel’, in *Delphi Complete Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 2 (Hastings: Delphi Classics, 2013), 260.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Chesterton was a Christian, though not a creationist, and questioned Darwinism. He thought the theory stifled debate and over-simplified more complex processes. See ‘Doubts About Darwinism’ [1920],

The bicycle, often synecdochically referred to as ‘the wheel’ in this period,²¹ was a landmark of industrial engineering. As Wells and Chesterton remind us, there is nothing ‘natural’ or self-evident in this form of locomotion; it is the outcome of an advanced manufacturing society, and results in an industrialised experience of movement.

Although trains had participated in normalising the experience of mechanised movement on wheels, it was a form of mobility that remained surprising to Octave Mirbeau (1848-1917) as late as 1908. In his account of a motoring holiday, *La 628-E8*, his narrator relates the uncanny experience of remaining still within a rapidly moving vehicle. His utter immobility (like most early car owners, he is driven by a chauffeur, and so does not even control the machine by small movements of his hands or feet) contrasts to the smooth, exhilarating speed of the car transporting him. He describes how ‘Tout autour de lui, et en lui, saute, danse, galope, est en mouvement, en mouvement inverse de son propre mouvement.’²²

Mirbeau portrays the car driver’s resulting sense of disorientation in the following terms:

Il ne peut plus tenir en place, trépidant, les nerfs tendus comme des ressorts, impatient de repartir dès qu’il est arrivé quelque part, en mal d’être ailleurs, sans cesse ailleurs, plus loin qu’ailleurs [...] La vie de partout se précipite, se bouscule, animée d’un mouvement fou, d’un mouvement de charge de cavalerie, et disparaît cinématographiquement, comme les arbres, les haies, les murs, les silhouettes qui bordent la route.²³

The repetition and jerky rhythm of this passage reflect the experience of the mobile subject, who finds himself at the centre of a barrage of disorienting impressions, and carries the

Collected Works, Vol. 32 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 55-59.

21 This was especially the case in the U.S. The terms ‘wheeling’ and ‘wheelman/ wheelwoman’ were also widely used.

22 Octave Mirbeau, *La 628-E8* (Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908), 7. ‘Everything around him, and within him, jumps, dances, gallops, is moving, with a movement that is the contrary of his own movement’.

23 *Ibid.*, 6–7. ‘He can no longer stay still, frantic, nerves wound tight like springs, impatient to leave again as soon as he has arrived, longing to be elsewhere, always somewhere new, somewhere further away [...] Life everywhere is speeding up, jostling, animated by senseless movement, like a cavalry charge, before disappearing cinematographically, like the trees, the hedges, the walls, the shadows, that line the road.’

impression of rapid movement with him even when he gets out of the car. While visiting a gallery in Amsterdam, Mirbeau's interaction with space is palpably shaped by his experience of driving: 'Des salles, des salles, des salles, dans lesquelles il me semble que je suis immobile, et où ce sont les tableaux qui passent avec une telle rapidité que c'est à peine si je puis entrevoir leurs images brouillées et mêlées.'²⁴ Even when on foot, the impression of car driving stays with Mirbeau's narrator, resulting in the nightmarish sensation that the world itself is shifting and spinning. The subject remains still at the centre of a multitude of mobile objects, dizzy by their incessant movement.

The cyclist foreshadowed the car passenger's experience of being almost immobile, while paradoxically moving at a great velocity. The machine's movement is, like in Mirbeau's description, the opposite of the cyclist's movement, as thanks to gravity, the traveller's body works least when speeding downhill and most when crawling uphill. Both modes are far removed from a walker's bodily movement through space, where each step forward corresponds to a precise and necessary movement of the body. The cyclist's body is indeed in constant movement, but this conforms first of all to the requirements of the machine, rather than those of the body or the terrain being crossed.²⁵ Edward Thomas bears witness to this uncanny in-betweenness in his nature-writing classic *In Pursuit of Spring* (1913):

Motion was extraordinarily easy that afternoon, and I had no doubts that I did well to bicycle instead of walking. It was as easy as riding in a cart, and more satisfying to a restless man. At the same time I was a great deal nearer to being a disembodied spirit than I can often be. I was not at all tired, so far as I knew. No people or thoughts embarrassed me. I fed through the senses directly, but very temperately, through the eyes chiefly, and was happier than is explicable or seems reasonable. This pleasure of my disembodied spirit (so to call it) was

24 *Ibid.*, 9. 'Rooms, rooms, rooms, in which it seems to me that I am still, and it is the paintings that are moving past at such speed that I can hardly make out their blurred and jumbled images.'

25 The majority of our authors rode fixed gear bicycles, meaning that their legs were constantly in motion, even when riding downhill. Freewheels began to appear after 1900.

an inhuman and diffused one, such as may be attained by whatever dregs of our life survive after death.²⁶

This striking portrait captures the liminal stance of the cyclist, who is at once a passenger and means of locomotion. Unlike the walker, Thomas feels ‘disembodied’, as though he were riding in a vehicle; yet he is not restless, as his legs are turning the pedals, creating his forward motion and distracting his mind. Thomas bears witness to a strange alienation from his ego and his body, describing the pleasure he feels as ‘inhuman’, and comparing it to deathly peace. The bicycle mechanises his movements, while the steady rhythm of the machine seems to regulate his thoughts and his senses (which he uses ‘directly, but very temperately’). While the body is a crucial actor in the forward movement of the bicycle, a gap is established here between forward movement and corporeal motion. The circle described by the cyclist’s legs removes him from the human body’s innate means of advancing – the ‘powers that reside in man’s feet’,²⁷ as Ivan Illich would call it – thus prefiguring a machine dependency that would become endemic in the twentieth century.

In *The War of the Worlds*, H. G. Wells reflected on the mechanisation of the body as a result of prolonged contact with technology. The invading Martians have extended their bodily capabilities by means of technology, and nearly succeed in wiping out humans as a result:

Yet though they wore no clothing, it was in the other artificial additions to their bodily resources that their great superiority over man lay. We men, with our bicycles and road-skates, our Lilienthal soaring-machine, our guns and sticks and so forth, are just in the beginning of the evolution that the Martians have worked out. They have become practically mere brains, wearing different bodies according to their needs just as men wear suits of clothing and take a bicycle in a hurry or an umbrella in the wet.²⁸

26 Edward Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring* (Albany, CA: Berkeley Hill Classics, 2013), 116–17.

27 Ivan Illich, *Energy and Equity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 25.

28 Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, 134–35.

While the narrator derides the futility of human inventions when compared with the deadly fighting machines constructed by the Martians, he nonetheless recognises that a technology such as the bicycle is part of the self-same drive to mechanise and improve the limited capacities of the body. Although the aliens gain the upper hand in the war at first, their bodies have become vulnerable as a result of over-dependency on machines, and the whole invading force is rapidly annihilated by contact with a banal human virus. Wells's Darwinian outlook leads him to imagine the negative evolutionary repercussions of integrating technology into the innate functions of the human body. Indeed, such concerns were reflected in contemporary scientific discourses. The author of an 1899 article, for instance, argued that the bicycle was part of a regression to quadrupedal motion, claiming that 'The cycle [...] will produce an inability to undertake bipedal locomotion,'²⁹ while other doctors theorised the concept of 'bicycle face.' This condition was seriously discussed in medical journals and the press from 1895. In an article on the 'hidden dangers of cycling' published in *The National Review* in February 1897, straight-faced Dr. A. Shadwell argues:

With set faces, eyes fixed before them, and an expression either anxious, irritable, or at best stony, they pedal away, looking neither to the right nor the left, save for an instantaneous flash, and speaking not at all, except a word flung over the shoulder at most. It is this strange and unhuman gravity which excites the ridicule and hostility of the street cad and of the dull-witted rustic alike.³⁰

Doctors such as Shadwell suggested that such an expression could become permanently engraved on a person's face, leaving them with a disagreeable physiognomy. Whilst discussed with gravity by some of the bicycle's detractors, those who adopted the bicycle were largely of the opinion that 'The face argument is absurd.'³¹ Nevertheless, the

29 Sydney Savory Buckman, 'Cycling: Its Effects on the Future of the Human Race', *The Medical Magazine* 8, no. 2 (1899): 269.

30 A. Shadwell, 'The Hidden Dangers of Cycling', *The National Review*, February 1897.

31 Abraham Wren Rumney, *A Cyclist's Note Book* (Edinburgh: W. and A.K. Johnston, 1901), 18.

development of such a discourse points to contemporary fears around the ‘unhuman’ mechanisation of the body as a result of prolonged contact with technology.

As Jeremy Withers argues, ‘the narrator’s (and Victorian society’s in general) overinfatuation with the bicycle appears to be, for Wells, a step in the direction of being displaced and disabled by one’s own technological achievements.’³² Wells’s *War of the Worlds* suggests that over-dependence on machines for locomotion and other needs will result in weakened, fragmented bodies, which are no longer able to function without mechanical appendages. These depictions foreshadow the subject of automobility as John Urry describes him: ‘The driver’s body is itself fragmented and disciplined to the machine [...] The body of the car provides an extension of the human body, surrounding the fragile, soft and vulnerable human skin with a new steel skin.’³³ While the bicycle does not physically encase the body with steel in the same way as the car or the train, it acts as a mechanical extension of the body’s capacity for locomotion which effectively displaces the need for the body to move itself.

From a Marxist perspective, a parallel may be established between the repetitive action of pedalling a bicycle and the meaningless, alienating gestures of factory workers, who are restricted and subordinated to the machines they operate. Marx describes how ‘The worker’s continued repetition of the same narrowly defined act and the concentration of his attention on it teach him by experience how to attain the desired effect with the minimum of exertion,’ Marx argues, thus transforming him into ‘the living mechanism of manufacture.’³⁴ These terms recall passages from 1890s cycling guides, explaining the exact bodily gestures

32 Withers, ‘Bicycles, Tricycles, and Tripods’, 49.

33 John Urry, ‘The “System” of Automobility’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4–5 (1 October 2004): 31.

34 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books; New Left Review, 1990), 458.

cyclists should adopt in order to action the machine in the most efficient manner. R. J. Mecredy, for example, gives meticulous instructions about the optimal placement of the saddle, commands his reader to breathe only through his nose, and explains his ‘ankle action’ technique, which allows cyclists to achieve an ‘enormous increase of power.’³⁵ Such discourses effectively codified cyclists’ gestures, disciplining the body to make it conform to the optimum working of the machine. Furthermore, as means of transport the bicycle played an important role in allowing workers to reach their place of employment, thus placing them at the service of capital. In one of the rare appearances of cyclists in Wells’s novel *Tono Bungay* (1909), workmen arriving to build the millionaire Edward Ponderevo’s huge mansion are described by the vicar in the following terms: ‘I was amazed to see people going by on bicycles. A silent procession. I counted ninety-seven – in the dawn. All going up to the new road for Crest Hill.’³⁶ Here the bicycle facilitates the workers’ exploitation at the hands of capital, and their ant-like procession towards the mansion in the early morning suggests an automatisations of their movements. Like the worker, the cyclist who ‘performs the same simple operation for the whole of his life converts his body into the automatic, one-sided implement of that operation.’³⁷ Authors such as Wells and Alfred Jarry (as we shall see) suggest that while such machine dependency may make new feats of strength and endurance possible, the human body and society at large will undoubtedly suffer as a consequence.

35 R. J. Mecredy, *The Art and Pastime of Cycling* (Dublin: Mecredy & Kyle, 1890), 57–63.

36 H. G Wells, *Tono Bungay* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 295.

37 Marx, *Capital*, 1:458.

3.1.2 Speed, shock and the sublime

Learning to ride a bicycle thus implied a certain mechanisation of human instincts, senses and muscles. It also made possible a direct experience of speed, something that was entirely new to the human sensorium. While trains could boast much greater velocity, rapid movement across land had never before been experienced in the immediate, bodily manner the bicycle allowed. Even today, when cars and planes transport us at hundreds of miles an hour, the thrill of fast cycling persists. As Watson and Gray observed in 1978, ‘these sensations make speed real in a way that only occurs in a modern car at over eighty miles an hour [...] they give cycling an intensity and an immediacy often lost to the driver.’³⁸ This intense contact with speed was central to the experience of early cyclists, and widely written about in literature. Some writers condemned the tendency to ‘scorch’, arguing that cyclists who focused purely on speed were missing the point. F. W. Bockett, for instance, insists that ‘when you see a nice view, you must: stop, fill up your pipe and digest the prospect’,³⁹ making it a cyclist’s moral imperative not to rush by – even if he has the capacity to do so – but to dismount and fully ‘digest’ a view when it presents itself. The cycling advocate from the US Maria Ward also criticised speed-crazed cyclists, claiming that: ‘The scorcher sees little, hears little, and is conscious only of the exhilaration of the moment.’⁴⁰ These critics imply that the high speeds made possible by cycling necessarily negate the possibility for rich sensory engagement.

38 Roderick Watson and Martin Gray, *The Penguin Book of the Bicycle* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), 34.

39 F. W. Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks for Pilgrims on Wheels* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1901), 18.

40 Maria E Ward, *Bicycling for Ladies* (New York: Brentano, 1896), 79.

Ward's portrait of sensorially deprived cyclists is reflected in literature, where the machine can allow for an experience of place mediated principally by speed, rather than by attentive interaction with one's surroundings. In *The Wheels of Chance*, H. G. Wells paints a humorous caricature of a scorcher, who complains to the hero Hoopdriver 'There's no hurry, sir, none whatever. I came out for exercise, gentle exercise, and to notice the scenery and to botanise. And no sooner do I get on the accursed machine, than off I go hammer and tongs; I never look to right or left, never notice a flower, never see a view' (WC 27). Despite this cyclist's 'contemplative disposition' (WC 27) and his desire for a rich engagement of the senses, he feels that his machine obliges him to travel rapidly from departure to destination. The attack on scorchers by both cycling advocates and detractors is symptomatic of concern about the effects of this new and exhilarating experience. While cyclists such as Bockett and Ward promoted a 'gentle' approach to riding, the machine gave its users the potential to experience speed in an entirely new way, and constrained riders such as Wells's scorcher to mediate their experience of their surroundings through this intoxicating sensation.

The virulent efforts made by cycling apologists to discourage 'scorching' betray the fact that the speed of the bicycle created shock waves in society at large. The journalist and writer A. W. Rumney wrote in an evangelistic vein when he added the following preamble to the account of a scorcher who had discovered the joy of cycle touring: 'It is the custom of missionaries to tell of conversions. As my mission in life is to encourage cycle touring, I give the following testimony.'⁴¹ The ex-scorcher in question then expresses himself in terms that recall a religious awakening, describing how 'From that point my eyes were opened, as it were, to a new world [...] When I reached home I had given up all idea of any more

41 Rumney, *A Cyclist's Note Book*, 14.

scorching.’⁴² Such language bears testimony to the real attempt being made by middle class cyclists to promote a gentle, slow-paced and observant approach to cycling over the contrasting paradigm based on speed and exhilaration, and associated with the working class. Similarly, F. W. Bockett makes no secret of his determination to raise cycling to the status of a ‘Gentle Art’, for ‘gentle folk.’ He traces the contours of a cycling etiquette, relating to dress, diet and behaviour, formulating certain rules on the ‘ethics of coasting’ and consistently reminding readers that the cyclist ‘is also a gentleman.’⁴³ His sworn enemy is the speed-crazed cyclist, who is ‘a scorcher and not a cyclist, and [...] before long he will be as extinct as the old bone-shaker.’⁴⁴ He generously forgives scorchers for exulting in the new ‘power of flying’⁴⁵ which cycling has suddenly bestowed upon them. However, he makes a firm case for establishing a gentlemanly, respectable image of his favourite pastime. These cyclists sought to distance themselves from the scorcher, who they thought gave a bad name to the pursuit. The desire of cycling authors to rise above the negative stereotype of the scorcher is motivated by both social and aesthetic factors; they do not wish to be taken for working-class racers or delivery boys, and they believe that a slow-paced approach to cycling offers a fuller sensory experience.

The touring cyclists Joseph and Elizabeth Robins Pennell state in their account of a journey through France and Italy that ‘we also thought we might prove to the average cyclist how much better it is to spend spare time and money in making Pilgrims’ Progresses [a reference to their first published travel account]⁴⁶ and Sentimental Journeys than in hanging around race-tracks.’⁴⁷ The voluntary element to the cycle tours undertaken by cyclists such as

42 *Ibid.*, 16.

43 Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks*, 37.

44 *Ibid.*, 5.

45 *Ibid.*

46 Joseph Pennell and Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *A Canterbury Pilgrimage* (London: Seeley and Co., 1885).

47 Joseph Pennell and Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *Our Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (London:

the Pennells, Bockett, Rumney and Edward Thomas brings to the fore what they see as the bicycle's aesthetic superiority over other forms of locomotion, and thus its utility as a writing tool. These authors claim that it is only by moving gradually and attentively that the true aesthetic qualities of cycling can be appreciated – there is, therefore, a right and a wrong way to cycle. The scorcher fails to adopt a 'gentle' approach; he misses out on the details of his journey by failing to pay attention, and rushing to the end (much like the train traveller, abhorred by de Quincey and Ruskin). For cycle pilgrims, the bicycle, when used voluntarily and consciously, is quintessentially an aesthetic and literary tool. When used out of context or by the uninitiated, however, it is merely another means of locomotion. The focus of these writers on the damaging effects of fast riding is symptomatic of a contemporary concern about the effects of the speed on the human body and senses.

The speed of the bicycle, it should be recalled, exposed its riders and those they passed by to the potential of shocks, collisions and accidents – experiences that were predicated on a close proximity to mechanism, and that have been seen by several critics as constitutive of the experience of modernity. Paul Virilio quotes Marc Bloch who links speed and the accident, arguing that both are central to the fabric of contemporary societies:

“Un trait, entre tous distinctif, oppose la civilisation contemporaine à celles qui l'ont précédée : la vitesse. La métamorphose s'est produite en l'espace d'une génération”, constatait, dans les années 1930, l'historien Marc Bloch. Cette situation entraîne, à son tour, un second trait : l'accident. La généralisation progressive d'événements catastrophiques qui affectent non seulement la réalité du moment mais causent l'anxiété et l'angoisse pour les générations à venir.⁴⁸

T. F. Unwin, 1893), vi.

48 Paul Virilio, *L'accident originel* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 15. 'One feature, the most distinctive of all, pits contemporary civilization against those that have preceded it: speed. The metamorphosis occurred in the space of a single generation,' the historian, Marc Bloch, noted in the 1930s. This situation involves a second feature in turn: the accident. The gradual spread of catastrophic events not only affects the reality of the moment but causes anxiety and anguish for generations to come. *The Original Accident*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 3.

For Virilio, technological progress is necessarily accompanied by its dark underbelly; the capacity to foster violence and suffering. He writes elsewhere: ‘inventer l’électricité, c’est inventer l’électrocution... Chaque technologie véhicule sa propre négativité, qui est innovée dans le même temps que le progrès technique.’⁴⁹ Mechanised means of transport such as the railway posed a greater risk for serious injury or death, but the cyclist’s physical presence amidst motorised, pedestrian and equine traffic subjected the body not only to fresh sensations, but also to new kinds of trauma. While the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a panic around railway deaths, Sydney Aronson recalls that in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, ‘so many accidents occurred that a new obituary column entitled “Death by the Wheel” appeared in newspapers.’⁵⁰



Figure 14: ‘A Spill.’ The frontispiece to W. J. Coppen’s *Romances of the Wheel* (1880).

Figure 15: Illustration from Frédéric Régamey’s *Vélocipédie et automobilisme* (1898).

49 Paul Virilio and Philippe Petit, *Cybermonde: la politique du pire* (Paris: Textuel, 1996), 87. ‘When you invent electricity, you invent electrocution... Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress.’ *Politics of the Very Worst: An Interview by Philippe Petit*, trans. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext[e], 1999), 89. .

50 Sidney H. Aronson, ‘The Sociology of the Bicycle’, *Social Forces* 30, no. 3 (1 March 1952): 311.

Accidents on bicycles were especially frequent in the early period of their use, when expressions to describe specific types of falls were coined, including ‘come a cropper’ and ‘do a header’ (since highwheel riders were, unfortunately, likely to fall head first). R. J. Mecredy (1861-1924) gave this practical advice to cyclists in 1890:

An Ordinary bicycle is the most dangerous. [...] If no hedge or hawthorn bush is near, throw your legs over the handlebars and put the brake hard on, and you will shoot forward and alight on your feet, when you must make every effort to keep on your feet and run as hard as you can, for your bicycle is in eager pursuit, and a stroke from it may place you *hors de combat*.⁵¹

Whilst falls became less perilous with the appearance of the safety bicycle, they were by no means excluded. Falls were taken up as motifs in both fiction and non-fiction writing throughout the period; W. J. Coppen’s 1880 *Romances of the Wheel*, for instance, features both a frontispiece and a story entitled ‘A Spill’ (see Figure 14), and the final story, ‘Willie’s Last Ride’ recounts a father’s grief at losing his son in a bicycle accident.⁵² Mary Kennard, H. G. Wells and Jerome K. Jerome all describe fictional falls in comic or gruesome detail, while in J. W. Allen’s metaphysical ode to the bicycle, *Wheel Magic; or Revolutions of an Impressionist* (1906), a whole chapter is dedicated to the various sorts of crash one is exposed to on a bicycle.⁵³ On the other side of the Channel, Frédéric Régamey in *Vélocipédie et automobilisme* (1898) includes several pages of textual and visual illustrations of the various accidents a cyclist may be unlucky enough to experience (see Figure 15).⁵⁴ This technology thus confronted people with new forms of physical experience, trauma and shock, which fascinated writers not only due to their comic effect (see Chapter 1), but also due to their importance in constituting the modern subject.

51 Mecredy, *The Art and Pastime of Cycling*, 65.

52 W. J. Coppen, *Romances of the Wheel: A Collection of Romantic Cycling Tales* (Coventry: Iliffe and Son, 1880).

53 J. W. Allen, *Wheel Magic; Or, Revolutions of an Impressionist* (London: J. Lane, 1909).

54 Frédéric Régamey, *Vélocipédie et automobilisme* (Tours: A. Mame et fils, 1898).

Walter Benjamin characterised the effect of new modes of transport on the individual in his essay 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', where he describes a subject's movement through a busy city street:

moving through this traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery [...] Thus technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training.⁵⁵

As Benjamin reminds us, the late-nineteenth century street was an increasingly hazardous space, criss-crossed by swarms of people, animals and vehicles. Benjamin is here describing the shocks experienced by a pedestrian, yet he focuses on the new technologies of the industrial era as the source of the 'nervous impulses' that transform the urban subject. The critic Sue Zemka points out that the modern subject was shaped by exposure to shock and injury when in traffic or on the factory floor.⁵⁶ Recalling Virginia Woolf's assertion that modern life is inherently traumatic, Zemka argues that 'modern shock does not begin with trench warfare, but rather with rapid industrialization.'⁵⁷ Nicholas Daly points to a paradox in industrial modernity; while it is 'predicated on the intellectual separation of people and machines [...] the corollary of this is a modernity that obsessively replays the meeting of the two.'⁵⁸ Daly focuses on the persistent motif of train collisions and car crashes, yet turn-of-the-century representations of the bicycle also consistently returned to the potential of this technology for bodily harm. Although the bicycle's non-motorised nature makes it less dangerous than trains or cars, it nonetheless exposes its rider and those around him to injury.

Accidents were rarely an enjoyable experience, yet several authors depicted the thrill of constantly being faced with danger while riding a bicycle. J. W. Allen draws attention to

55 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), 171.

56 Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Zemka, *Time and the Moment*, 215.

57 Zemka, *Time and the Moment*, 216.

58 Daly, *Literature, Technology and Modernity*, 2.

the pleasurable danger experienced by the cyclists, whose safety is dependent purely on her individual skill:

One of the finest qualities of cycling is just that it involves an element of difficulty and even danger. Our ordinary comings and goings are sadly lacking in this ingredient of happiness. There is a certain danger in railway travelling; but on the railway, so far as you are personally concerned, you are almost completely at the mercy of brute chance. On a bicycle it is your own skill and coolness and power that must overcome difficulties and carry you in safety. You are braced not only to energy, but to prudence and foresight and nice balance.⁵⁹

The lone cyclist stands out from dominant, collective and mechanised modes of transport; she is autonomous in the midst of the traffic and has a greater degree of agility and flexibility than bulkier vehicles. Moreover, the danger to which she is visually exposed (unlike the train passenger, who is blind to potential obstacles on the line and, as Allen points out, unable to act to avoid them) gives her what could be termed a sublime experience of the street, where a fear of destruction is constantly balanced by the faith in her own ability to avoid the obstacle. As Edmund Burke observes in the context of darkness, uncertainty about our next movements is one root of the sublime: ‘in utter darkness, it is impossible to know in what degree of safety we stand; we are ignorant of the objects that surround us; we may every moment strike against some dangerous obstruction; we may fall down a precipice the first step we take.’⁶⁰ When moving at speed or in darkness – especially in an urban environment – the cyclist may be involved in a collision at any moment, and this experience can be rewarding as well as terrifying. Allen’s sentiment is mirrored in Virginia Niles Leeds’s 1897 short story ‘A Coast and a Capture’, in which the heroine is exhilarated by her close brush with death:

I shoved off with utter recklessness, drew my feet up on the fork, and proceeded to coast. How the wheel flew! Everything swam before me from the

59 Allen, *Wheel Magic*, 47.

60 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [1757] (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 130.

rapidity of my flight, and every moment I expected to be dashed to destruction [...] Just as I reached the rails, around the rock-bound curve came the midnight train. A dark, looming, quivering phantom, shaking the earth as it thundered along, and bearing down with menace and fury upon all venturesome atoms that should stand in its way.⁶¹

In this bicycle-versus-train scene, the cunning cyclist manages to ride over the tracks before the night train prevents her pursuers from following her. This episode inherits the trope of the closely-avoided railway disaster (staged to great popular acclaim in melodramatic stage plays in the 1860s), which Nicholas Daly has examined as a means of ‘training’ subjects to ‘accommodate the shocks of mechanical modernity.’⁶² By the turn of the century, such close brushes with death may have become something of a cliché in literature and on stage, yet the bicycle was a technology that allowed daring riders to experience such exhilaration and danger directly.

The cyclist, unlike the walker, is part of the traffic, advancing rapidly and autonomously, never more than a few inches away from danger. John Urry argues that ‘it was the traffic of people and horses that transformed social experience in this modern urban area’ and that ‘to be private in the midst of such danger and chaos created the perfect romantic setting of modern times.’⁶³ The cyclist is alone and ‘private’ in the midst of the crowd, creating a personal safety perimeter through careful attention and mastery of her machine. Yet the constant proximity of shock and danger are central to modern experience. Due to the visceral experience of speed made possible on a bicycle, the cyclist is both exhilarated and constantly exposed to trauma, resulting a radically different sensory experience from walking.

61 Virginia Niles Leeds, ‘A Coast and a Capture: A Bicycling Story’, in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897), 89.

62 Daly, *Literature, Technology and Modernity*, 33.

63 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 137.

3.1.3 Mechanised vision: photographic and cinematic cycling



Figure 16: 1899 US advertisement for a cycle camera.

While displacing the body's innate capacity for movement, the bicycle altered our interaction with sensory data. As Tim Armstrong observes, the technologies of modernity were viewed by some as a form of 'organ extension [where] sight is extended and perfected via the telescope and microscope; hearing via the

telephone; memory by the gramophone.⁶⁴ While the bicycle was most obviously an extension of the locomotive capacities of the limbs, the vehicle also participated in the formation of an altered, mechanised 'way of seeing'.⁶⁵ Zack Furness argues that bicycling and photography 'framed and fixed the landscape in mutually reinforcing ways' and terms the bicycle 'a landscaping machine', that allowed city dwellers to construct a distancing, tourist gaze.⁶⁶ Indeed, modern infrastructures of mobility such as tarred roads, touring maps, guides and road signs were first installed for the use of cyclists. Thus, the bicycle has been credited by Furness with establishing an abstract, textual or photographic interaction with the environment. It is pertinent to examine the cyclist's altered visual and sensory engagement alongside photography and cinematography due to the contemporaneity of these three

⁶⁴ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, 77.

⁶⁵ On the social construction of visual culture, see John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972).

⁶⁶ Zack Furness, *One Less Car: Bicycling and the Politics of Automobility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 41.

technologies. Early tricycles were used for transporting heavy photographic equipment to picturesque spots, and the bicycle boom of the 1890s coincided with the appearance of cheap, portable cameras, which were heavily marketed at cyclists (see Figure 16). The Lumière brothers held their first cinematograph screenings in 1895, and as I show below, the mobile representation of the world through this medium established enduring connections with the experience of cycling. The discourses that emerged around these three technologies offer many points of comparison, suggesting at once an extension and a mechanisation of the human senses.

Photography and cinematography were both technologies that promoted the dominant visual or, in de Certeau's terms, 'totalising' views of landscapes, while paradoxically drawing attention to the extent to which visual perceptions may be misleading, especially when it comes to objects moving at speed. While early photography required the subject to be motionless, from the 1860s Edward Muybridge developed a technique that documented the movements of mobile animals or humans. Along with the chronophotography of Etienne-Jules Marey in France, these images recorded the precise movements of humans and animals in motion, and transformed contemporary attitudes to visual perception. Muybridge's photographs of horses, for instance, showed that all four hooves leave the ground during a gallop, something that the human eye is incapable of perceiving. Parallel developments in microscopy continued to expand the realm of the invisible, giving credence to the idea that technology's eye was omniscient, whilst human vision could never be more than partial and misleading.

Cyclists noted that their visual experience was very different from that of the walker. Edward Thomas opts for walking one misty day since 'in cycling chiefly ample views are to

be seen, and the mist conceals them. You travel too quickly to notice many small things [...]

By walking I saw every small thing one by one.’⁶⁷ In Maurice Leblanc’s *Voici des ailes*, the cyclist Pascal compares the perspective of the walker and the cyclist, noting that ‘L’un recevra [de la nature] de menues sensations de détail, l’autre une vaste sensation d’ensemble’ (VA 39).⁶⁸ The ‘ample views’ or ‘sensation d’ensemble’ of cycling suggested an affinity with the young technologies of photography and cinematography. Where walkers a century before held out Claude Glasses in order to appreciate a view,⁶⁹ many touring cyclists travelled with new models of camera specially designed for carrying on bicycles. W. S. Beekman augmented his volume on cycle touring with images taken by the photographer Allan Eric on his New England rides, claiming that the camera was an essential accessory for the modern cyclist. Beekman argues that ‘an individual starting out with a twenty-five pound machine, a light cyclometer, a small bicycle clock, and a compact camera is indeed a most wonderful example of the world’s progressiveness.’⁷⁰ Beekman’s progressive cyclist seems to own a device for every function that the body and mind previously fulfilled, and so to no longer need his legs to walk, his eyes to see or his intelligence and memory to tell him the time and distance covered. Like Wells’s Martians, the cyclist’s body appears to have become incidental to the technologies that augment and perfect its capabilities.

Alfred Jarry connects photography with cycling in two literary depictions of cycle races. In *Le Surmâle* (1903), which will be further discussed below, the narrator describes the appearance of the eponymous super-cyclist in graphic detail, recounting how ‘toute sa silhouette cocasse, jusqu’aux détails des rayons de sa bicyclette, resta photographiée dans ma

67 Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, 111.

68 ‘One will receive minute and detailed sensations, the other a vast overall sensation’.

69 Claude Glasses were small convex mirrors used by picturesque artists and tourists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were thought to give landscapes a more painterly aspect.

70 W. S. Beekman and Allan Eric, *Cycle Gleanings: Or, Wheels and Wheeling for Business and Pleasure, and the Study of Nature* (Boston: Skinner, Bartlett & Co., 1894), 10.

répine.’⁷¹ The narrator, who is another cyclist in the epic race, seems to have integrated an eerie photographic approach into his vision, becoming capable of permanently inscribing a still image onto his retina. This cyborg-like description implies an augmentation or distortion of the human senses through contact with technology. In the same year, Jarry penned a sketch entitled *La Passion considérée comme course de côte*, in which Jesus and his fellow racers ride their bicycles up the hill of Golgotha. In this playful parody of Jesus’s crucifixion, the narrator describes the end of the race in the following manner: ‘Jésus, quoique ne portant rien, transpira. Il n’est pas certain qu’une spectatrice lui essuya le visage, mais il est exact que la reporterresse Véronique, de son kodak, prit un instantané.’⁷² By transforming the Biblical veil into a photograph, Jarry draws attention to the miraculous nature of contemporary technologies, which make possible godlike feats. Yet Jarry is also satirising the modern obsession with spectator sports; rather than adopting the compassionate gesture of wiping the suffering man’s face, this up-to-date Veronica keeps her distance and snaps a photograph, which will become a commodity for sale and distribution through newspapers. The spectator remains aloof from fellow humans and her surroundings, attaching more importance to the visual representation of scenes and the physical commodity that will remain in their wake.

Photography could encourage at once a fleeting and appropriative relationship with one’s surroundings. Sketching was another favoured pursuit among cyclists, which also foregrounded a subjective, visual approach to urban and rural environments. While sketching can hardly be considered a ‘technology’ in the same way as photography, industrial production meant that graphite pencils and paper became much cheaper and more readily

71 Alfred Jarry, *Le Surmâle: roman moderne* [1903] (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 1996), 72. ‘his entire comical silhouette, down to the details of the spokes of his bicycle, remained photographed in my retina’.

72 Alfred Jarry, *Ubu cycliste: écrits vélocipédiques*, ed. Nicolas Martin (Toulouse: Le Pas d’Oiseau éd., 2007), 94. ‘Although wearing nothing, Jesus sweat. We are not certain that a female spectator wiped his face, but it is a fact that the reporter Veronica took a photograph with her Kodak’.

available in the Victorian period, making the pastime accessible to the many touring cyclists who appeared at the century's end. Edward Thomas's *In Pursuit of Spring* features a prominent sketching cyclist, and D. H. Lawrence's hero Paul in *Sons and Lovers* also draws landscapes on his cycling trips. Joseph Pennell illustrated the travel books written by his wife Elizabeth, and in an article on cycle touring the couple claim that cycling itself is a way of composing an 'outdoor picture.'⁷³ Hence, cyclists, photographers and sketchers all performed a visual, commodified relationship with their surroundings, 'fetishising' them in Marxist terms, as an object to be admired and appropriated.⁷⁴ This modern gaze is humorously portrayed by the Pennells in their travel account *Over the Alps on a Bicycle* (1898), where they remark: 'Everybody called for postcards. After Rousseau set the fashion, people wept over the sublimities of Nature which they could not see for their tears; now they turn their backs upon the spectacle and let their feelings loose upon illustrated postcards.'⁷⁵ Although the Pennells mock their fellow travellers, they are themselves participating in this modern, image-based approach to travel, which favours fragmented, secondary, visual representation of a scene over more direct, present engagement with one's surroundings. There was a form of visual commodification inherent in touring cyclists' way of seeing, given tangible manifestation in the photographs, postcards and sketches they avidly collected.

Cycling also established a precocious connection to the spectacle of moving images. Indeed, Jacques Seray records 'phénakistiscope' displays in Paris theatres as early as 1870, in which the rear wheel of a Michaux velocipede was decorated with successive images, which moved as the wheel turned.⁷⁶ Several contemporary critics on cycling have established a link

⁷³ Quoted in Furness, *One Less Car*, 41.

⁷⁴ See Marx, *Capital*, 1:163.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *Over the Alps on a Bicycle* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1898), 81.

⁷⁶ Jacques Seray, *Tours de manivelles: le vélo au cinéma* (Vélizy: J. Seray, 2006), 13.

between the modes of perception promoted by these two technologies, which both offer a smooth, mobile, shifting perspective from a slightly raised point of view. Michel Bouet suggests that the cyclist becomes a spectator of her own movements, claiming that ‘grâce à la bicyclette, notre activité musculaire peut cinématiquement se réfléchir hors d’elle même.’⁷⁷ The machine distracts the rider from the motions of her limbs, transforming her into an observer of both the actions of her body and the events going on around her. Edward Nye describes the cyclist’s visual impressions in the following terms: ‘le fil des images qui passent avec la vitesse amène le cycliste à faire une sorte de montage cinématographique de ce qu’il voit.’⁷⁸ Didier Tronchet similarly argues that the bicycle is the vehicle that best reflects cinematic ‘travelling.’ While the pedestrian is attentive and mobile, Tronchet claims: ‘pour rester dans la métaphore cinématographique, il lui manque le travelling. C’est dans ce mode de perception en mouvement que le cycliste trouve sa pertinence.’⁷⁹ As these critics highlight, the cyclist is involved physically and sensorially in his surroundings, yet his point of view (slightly above that of a pedestrian), steady speed and partial alienation from his senses give him a mechanised, global, cinematic view of his surroundings.

While several critics have suggested links between the cinema and the railway – with the train window mirroring the cinema screen⁸⁰ – the smooth, gradually changing progression of scenes the cyclist experiences offers an equally compelling parallel of cinematic experience. If, as Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz argue, ‘modernity can be best

77 Michel Bouet, *Signification du sport* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1968), 191. ‘thanks to the bicycle, our muscular activity can cinematographically conceive of itself from an exterior point of view’.

78 Edward Nye, *A bicyclette: anthologie* (Paris: Sortilèges, 2000), xxiv. ‘dreaming’; ‘the stream of images that rush by lead the cyclist to construct a sort of cinematographic montage of the things he sees’.

79 Didier Tronchet, *Petit traité de vélosophie: réinventer la ville à vélo* (Paris: Plon, 2014), 56. ‘to extend the cinematographic metaphor, he lacks travelling. It is this mode of mobile perception that is most relevant to the cyclist’.

80 See Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Leo Charney and Vanessa R Schwartz, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

understood as inherently cinematic’,⁸¹ the bicycle may be seen as a crucial element in a mechanised modernity that, along with the cinema, foregrounded the act of spectatorship and the experience of simultaneity. Stephen Kern notes how the cinema provided ‘proof of the existence of simultaneous realities’, an experience that inspired writers such as Arthur Craven and Guillaume Apollinaire to adopt multiple voices in their simultaneous poetry.⁸² On a bicycle, diverse images from different localities unite to provide one overall sense of many simultaneous, superimposed realities. The impression is well conveyed in a review of the *Cyclo-Guide Miran illustré*, which Alfred Jarry wrote for *Mercure de France* in 1896. Jarry describes his personal cycling aesthetic, contrasting it to the leisurely approach foregrounded by the guidebook he is reviewing:

Quoique nous préférons à ce tourisme des sites et monuments, sans comparaison, l’émotion esthétique de la vitesse dans le soleil et la lumière, les impressions visuelles se succédant avec assez de rapidité pour qu’on n’en retienne que la résultante et surtout qu’on vive et ne pense pas, nous ne pouvons que glorifier ce livre, série d’itinéraires pratiques avec une profusion de très bonnes photographies de tous les sites.⁸³

The optical experience of the cyclist is reliant on ‘l’émotion esthétique de la vitesse’, which creates the conditions for this unification of many images into one overall visual impression, based not on thought or introspection, but direct, lived experience. Whether observing his own movement or the scenes around him, the motion of the cyclist implies a mechanised and primarily visual perspective, recalling Edward Thomas’s earlier description of the cyclist’s ‘disembodied’ movement. Thomas engages with his surroundings ‘through the eyes

81 Charney and Schwartz, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, 2.

82 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 72.

83 Jarry, *Ubu cycliste*, 34. ‘Rather than visiting sites and monuments, without compare we prefer the aesthetic emotion of speed in the sun and light, visual impressions succeeding one another rapidly enough so that we only recall the overall impression, and most of all so that we live without thinking. However, we can only praise this book, a series of practical itineraries with an abundance of very good photographs of all the sites’.

chiefly',⁸⁴ becoming a spectator of the scenes which his bicycle permits him to witness in rapid, smooth, exhilarating succession. The cyclists' gaze was at once fragmented and flowing, an equivocal trait that recalls the impact of modern advertising on apprehending text, as theorised by Sara Thornton: 'Our eye drifts across a page of ads from frame to frame, one frame remaining in our vision as the other is taken in, creating a palimpsestuous merging or superposition of one frame onto another. The effect here is of fragmentation and yet also sequence and flow.'⁸⁵ As Thomas, Leblanc, Jarry and others describe it, the cyclist clearly contributed to this very modern way of seeing.

In encouraging a spectatorial standpoint, the bicycle may be considered as an important element in the emergence of Guy Debord's society of the spectacle, in which 'tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation.'⁸⁶ From Debord's Marxist point of view, the passive spectator identifies only with visual representations and mediates his relationship with others purely through images. Technologies of modernity such as the camera, the cinematograph and to some extent the bicycle privileged a visual relationship to people and places, one that questioned the reliability of the human sensorium while affirming the capacity of technology to objectively represent reality. As such, these technologies contributed to widening the growing gap between subjects and the functions and needs of their own bodies. The political implications of this estrangement from our senses and bodily functions are examined by Jean Baudrillard, who establishes a link between bodily needs and consumer society in *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (1972). He argues that 'il faut dépasser le point de vue idéologique de la consommation comme processus

84 Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, 116.

85 Sara Thornton, *Advertising, Subjectivity, and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Dickens, Balzac, and the Language of the Walls* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9.

86 Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 15 'all that once was directly lived has become mere representation.'

d'appétence et de jouissance, comme extension métaphorique des notions fonctionnelles de digestion.'⁸⁷ Baudrillard claims that the persistence of the capitalist paradigm may be partly attributed to its success in first of all estranging us from our bodily requirements, and then compensating for this lack by encouraging an artificial need for commodities. In this way, he argues, the capitalist system produces 'un nouveau type de serf',⁸⁸ a modern-day consumer whose consumption of commodities differs very little from a slave's consumption of food in a feudal system. In a world where machines alienate people from their bodies, consumption of goods and services is portrayed as an extended metaphor of the digestive and bodily functions in order to manipulate people into buying objects to replace the functions that technology has usurped. Technologies such as photography, cinema and the bicycle were themselves commodities that heavily interfered with certain sensory or locomotive functions. Within Debord and Baudrillard's framework, such technologies may be viewed as contributing to the creation of unthinking automatons placed at the mercy of machines and capitalists. The camera and the bicycle were both examples of technologies which had the potential to alienate people from their bodies and senses, transforming humans into passive button or pedal-pushers, Marx's 'living mechanism' of a superior machine.

3.1.4 The human motor: mechanising the body in Alfred Jarry's *Le Surmâle*

The bicycle thus participated in larger discourses concerning technology's ability to outstrip human capacities, while also stoking fears of the mechanisation of the body itself.

87 Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). 'it is necessary to overcome the ideological understanding of consumption as a process of craving and pleasure, as an extended metaphor of the digestive functions.'

88 *Ibid.*, 90. 'a new type of serf'.

This concern was epitomised in the contemporary obsession with testing the limits of human endurance. Around the time that the first commercially-available velocipedes appeared in Paris, a body of medical writing emerged examining the efficiency of the human body. In his seminal study *The Human Motor*, Anson Rabinbach conducts a survey of a vast body of writing concerned with human work and fatigue, noting that whereas ‘before 1860 almost no medical or scientific studies of fatigue are recorded’,⁸⁹ there appeared a ‘new medical discourse in the 1870s charting the topography of fatigue, especially in France but also in other European countries.’⁹⁰ ‘Fatigue’ was seen by contemporaries as a malfunctioning of the human motor, to be overcome by various means, such as diet, stimulants, and training. The body was subjected to the logic that scientists and engineers had been applying to machines throughout the industrial era. It became a means for transforming energy into work, and was examined in terms of its input, output and efficiency. Such an outlook was characterised in the UK by works such as Arnold Bennett’s 1908 *The Human Machine*, which encouraged its readers to view their bodies and brains which may be controlled with careful training.⁹¹ While Rabinbach fails to consider the bicycle in his study, it was a technology that offered an ideal means for mechanically testing the physical capacities of the body. As contemporaries recognised, this highly efficient mechanism powered solely by human energy was an exemplary means for testing and quantifying human endurance.

Attitudes to competitive cycling during the late nineteenth and early twentieth attest to a mechanical vision of the human body’s potential. As the technology of the bicycle was perfected from the mid-1880s, incredible tests of performance were thought up to push the

89 Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 20.

90 *Ibid.*, 38.

91 Arnold Bennett. *The Human Machine* [1908]. Auckland, N.Z.: Floating Press, 2009.

limits of the human-machine assemblage. As Andrew Ritchie outlines in his history of cycle racing *Quest for Speed*, competitive cyclists at the turn of the century covered ever greater distances at faster and faster speeds. Ritchie argues that:

“Gigantism” and the pursuit of superlative records occurred in both sport and the development of technology, especially around the turn of the century. Both phenomena were fundamental expressions of an industrialised society, in which outstanding and hitherto unrealized achievements became the objective of all human endeavours.⁹²

At a time when faith in technological and athletic achievement was at its apogee, cyclists were pushed to feats that would shock present day athletes. At hugely popular track races, considered as one of the first mass spectator sports, cyclists continually raced around a circuit for six days and nights, stopping only briefly in order to sleep or eat. These cyclists pushed their bodies to incredible limits; in 1897 C.W. Miller covered the record distance of 2088.35 miles in a New York six-day track race.⁹³ A similar drive to ‘gigantism’ was observed in French road races. For instance, the Bordeaux-Paris bike race, first held in 1891, was 577 kilometers long, and in the Paris-Brest-Paris race, inaugurated the same year, cyclists covered 1,196 kilometers. Soon after winning the first Paris-Brest-Paris race, Charles Terront rode over three thousand kilometers from St. Petersburg to Paris in just over fourteen days. While I focus on recreational and utilitarian cyclists, who had a very different approach to the pastime, the social and cultural impact of such sporting events should not be downplayed.⁹⁴ Racing cyclists were a spectacle in the towns and villages through which they passed, results of races were published in the flourishing cycling press, and successful cyclists rapidly became celebrities.⁹⁵

92 Andrew Ritchie, *Quest for Speed: A History of Early Bicycle Racing 1868-1903* (Santa Clarita: A. Ritchie, 2011), 351.

93 Watson and Gray, *The Penguin Book of the Bicycle*, 232.

94 I adhere to Andrew Ritchie’s distinction between three categories of cycling: recreational, utilitarian and sporting. See Ritchie, *Quest for Speed*, 18.

95 The Tour de France was thought up by Henri Desgrange, the proprietor of *L’Auto-Vélo*, as a means to sell

Alfred Jarry's *Le Surmâle* (1902) provides a memorable literary incarnation of and cautionary tale about this contemporary obsession with testing human endurance and fatigue. Jarry himself was an enthusiastic cyclist who bought a luxury Clément racing bicycle in 1896, never managing to pay off the debt he had incurred in making the purchase.⁹⁶ Published a year before the first Tour de France, this 'roman moderne' mobilises the bicycle as a symbol of society's obsession with mechanically and chemically augmenting the body's capacities. As Marieke Dubbelboer observes: '[Jarry] reconnaît tous les motifs et toutes les idées en vogue à propos de la machine, mais pour s'en moquer, et pour les subvertir.'⁹⁷ While mocking contemporary attitudes, the novel also reflects a strain in Jarry's own thinking about the perfectibility of human strength through mechanical invention. In his 1896 review of the *Cyclo-Guide Miran* he describes the bicycle as 'un squelette extérieur' which has developed independently of human evolution.⁹⁸ Quoting other contemporary authors on cycling, Jarry remarks that 'Les Rosny ont déjà appelé le cycle un nouvel organe ; c'est surtout un prolongement minéral, et presque indéfiniment perfectible, étant né de la géométrie.'⁹⁹ In *Le Surmâle*, Jarry explores and satirises the concept of the mechanical perfectibility of the human body when coupled with machines. Set in a near future (c. 1920), the narrative centres around the exploits of aristocratic André Marcueil, who provocatively asserts at the beginning of the novel 'L'amour est un acte sans importance, puisqu'on peut le faire indéfiniment.'¹⁰⁰ This bold statement is founded on a firm belief in the possibility of attaining a form of

more newspapers.

96 Jarry, *Ubu cycliste*, 2.

97 Marieke Dubbelboer, 'Un univers mécanique: la machine chez Alfred Jarry', *French Studies* 58, no. 4 (2004): 483. 'Jarry recognises all the fashionable motifs and ideas circulating about the machine, only to mock and subvert them'.

98 'external skeleton.'

99 In *Le Mercure de France*, no 82, novembre 1896. Jarry, *Ubu cycliste*, 33. 'the Rosny brothers have already called the bicycle a new organ; above all it is a mineral extension which, being the outcome of geometry, is almost infinitely perfectible'.

100 Jarry, *Le Surmâle*, 7. 'Love is an insignificant act, since you can indulge in it endlessly'.

perpetual motion. Justifying himself to his audience – the doctor Bathybius, the engineer Arthur Gough and the chemist William Elson – Marcueil uses a cycling metaphor to make his point:

Des systèmes de muscles et de nerfs complexes jouissent d'un repos absolu, il me semble, pendant que leur "symétrique" travaille. On n'ignore point que chaque jambe d'un cycliste se repose et même bénéficie d'un massage automatique, et aussi réparateur que n'importe quelle embrocation, pendant que l'autre agit...¹⁰¹

This image highlights the bicycle's unique role as a machine that accompanies the body's effort, facilitating a perfected expenditure of energy. Since the body naturally recovers strength and energy when at rest, the alternate pedalling motion on a bicycle leads Marcueil to imagine that the cyclist could achieve perpetual motion. Such an outlook was fostered by mid-nineteenth century discoveries in thermodynamics, whose first law stated that energy in an isolated system is constant; therefore energy can neither be created nor destroyed. Yet the second law of thermodynamics asserts that entropy in a system will always increase, reducing the ability of energy to do work. These discoveries in physics contributed to the debates around fatigue and degeneration that characterised the late century, when a fear of limits coexisted alongside an optimistic belief in endless human potential.¹⁰² As Rabinbach observes:

The concepts of energy and fatigue reflected the paradox of this social modernity, at once affirming the endless natural power available to human purpose while revealing an anxiety of limits – the fear that the body and psyche were circumscribed by fatigue and thus could not withstand the demands of modernity.¹⁰³

101 *Ibid.*, 13. 'Complex muscular and nervous systems benefit from complete rest, it seems to me, while their "other half" works. It is well known that each leg of a cyclist rests and even enjoys an automatic massage, as restorative as any embrocation, while the other one acts...'

102 On degeneration, see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

103 Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 12.

The bicycle and the imaginaries that came to surround it in late-industrial Britain and France contributed to the emergence of discourses that presented the human body as a machine to be tested and perfected. Yet the spectre of the dissipation of human energy loomed large, suggesting that the body could not cope with the demands that machine culture placed on it.

In the opening pages of *Le Surmâle*, Marcueil is described as a thirty year-old ‘homme ordinaire’ who, judging from his frail physique, seems to be ‘d’une faiblesse remarquable.’¹⁰⁴ Unmarried and physically weak, he represents the type of degenerate subject that certain commentators believed would bring about depopulation and the decline of the nation. Yet a subsequent chapter recounting Marcueil’s youth informs the reader that he is not the feeble man he appears to be; due to his abnormally large sex, he has hidden his superhuman strength and sexual energy all his life, in order to appear normal. It is his desire to prove his conviction that ‘les forces humaines n’ont pas de limites’¹⁰⁵ that motivates him to eventually want to test his own physical strength, although he continues to veil his true identity. Marcueil’s first attempts to measure his physical might are carried out on machines built specifically for that purpose. Jarry’s narrative parodies the contemporary invention of just such devices, including the ergograph and the aesthesiometer.¹⁰⁶ Marcueil then turns to the bicycle, covertly taking part in a 10,000 mile race¹⁰⁷ between five cyclists on a quintuplet and a steam train, from Irkousk to Paris. American chemist William Elson travels in the train while the team of cyclists race a tandem for five days and nights at speeds up to 300km/h, fed only on Elson’s ‘Perpetual Motion Food.’ Like the Tour de France, first held in 1903, the race

104 Jarry, *Le Surmâle*, 9. ‘ordinary man’; ‘remarkably weak’.

105 *Ibid.*, 11. ‘human strength has no limits’.

106 Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 23. The ergograph measures the strength of a muscle while the aesthesiometer quantifies the degree of tactile sensitivity of the skin.

107 The metric distance is given as 16,093km, which is smaller by a factor of ten. As one person present remarks ‘Des nombres pareils, ça ne veut plus rien dire’ (‘numbers like that don’t mean anything anymore’), we may infer that Jarry is poking fun at the length of contemporary bicycle races by absurdly inflating their length, before diminishing it in the next line. Jarry, *Le Surmâle*, 13.

is thought up as a publicity stunt aimed at proclaiming ‘le moteur humain supérieur aux moteurs mécaniques *sur les grandes distances*’¹⁰⁸ thanks to Elson’s stimulant. Marcueil, on the other hand, takes part in the race in order to prove his belief in ‘l’illimité des forces humaines’¹⁰⁹ unaided by stimulants.

The long chapter recounting the race is narrated by one of the American quintuplet cyclists, Tom Oxborrow.¹¹⁰ One of the cyclists, Jewey Jacobs, dies from overexertion during the race. Oxborrow, referring to the body of his deceased team-mate, describes how his body ‘grippait’, adding that ‘ce terme, qui s’applique aux frottements des machines, convenait merveilleusement au cadavre.’¹¹¹ The trainers share this mechanistic, commodified view of the racer’s body, deciding against removing the corpse since Jacobs is still under contract until the end of the race. Instead, they order the remaining four cyclists to pedal harder to reanimate their departed team mate, whose corpse starts pedalling again furiously. The cyclists take the lead as the train runs out of fuel, but when they approach the finish line they are outrun by a mystery solo cyclist who, the reader presumes, is Marcueil. Free from any performance-enhancing drugs, he has been on their tail for the whole race. When he first appears, Oxborrow takes him for a novice, inept cyclist, known at the time as a ‘pédard.’¹¹² Remarking on his poor technique and outdated clothing, the narrator fully expects the mysterious cyclist to be run over by the steam train at any minute: ‘On eut dit, ma foi, tant il zigzagait, qu’il y avait bien trois heures, mais guère davantage, qu’il pratiquait le cycle. [...]’

108 *Ibid.*, 53. ‘the human motor superior to mechanical motors *over long distances*’.

109 *Ibid.*, 54. ‘the infinite nature of human strength’.

110 The cosmopolitan atmosphere of the novel, which features American scientists and doctors, reflects the international exchange between the US, France and the UK at the time. The presence of English bicycle terminology such as ‘toe-clip’ (p.59) ‘ankle play’ (p.60) further testifies to the global construction of discourses around cycling and other technologies.

111 Jarry, *Le Surmâle*, 61. ‘seized up’; ‘this term which applies to friction in machines, described the corpse perfectly’.

112 *Ibid.*, 71.

Il était vêtu d'une redingote et coiffé d'un chapeau haut de forme gris de poussière.'¹¹³ This image of an old-fashioned cyclist remains 'photographié dans [sa] rétine',¹¹⁴ as we have seen; yet just a few moments later his first impression proves to be false:

Je n'avais pas rêvé pourtant : un coureur étrange précédait la locomotive ; mais il ne montait pas un corps-droit à caoutchoucs pleins ! mais il ne portait pas de bottines à élastiques ! mais sa bicyclette ne grinçait pas [...] Sa culotte était éclatée sur les cuisses par le gonflement de ses muscles extenseurs ! Sa bicyclette était un modèle de course dont je n'ai jamais vu le pareil, aux pneus microscopiques, au développement supérieur à celui de la quintuplette.¹¹⁵

Before the narrator's eyes, the outdated *pédard* becomes a scorcher. An absurd nineteenth-century apparition is transformed into a vision of the future, an optimised human body mounted on a perfected machine. This detailed portrait of an old-fashioned cyclist reminds us that the frenetic pace of technological development meant that even by 1902 – with the appearance of the automobile and the beginnings of aviation – the cyclist was something of an archaic apparition. Yet the portrait of the futuristic cyclist drives home the persistent modernity of an artefact that provides an optimised means to test and develop the limits of the human body. The clothes, muscles and bicycle of the *surmâle* mingle into one striking, futuristic image of a body perfected by technology.

After winning the race, Marcueil returns home to accomplish his next feat: while disguised as an 'Indien', he has sex a record eighty-two times in 24 hours with Ellen Elson, William's daughter. Ellen, a keen driver, wears driving goggles during the experiment in order to conceal her identity from the independent observer, Dr. Bathybius.¹¹⁶ While the

113 *Ibid.*, 72. 'He was wobbling so much that it looked like he had been cycling for hardly three hours [...] He was dressed in a frock coat and wearing a grey and dusty top hat'.

114 *Ibid.*

115 *Ibid.*, 74. 'It was not a dream: a strange cyclist was in front of the locomotive. But he was not riding a town bicycle with solid tyres! He was not wearing elastic boots! His bicycle wasn't squeaking [...] His swelling muscles had split his shorts apart at the thighs! His bicycle was a racing model the like of which I had never seen, with microscopic tyres, and with a ratio higher than that on the quintuplet'.

116 *Ibid.*, 98.

couple are attempting to test their sexual capacity, the inclusion of this symbolic accessory points to the mechanical outlook on the body fostered by contact with technologies such as the automobile and the bicycle. At the end of the sexual experiment the astonished Dr. Bathybius exclaims, ‘Ce n’est pas un homme, c’est une machine.’¹¹⁷ In order to inspire love for Ellen in Marcueil, the engineer Arthur Gough then invents a machine that shocks him with 11,000 volts. The desired effect is not achieved, however; it is the machine that falls in love with the man, as Marcueil’s strength is superior to that of the love machine. Seeing the result, the doctor remarks:

[...] mais c’est si naturel, au fait ! [...] en ce temps où le métal et la mécanique sont tout-puissants, il faut bien que l’homme, pour survivre, devienne plus fort que les machines, comme il a été plus fort que les fauves... Simple adaptation au milieu... Mais cet homme-là est le premier de l’avenir...¹¹⁸

In the closing pages of the novel, this evolutionary explanation for Marcueil’s superhuman strength focuses the reader’s attention on the risk posed by an overly mechanised society. In order to survive, the doctor claims, humans must overcome machines, becoming machine-like and losing their humanity in the process. Marcueil’s death at the end of the novel is a reminder of the necessary limits of such a mechanistic view of human potential: he breaks free from the love machine and impales himself on the iron railings of the gate to his château. The final description of his corpse, ‘entortillé autour des barreaux, ou les barreaux autour du corps’¹¹⁹ provides a grotesque image of a body deformed by the metal it sought to imitate, and finally indistinguishable from it.

As Corry Cropper and others have argued, Jarry’s novel is not simply an irreverent, humorous tale: it is a response to contemporary attitudes about the relationship between

117 *Ibid.*, 127. ‘He’s not a man, he is a machine’.

118 *Ibid.*, 130. ‘[...] but it’s so natural, in fact! [...] now that metal and mechanism are all powerful, in order to survive man must become stronger than machines, just like he overcame animals... Simply adapting to his environment... But this is the first man of the future...’.

119 *Ibid.*, 134.

humans and machines, a ‘cautionary prophecy about the negative consequences of speed and technology, a warning of positivism’s hubris.’¹²⁰ Jarry instrumentalises the bicycle in this novel as one in a string of real and imaginary inventions that express a dangerous drive to industrialise and mechanise the human body. Marcueil is the man of the future who, through prolonged contact with machines, has learned to treat his body as a machine to be tested, pushed and optimised. As Bettina Knapp observes, Jarry’s novel highlights ‘the fragility of the human species’ and offers a negative view of the machine age and its increasing power over individuals and societies.¹²¹ Jarry suggests that while machines might allow us to overcome certain limitations of the body, such limitations are necessary, natural, and constitute what it means to be human. Overlooking them by treating the body purely as a machine leads to the destruction of the body, alongside a loss of fundamentally human sentiments such as love and compassion.

3.2 Beyond vision: stimulating the senses

While providing a striking instance of the meeting and interaction of man and machine, turn-of-the-century cyclists attested to a sharpened and renewed sensory experience in the saddle. Michel Bouet characterises the bodily effect of sport as such: ‘À l’activation et à l’intensification des fonctions corporelles motrices correspondent un éveil et un enrichissement de la sensorialité et principalement des modes de la kinesthésie.’¹²² The bicycle

120 Corry Cropper, ‘Like a Furnace: Alfred Jarry’s *The Supermale*, Doping and the Limits of Positivism’, in *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film*, ed. Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 106; See also Bettina L Knapp, ‘Jarry’s “The Supermale”: The Sex Machine, the Food Machine, and the Bicycle Race: Is It a Question of Adaptation?’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 18, no. 3/4 (1990): 492–507; Philip G. Hadlock, ‘Men, Machines, and the Modernity of Knowledge in Alfred Jarry’s “Le Surmâle”’, *SubStance* 35, no. 3 (2006): 131–48.

121 Knapp, ‘Jarry’s “The Supermale”’, 492.

122 Bouet, *Signification du sport*, 25. ‘The activation and intensification of the body’s motor functions

required its rider to make a physical effort, and the effect of this was a stimulation and mingling of all the senses, such as that described by Bouet. Justin Spinney also remarks on the multisensory experience of cyclists in an ethnographic study of present-day London.¹²³ Whilst highlighting the importance of technology in shaping the ways we experience space, Spinney illustrates how ‘in an embodied practice such as cycling [...] vision is shown to be re-embodied alongside the other senses as part of a multi-sensory construction of the experiences and meanings of place.’¹²⁴ Early century cycling authors attested to this novel sensory and bodily engagement with one’s surroundings, describing an awakening and a blending of all the senses.

Although his motion was simplified by a complex mechanism, the cyclist’s vision was no longer framed by the train window, and he was able to engage his hearing, smell and touch in his negotiation of his surroundings. W. S. Beekman reflected on the changes he felt had occurred in his sensory organs on learning to cycle in his autobiographical touring account *Cycle Gleanings* (1894) in the following terms: ‘Once possessing a machine, see the effect. The entire system is stimulated, the mind strengthened, purified and quickened [...] One can never forget the sensations experienced during the time acquiring the art of riding.’¹²⁵ In a highly industrialised present, this unique machine appeared to provide a means for reconnecting with the human sensorium, manifesting a contemporary desire for embodied experience. Marc Desportes notes that a ‘désir d’une expérience spatiale qui engagerait pleinement le corps’¹²⁶ characterised the work of writers and artists at the end of the

corresponds to an awakening and an enriching of sensoriality, particularly through kinaesthesia’.

123 Justin Spinney, ‘Cycling the City: Non-Place and the Sensory Construction of Meaning in a Mobile Practice’, in *Cycling and Society*, ed. Dave Horton, Paul Rosen, and Peter Cox (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 25–45.

124 *Ibid.*, 41.

125 Beekman and Eric, *Cycle Gleanings*, 3.

126 Marc Desportes, *Paysages en mouvement : transports et perception de l’espace, XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 199. ‘desire for a spatial experience that would fully engage the body.’

nineteenth century, arguing that the *fin-de-siècle* sought a means of engaging with space in a mobile, bodily, sensory manner.¹²⁷ Although Desportes fails to take cycling into account in his aesthetic survey of various transportation technologies, his remarks on this yearning for an embodied, mobile experience of space reflect the reality of those discovering the new technology of the bicycle at this time. Cycling authors bear witness to a revival of the senses and a corresponding reconnection with space through this novel means of transport.¹²⁸

The cyclist enjoys a sensorily rich experience of place that shares much in common with the perspective of the pedestrian, relying not only on vision but also on hearing, smell and touch to interpret her surroundings. This was in sharp contrast to other nineteenth-century technologies such as rail travel and photography, which encouraged a purely visual interaction with space. Alex Goody points to the emergence of ‘a visual technological culture’ in the Victorian era, with inventions such as stereoscopes, dioramas, magic lantern shows, mutoscopes, zoetropes, peepshows and the cinema proliferating towards the end of the end of the nineteenth century.¹²⁹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch highlights the cultural impact of the ‘panoramic view’ engendered by the railways, whose speed prevented travellers from hearing, smelling, touching or looking closely at objects passing near by, obliging them to contemplate distant views.¹³⁰ The car, making its appearance shortly after the bicycle, largely inherited the train’s panoramic, distancing vision. A cyclist, on the contrary, sets her own pace, travelling at speed, riding slowly, changing direction, walking or stopping at her own will. She is conscious and aware of the people, animals and things around her, becoming

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 174–75.

¹²⁸ The spatial engagement of the cyclist is explored at greater length in Chapter 4.

¹²⁹ Alex Goody, *Technology, Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 6.

¹³⁰ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th century* (1979), trans. Anslem Hollo (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986).

integral to the machine and a part of the landscape through which she moves. Cyclists are able to creatively interact with their surroundings, engaging all of their senses in the process.

Perception, as well as being a bodily phenomenon, is of course a cultural construct, contingent on the time and place in which it occurs. In order to examine its place at the turn of the century, I follow in the footsteps of Steven Connor's 'cultural phenomenology', privileging examination of embodied, sensory experience, while bearing in mind the historical, social and political determinism of such experience.¹³¹ The meanings given to the sensory experience of the cyclist were inherited, adapted and understood through previous modes of mobility and perception, as well as the metaphysical and scientific traditions existing in Britain and France. In addition, each bodily sense played a part in overarching discourses, in which socially accepted meanings were assigned to them. Norman Bryson reminds us that, in the case of vision, 'between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visibility, that cultural construct, and make visibility different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience.'¹³² Attempting to uncover the discourses surrounding cyclists' perception in this period will allow us to come to a closer understanding of our texts, their authors, and the society in which they lived. Textual examination also provides a means for exploring how authors on cycling contributed to the (de)construction of contemporary discourses around sensory perception. At once mobile and attentive, cyclists were key players at a moment when, in Crary's terms, vision was 'taken out of the incorporeal relations of the camera obscura and relocated in the human body.'¹³³ Not only vision but all the other human senses were combined with movement to create one

131 Steven Connor, 'Making an Issue of Cultural Phenomenology', *Critical Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2000): 2–6.

132 Norman Bryson, 'The Gaze in the Expanded Field', in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 92.

133 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 16.

compelling incarnation of the ‘unstable attentive subject’ of modernity theorised by Crary.¹³⁴

3.2.1 Bodily progression: effort and reward

Central to the cyclist’s multi-sensory experience is the energetic input required from the body. Where the energy needed for progression was constantly in evidence in coaches or on horseback, railways and other fuel-powered transport had occulted energetic input, making forward motion seem effortless. While many hailed the machine’s negation of the need for human or animal labour as a victory of industrial society, others saw it as a fundamental distortion of human experience. John Ruskin (1819-1900) famously asserted that ‘all travelling becomes dull in exact proportion to its rapidity’,¹³⁵ and elsewhere railed against mechanical aids to locomotion (including the bicycle), arguing that ‘nothing in the training of the human mind with the body will ever supersede the appointed God’s ways of slow walking and hard working.’¹³⁶ While Ruskin vociferously denounced the bicycle along with other modes of transport, many early cyclists in fact shared his view on the value of hard work in the experience of travel. The energetic contribution cyclists made to their locomotion encouraged them to question the value of mechanised models of transport. In ‘The English Mail-Coach’ (1849), Thomas De Quincey argues that mechanised travel removes the main pleasure of movement:

Seated in the old mail-coach, we needed no evidence out of ourselves to indicate velocity [...] The vital experience of the glad animal sensibilities made doubts impossible on the question of our speed; we heard our speed, we saw it, we felt it as a thrilling; and this speed was not the product of blind

134 Crary, ‘Unbinding Vision’, 68.

135 John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander D. O Wedderburn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), vol 5, 370.

136 John Ruskin, *Tit-Bits*, 31 March 1888, 399.

insensate agencies, that had no sympathy to give, but was incarnated in the fiery eyeballs of the noblest among brutes, in his dilated nostril, spasmodic muscles, and echoing hoofs [...] But now, on the new system of travelling, iron tubes and boilers have disconnected man's heart from the ministers of his locomotion.¹³⁷

The cyclist shares in common with the horses pulling the mail coach – and, according to De Quincey, its passengers – a keen, bodily sense of the energy being spent in order to move. De Quincey insists on the rich sensory experience of coach travel, describing how travellers heard, felt and saw their speed, and thus mingled their senses and bodies with their forward movement. This is contrasted to the ‘blind, insensate’ experience of rail travel, where passengers’ bodies are ‘disconnected’ from the means of locomotion. Coach travellers did not directly furnish locomotive energy, yet they were complicit with the horses’ effort; De Quincey goes on to stress that their speed, though provided by the horses, ‘had yet its centre and beginning in man.’¹³⁸ Not only did the passengers directly witness their effort and exhaustion, they would get out of the coach and walk on uphill stretches in order to relieve the animals. Moreover, De Quincey’s justification of his preference for riding on the top of the mail coach – ‘The air, the freedom of prospect, the proximity to the horses, the elevation of seat [...] but, above all, the certain anticipation of purchasing occasional opportunities of driving’¹³⁹ prefigures the aesthetic pleasure of cycling, where the rider is directly exposed to the elements and directs the vehicle independently. The cyclist, like the horse, is connected in a very physical way to his motion; kinetic energy is drawn from his limbs, not from invisible ‘tubes and boilers.’ The sociologist of sport Michel Bouet similarly recognises the bicycle’s ability to reconnect the body to its own capacities, arguing that:

137 Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 193–94.

138 *Ibid.*, 194.

139 *Ibid.*, 186.

Un des plaisirs spécifiques de la bicyclette consiste à se sentir doué d'une puissance multipliée, mais qui pour autant reste la nôtre, celle de notre corps, sans que nous payions notre exaltation par une perte de notre autonomie, comme c'est le cas lorsque nous nous annexons un moteur naturel, comme le vent ou la puissance d'un animal (équitation) ou un moteur automobile.¹⁴⁰

The loss of autonomy inherent in motorised (or, according to Bouet, even equine) travel is the price to pay for the exhilaration of fast, effortless movement. The cyclist, on the other hand, reaps all the benefits of a mechanism that optimises his motion, while retaining his energetic autonomy. Leblanc's hero Pascal attributes the specific joy of cycling to this direct correlation between bodily energy and movement; 'on a la joie de créer en vitesse et en impressions l'équivalent de ce qu'on a dépensé en énergie et en espoirs. On avance parce qu'on est fort et souple, et l'on voit de belles choses parce qu'on est capable d'aller les voir' (VA 40).¹⁴¹ The cyclist provides his own energy and draws deep satisfaction both from his rapid movement and his vital connection to his body's effort.

Writing in the 1970s, Ivan Illich echoed Ruskin and De Quincey's impression of the alienation implicit in mechanised travel, describing how the habitual passenger, 'Addicted to being carried along, [...] has lost control over the physical, social, and psychic powers that reside in man's feet.'¹⁴² By contributing her own energy to forward movement, the cyclist rediscovers a meaning in the journey, rather than concentrating solely on departure and destination. Work and effort are required from the cyclist to make progress, and the journey is synonymous with physical fatigue or suffering, yet also with a sense of purpose. As Eric Leed recalls, medieval pilgrims did not travel for pleasure, but in order to subject their bodies to

140 Bouet, *Signification du sport*, 190. 'One of the specific pleasures of cycling is feeling endowed with multiplied strength, but which nonetheless remains our own, that of our body. We do not have to pay for our exaltation with a loss of autonomy, as is the case when we annex natural energy, such as that of the wind or an animal (horse), or extract energy from a car's engine'.

141 'joyfully we create speed and impressions that are the equivalent of the energy and expectations we have contributed. We progress because we are strong and supple, and we see beautiful things because we are capable of going to see them.'

142 Illich, *Energy and Equity*, 25.

the epic ordeal of walking great distances to reach holy sites; a meaning ‘explicit in the original English word for travel, *travail*.’¹⁴³ The hard work required from the cyclist’s body may be exhausting, but it is above all empowering. By putting effort into movement, the non-motorised traveller is rewarded with a rich sensory experience (described by De Quincey) and physical, social and psychic empowerment (depicted by Illich). The bodily connection to forward movement specific to the walker and the cyclist is at the source of a multi-sensory connection to space that, in an industrialised world, proposes an alternative, human-centred vision of travel.

As well as making possible an empowering experience of mobility, the physical effort required to make progress is at the basis of the cyclist’s altered relationship with her surroundings. In a similar way to the walker, as characterised by Michel de Certeau, cyclists are able to escape the ‘totalisations imaginaires de l’œil’ through a bodily and ‘blind’ connection with space. Rather than relying on visual signals to interpret their environment, cyclists, like de Certeau’s urban walkers, ‘jouent des espaces qui ne se voient pas; ils en ont une connaissance aussi aveugle que dans le corps à corps amoureux.’¹⁴⁴ This vocabulary of bodily engagement with space is mirrored by several critics who have written about cycling: Marc Augé describes the sensation as as ‘ce corps à corps avec l’espace’,¹⁴⁵ while Didier Tronchet praises the capacity the bicycle gives us to merge with our environment (‘faire corps avec l’espace’).¹⁴⁶ It is as though cyclists’ connection to their bodies allows them to extend their consciousness into an awareness of a physical connection to their surroundings. Cyclists

143 Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of a Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 6.

144 Michel de Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 141–42. ‘the imaginary totalisations produced by the eye’; ‘These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms.’

145 Marc Augé, *Éloge de la bicyclette* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2008), 30. ‘a bodily connection with space.’

146 Tronchet, *Petit traité de vélosophie*, 59. ‘be at one with space’.

perform a sensory aesthetics built on mobile, multisensory engagement that directly challenges the predominance of mechanised travel and visual discourses.¹⁴⁷

Using the body's energy implies a return to a pre-industrial paradigm, when value was generated through human and animal labour in addition to the harnessing of natural resources. Desportes points out how the modernising road-building projects in France in the eighteenth century were accompanied by Turgot's abolishment of the state's requisitioning of the resource of human energy in the form of the *corvée* (the obligatory, unpaid work men had to do for the King), a measure which the finance minister justified in the following terms: 'l'ouvrage qui se fait coûte au peuple et à l'Etat, en journées d'hommes et de voitures, deux fois et souvent trois fois plus qu'il ne coûterait, s'il s'exécutait à prix d'argent.'¹⁴⁸ While the revocation of the draconian *corvée* certainly freed French peasants from effective slavery, Turgot's reasoning was symptomatic of a modern, capitalist drive to replace human power with money and mechanism; a paradigm that by no means implies an end to exploitation. Karl Marx noted the centrality of mechanised transport for industrial production in a capitalist system, with its 'constant flinging of capital and labour from one sphere of production into another, and its newly-created connections with the world market.'¹⁴⁹ Mechanised transport created the new geographies required for globalised capitalism and imperialism, systems that rely on the exploitation of the many by the few. The bicycle, on the other hand, proposes a localised, human-scaled geography, that makes the 'constant flinging of capital and labour' unthinkable. Marx himself focused on the importance of the senses in framing our interaction with the world, observing that 'man is affirmed in the objective world

147 The cyclist's engagement with space is explored at greater length in Chapter 4.

148 Desportes, *Paysages en mouvement*, 26. 'work carried out with labour from men and coaches costs the people and the State twice or even three times as much as it would cost if paid for with money'.

149 Marx, *Capital*, 1:506.

not only in the act of thinking, but with *all* his senses.’¹⁵⁰ The enthusiastic uptake of cycling by diverse groups in the late-nineteenth century may have been connected to the subversive thrill of rediscovering, albeit briefly, the power and potential of the human body and its senses, in the context of a highly industrialised, globalised and commodified present.¹⁵¹ At the turn of the twentieth century, when imperialist capitalism was at its apogee, the bicycle suggested an alternative route for modernity, one which turned its back on the dizzying pursuit of wealth and mechanisation and re-instated human energy as society’s basic currency and the five senses as our interface with the world.

3.2.2 Multisensory movement

Having reconnected to the body as a source of energy and empowerment, and appreciating the aesthetic pleasure of mechanically optimised effort, cyclists engaged in a renewed relationship with their senses. The importance of all five senses to early cyclists is testified to by the frequent recurrence of accounts of night-time cycling. This trope in cycling literature became at once a means to vaunt the merits of a vehicle that allowed its user to travel regardless of timetables, and a way to challenge the optical ‘panoramic’ discourse by presenting a multisensory experience of movement. Deprived of visual signals, cyclists attest to a heightened, visceral experience of their surroundings. In his autobiographical account of cycle touring, J. W. Allen reflects on preference for nocturnal rides, noting: ‘At night we see the world as it is: vast, phantasmal, nebulous, dark. The sun makes it difficult to believe in the

150 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), 108.

151 This was part of broader cultural tendencies, as shown by William A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

absolutely invisible. At night we know better [...] One realises the immensity of things and how unimportant humanity is, even on its own planet.’¹⁵² Allen’s verb progression – from ‘seeing’ to ‘believing’ to ‘knowing’ to ‘realising’ – hints at a subtle questioning of visual discourses, and a widening of the cognitive net to other means of interpreting the ‘invisible’ world. H. G. Wells’s heroes in *The Wheels of Chance* rejoice in the exhilarating experience of cycling at night, when the road – which had been an aggressive visual and tactile presence during the day – becomes principally an aural (albeit silent) element in the nocturnal scene:

The road that was a mere rutted white dust, hot underfoot, blinding to the eye, is now a soft grey silence, with the glitter of a crystal grain set starlike in its silver here and there. [...] And in silence under [the moon’s] benign influence, under the benediction of her light, rode our two wanderers side by side through the transfigured and transfiguring night. (WC 96)

These cyclists’ interaction with the spaces they move through allows them access to a realm beyond the visual. Their multisensory, kinaesthetic experience is highlighted by the mingling of tactile, visual and aural elements in descriptions such as ‘soft grey silence,’ and a sense of reciprocal exchange with the environment is suggested by the repetitive rhythm of the end of the extract. It is as though the darkness awakens a mystical sixth sense that takes attention away from the predominance of sight, allowing for an interaction with space that, in Wells’s terms, is mutually transfiguring, for both subject and object.

This fantastic register surrounding nocturnal rides was echoed by several other authors. The journalist A. W. Rumney was typical of his generation of cyclists in enjoying riding ‘on Welsh mountains on a moonlit night, and amongst the weirdness of the solemn hills at the witching hour.’¹⁵³ The supernatural tone recurrent in such accounts of night-time riding communicates these riders’ hyper-sensory, hypnotic experience. After a difficult start

¹⁵² Allen, *Wheel Magic*, 91.

¹⁵³ Rumney, *A Cyclist’s Note Book*, 70.

under a glaring sun, Leblanc's four cyclist protagonists first discover the joy of cycling when they continue cycling after sunset:

La silhouette des choses s'effaçait. Ils allaient parmi les fantômes des arbres et les haies confuses. Et plus ils avançaient, plus il leur semblait recevoir des trésors d'énergie et de souplesse et qu'ils pourraient aller, aller toujours, comme l'eau qui roulait auprès d'eux sans lassitude, toujours alerte, toujours joyeuse, toujours renouvelée.

Le nuit les enveloppa. Les deux couples se perdirent de vue (VA 21).

154

Here, darkness allows the cyclists to establish a mystical connection with their environment, while providing the first opportunity for the two newly formed couples to lose sight of each other. Leblanc's syntax mirrors the revitalising experience of nocturnal cycling; two brief sentences convey the effect of the diminishing light, before a long, lyrical sentence composed of several rhythmic phrases reflects the regular motion of the cyclists. Moreover, there is an aesthetic pleasure in the ghostly atmosphere associated with the night. Burke considers the effect of darkness on the human psyche, quoting a gloomy scene from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), in which 'all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree.'¹⁵⁵ Darkness enhances the cyclist's sense of travelling into the unknown, an impression that augments her sense of adventure and pleasure in the journey. While anchored in a keen corporeal awareness, these accounts of nocturnal riding also bear witness to a certain out-of-body experience.¹⁵⁶ It is as though bodily effort and the engagement of all the senses allow the cyclist to transcend both the machine and her own physicality, giving her access to a spiritual, immaterial world.

154 'The silhouettes of things were fading. They moved through the ghosts of trees and blurry hedges. And the further they went, the more it seemed to them that they were gifted with energy and agility, and that they could go on forever, like the water that flowed untiringly along beside them, ever alert, ever joyful and continually refreshed./ The night engulfed them. The two couples lost sight of each other'.

155 Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 55.

156 Such a register recalls the efforts of Thomas Carlyle or Rudyard Kipling to reconcile machinery with vitalism through a transcendental perspective. See Herbert L. Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine: the Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 197.

Cyclists' fascination with the night is suggestive not only of the Romantic, sublime aesthetic, but also of nostalgia. Junichirō Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows* (1933), takes up the image of darkness in order to cast one last backward glance at a traditional world that is disappearing (or being harshly revealed) in the aggressive glare of electric lighting and modern technology.¹⁵⁷ The night certainly seems to bring a sense of history to mind for J. W. Allen, who argues that main roads 'are pleasant only at night', when the impossibility of seeing the road means that 'we know only that beneath our wheels is the great road along which men have travelled generation after generation; and our minds reach forward along it for a hundred miles.'¹⁵⁸ Allen's keen interest in visiting medieval cathedrals, and the passion of the literary cycle pilgrims I discuss further in the final chapter for visiting historical sites, are indicative of certain cyclists' ambivalent attitude towards modernity. In many textual accounts, cyclists were drawn to the rapidly diminishing dark places, where they sought to establish a meaningful, bodily connection with space beyond the reach of the city's lights, and suggest an alternative means of envisioning progress.

Maurice Leblanc's pastoral novel *Voici des ailes* pays close attention to the subtle changes that cycling can operate in the human sensorium. At the beginning of their journey through Brittany and Normandy, the four cyclists are described as being out of touch with their senses and bodies, yet gradually they begin to perceive things afresh:

Ils regardaient à peine, les yeux et l'esprit fermés au charme des spectacles. Ils ne savaient pas percevoir la musique du silence, le chant des feuilles et l'harmonie des eaux. Mais tout cela pénétrait en eux par des voies nouvelles et les imprégnait d'un bien-être inconnu. (VA 20)¹⁵⁹

The narrator first concentrates on the visual register, drawing attention to the characters'

¹⁵⁷ Junichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (London: Vintage Books, 2001).

¹⁵⁸ Allen, *Wheel Magic*, 6.

¹⁵⁹ 'They hardly looked at things; their eyes and their minds were closed off to the charm of spectacles. They did not know how to perceive the music of silence, the song of the leaves and the harmony of water. But all this penetrated them through new channels and infused them with an unfamiliar sense of well being'.

closed eyes and minds. It is as though this blindness were a necessary stage on the cyclists' journey, which will allow them to distance themselves from the dominant visual paradigm in order to discover 'new channels' for sensory engagement. The description of barely audible ambient noises, which they do not yet 'know how to perceive', points to the crucial role that the other senses will come to play in these cyclists' renewed relationship with their bodies and their environment. By the end of the novel Pascal is able to proclaim to Madeleine that, thanks to the bicycle, their senses are more acute: '[nous sommes] affranchis dans notre corps plus rapide, dans nos sens plus délicats, dans nos oreilles qui savent entendre et dans nos yeux qui savent voir' (VA 92).¹⁶⁰ Recalling the terms of the above description of the cyclists' closed senses – 'Ils ne savaient pas percevoir' (VA 20)¹⁶¹ – Pascal bears witness to an awakening of the senses, which have learned to perceive the surrounding sights, smells and sounds through a gradual apprenticeship.

Several days into the journey, Pascal begins to take stock of the changes that are occurring in his sensorium. He describes his impressions using the following metaphor:

Il me semble que j'étais, jusqu'ici, emprisonné dans une enveloppe de verre, et que c'était au travers de cette enveloppe que me venaient les spectacles du dehors, les bruits, les parfums, et tous affaiblis, refroidis pour ainsi dire... et il me semble maintenant que ce verre se casse, morceau par morceau, et que les sensations m'arrivent directes, chaudes, douloureuses presque. (VA 31-32)¹⁶²

The glass envelope from which Pascal begins to break free recalls the window of a car or train; while transparent, it acts as a filter between the moving subject and the sense data he interprets. Everything appears as a 'spectacle', implying an absence of involvement in the scene on the part of the subject, and the visual register predominates at the expense of

160 '[we are] liberated in our quickened bodies, in our sharpened senses, in our ears that can hear and our eyes that can see'.

161 'They did not know how to perceive.'

162 'It seems to me that until now I was imprisoned in a glass case, and that all outside spectacles, sounds and smells, came to me through the glass, watered down and chilled, as it were... and now it seems that the glass is breaking, bit by bit, and that warm and almost painful sensations come to me directly.'

watered down sounds and smells. As the glass breaks, Pascal discovers a more comprehensive sensory experience, thanks to which he gradually becomes aware of the whole range of sensations available to him. He directly attributes this discovery to the bicycle, while (through a word play on ‘sens’¹⁶³) he claims that this sensory reconnection gives meaning to life: ‘Il n’y a qu’à stimuler en soi le sens de la vie, et l’on est heureux, heureux noblement, largement, en toute justice et en toute certitude. Et c’est à elle que nous devons cela, à cette petite chose en acier’ (VA 30).¹⁶⁴

The nature of Leblanc’s cyclists’ new interaction with the world prefigures aspects of Henri Bergson’s concept of *élan vital*, as well as the phenomenology and materialism of more recent theorists such as Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Guattari, Bill Brown, Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett.¹⁶⁵ The further he rides, the more convinced Pascal becomes that, rather than being separate from the objects surrounding him, his body mingles with them (‘on est fondu dans ces choses elles-mêmes’ [VA 63]¹⁶⁶). This belief is founded on a sensory dialogue with his environment; as Merleau-Ponty argues, in the act of sensory interaction, the sense organ becomes integrated into the fleshy world of objects:

[...] la main qui touche [...] prend place parmi les choses qu’elle touche, est en un sens l’une d’elles, ouvre enfin sur un être tangible dont elle fait aussi partie. Par ce recroisement en elle du touchant et du tangible, ses mouvements propres s’incorporent à l’univers qu’ils interrogent, sont reportés sur la même carte que lui.¹⁶⁷

Prefiguring Merleau-Ponty’s theory in *Le Visible et l’invisible*, Pascal attests to a sense of

163 Translating as either ‘sense’ or ‘meaning.’

164 ‘One only needs to stimulate the sense of life within oneself, and one is happy, nobly, generously happy, justly and assuredly. And we have this little steel object to thank for this.’

165 See Henri Bergson, *L’évolution créatrice* (Paris: PUF, 1948).

166 ‘we melt into these very things’.

167 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 174. ‘[...] the hand that touches [...] takes up a place amongst the things that it touches, is in some sense one of them, and finally gives access to a tangible greater essence of which it is also a part. Through this overlapping of the touching and the touchable, its own movements are integrated into the universe it is engaging with and are written onto the same map as it.’

belonging in a vibrant world, where his newly-awakened senses are the interface with the objects around him. ‘C’est ma peau elle-même qui frappe la vie du dehors,’ Pascal affirms, ‘ce sont mes sens qui reçoivent les chocs, et c’est mon cerveau qui vibre et qui s’émeut’ (VA 48).¹⁶⁸ Pascal’s description mirrors Merleau-Ponty’s concept of ‘chair’, a fleshy essence that mediates the sensory interaction between subject and object. By opening themselves up to this direct sensory experience, Leblanc’s cyclists merge with the environment: ‘[ils] devinrent des parcelles de la nature, des forces instinctives, comme des nuages qui glissent, comme des vagues qui roulent, comme des parfums qui flottent, comme des bruits qui se répercutent...’ (VA 52).¹⁶⁹ By engaging the senses fully, the cyclist becomes part of the clouds, smells and sounds surrounding him, and enters into dialogue with the vibrant world.

3.2.3 Sensual bicycles

Leblanc offers a compelling insight into the cyclist’s sensory experience, one that highlights the essentially erotic nature of being in the world. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty highlights the fact that sensory experience finds its culmination in sexual desire and verbal expression, when ‘le corps ne s’accouple plus au monde, il enlace un autre corps [...] et dès lors, mouvement, toucher, vision s’appliquant à l’autre et à eux-mêmes, remontent vers leur source et, dans le travail patient et silencieux du désir, commence le paradoxe de l’expression.’¹⁷⁰ Correspondingly, by stimulating their sense organs, cyclists engage in a more

168 ‘My skin itself strikes the outside world, my senses are shocked and my brain resonates and stirs.’

169 ‘[they] became parcels of nature, instinctive forces, like the clouds that float by, like the waves that roll, like smells that float in the air, like sounds that reverberate.’

170 Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible*, 187. ‘the body no longer joins together with the world, it wraps itself around another body [...] and at that point, movement, touch, vision relate to both the other and themselves, they return to their source, and begin the long and silent work of desire, where the paradox of expression begins.’

direct, erotic exchange with the objects and bodies that surround them. As we shall see, a range of French and British authors mobilise the bicycle as a tool for awakening or expressing sexuality.

In Leblanc's *Voici des ailes*, the cyclists' finely attuned senses allow them to recognise and act on their sexual desires, a force that consistently acts as the main narrative drive of the tale. The bicycle plays a role in awaking desire, since, as Rosemary Lloyd notes in her analysis of the novel, 'its wheels act like a pair of magic spectacles to reveal both its own desires and those of everything around it.'¹⁷¹ To begin with, this sexual energy is principally directed at the bicycle itself, with which Pascal senses an intimate communion. At the beginning of the novel, Pascal draws inspiration from the open and 'sincere' nature of the bicycle's mechanism: 'Elle ne cache rien, ses mouvements sont apparents, l'effort chez elle se voit et se comprend; elle proclame son but, elle dit qu'elle veut aller vite, silencieusement et légèrement' (VA 12).¹⁷² Indeed, the bicycle – consistently referred to in the feminine 'la bicyclette', and not the masculine 'le vélo' – becomes explicitly sexualised in Leblanc's narrative; in one scene Pascal, leaning against a tree, lovingly contemplates the machine: 'C'étaient [des] regards, doux, affectueux, imprégnés de respect et de gratitude', before admitting 'Ce n'est plus une chose, Madeleine, ce n'est plus une petite bête d'acier ; non, écoutez... c'est une amie' (VA 86).¹⁷³ The sense of existing reciprocally with one's environment leads Pascal to perform an erotic exchange with all the objects around him,

171 Rosemary Lloyd, 'Reinventing Pegasus: Bicycles and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Imagination', *Dix-Neuf* 4, no. 1 (2013): 56.

172 'It hides nothing, its movements are visible, you can see and understand its working; it proclaims its goal, it says it wants to go quickly, silently and lightly.'

173 'With soft, affectionate looks, filled with respect and gratitude'; 'It's no longer a thing, Madeleine, it's no longer a little steel beast; no, it's a friend.'

feeling that ‘la vie des choses, des bêtes et des plantes, est un épanouissement perpétuel du désir’ (VA 78).¹⁷⁴

These frequent lyrical adulations of the bicycle and nature provide an illustration of Merleau-Ponty’s association between desire and expression. Pascal’s enthusiastic outbursts are directly related to his newly-awakened sensory experience, and are depicted as volcanic outpourings in descriptions such as: ‘Le flux de paroles avait jailli de lui comme une source qui crève la terre et qui s’échappe’ (VA 31).¹⁷⁵ This sexualised depiction of the voice as a torrent brings to mind George Bataille’s persistent focus on the body as a source of outpouring, as well as a site of reception of the sense data around it.¹⁷⁶ As William Cohen argues, for Bataille ‘The idea of the body as the source of outflowing, usually repulsive material is frequently the shadowy companion to a notion of it as a repository for sensory influx.’¹⁷⁷ Vocal expression is essential in allowing Pascal and Madeline to express their love to each other. As the married couples disintegrate and reform into two new pairs, the sexual desire between them takes over as the narrative drive of the story. These sexually liberated cyclists credit their bicycles with having taught them how to recognise their true desires, in spite of social conventions. Usually their bicycles are praised, but in a moment of guilt Madeline points to the bicycles and cries out ‘les voilà, les vrais coupables’ (VA 69)¹⁷⁸ thus assigning blame for their infidelity to the objects which have allowed them to develop a new, frank approach to bodies and sexuality, and eventually to recognise their desires.

174 ‘the life of things, that of animals and plants, is a perpetual blossoming of desire’.

175 ‘the stream of words had sprung from him like a source that bursts through the earth and breaks free’.

176 See Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

177 Cohen, *Embodied*, 22; Bataille’s pornographic tale *Histoire de l’œil* (1928) also contains an erotic bicycle-riding scene. See Georges Bataille, *Madame Edwarda, Le Mort, Histoire de l’œil* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1983), 119–20.

178 ‘here are the real guilty ones.’

In a more satirical vein, in Jarry's *Le Surmâle* Marcueil undertakes two consecutive and interconnected challenges: to race a bicycle against a steam train in a 10,000 mile race and to have sex a record number of times in 24 hours. Marcueil's insatiable sexual appetite is closely linked to his superhuman powers as a cyclist. It seems the machine participates in awakening in the cyclist a hyper-awareness of his own body that leads him to want to test and push his sexual and physical limits. In a further example from French literature, a collection entitled *Contes modernes. Pédalons !* (1892), written under the pseudonym Jehan de la Pédale, contains a series of humorous and erotic tales recounting the adventures of the aristocratic cyclist La Morillère. Both male and female cyclists are depicted as objects of sexual desire, and the bicycle is often the means that brings a couple into contact, or allows them privacy. In 'Caoutchouc Pneumatique', the wonder of pneumatic tyres is celebrated by La Morillère and his friends the couple Rose and Hector, who go on a long ride into the country. When sexually unresponsive Hector gets a puncture, his frustrated wife Rose goes off to the next village with La Morillère, only returning four hours later. Her last remark to her husband as they go to bed that night establishes a humorous connection between the newly invented pneumatic tyre and male sexual performance: 'il est bien regrettable que tu n'aies pas, comme la Morillère, un pneumatique ne se dégonflant pas !'¹⁷⁹ In the story 'Le Tandem,' a journey by tricycle brings La Morillère to the home of his beautiful cousin, and tandem rides frame their first moments of intimacy, as the hero recalls: 'O les douces promenades en tandem fréquemment interrompues par les baisers !'¹⁸⁰ Moreover, La Morillère establishes an explicit link between sexual intercourse and cycling in his parting shot; when his aunt discovers him in her daughter's bed, he cries: 'Oh! Ne te fâche pas,

179 Jehan de La Pédale, *Contes modernes. Pédalons !* (Paris: Véloce-Sport, 1892), 24. 'It's a real pity you don't have a pneumatic that doesn't deflate, like la Morillère!'

180 *Ibid.*, 53. 'Oh those sweet tandem rides, often interrupted for kisses!'

tante... Nous faisons du tandem !'¹⁸¹ Here the activity of tandem riding both prepares the ground for and provides a humorous analogue to lovemaking.

Arthur Conan Doyle's début novel, *Beyond the City* (1891), features somewhat more prudish though equally sexualised and humorous use of tandem tricycle riding in a romantic setting. In a chapter entitled '*Venit tandem felicitas*', Charles ceremoniously invites Ida on a tandem tricycle ride, specifying 'You in front.'¹⁸² Their physical activity mirrors the sexual act, evident in descriptions such as 'the great limbs of the athlete [Charles] made the heavy machine spring and quiver with every stroke.'¹⁸³ As it turns out, Charles is too timid to propose to her while looking her in the eye, so he makes the most of their respective positions on the tandem to confess his affections to the back of her head. In his confusion, Charles lets go of the steering handle, 'so that the great machine crawled aimlessly about from one side of the road to the other.'¹⁸⁴ Before he has heard her response, the tricycle's movements provide a visual illustration of the character's erratic emotions and sexual desire. Rather than stopping the tricycle to discuss the (tacitly accepted) proposal, the couple ride steadily onwards, holding hands but still not looking at each other. In this instance the tandem tricycle offers a privileged private space for the couple to admit their affections to each other. Although the machine prevents them from directly acting on their desire, the act of mutually pedalling a tandem clearly mirrors the sexual act, as in the previous example from the more risqué French story 'Le Tandem.'

181 *Ibid.*, 55. 'Oh, don't be angry, aunt, we were tandem riding!'

182 Arthur Conan Doyle, *Beyond the City* [1891] (London: George Newnes, 1921), 69. Tandem tricycles, popular from the late 1880s, were often used by couples (the Pennells made their *Sentimental Journey* on one, for instance). They were steered from behind and accommodated women wearing bulky skirts on the seat in front.

183 *Ibid.*, 70.

184 *Ibid.*, 73.

The bicycle was a celebrated marriage maker, since it allowed young people to meet and socialise beyond the limits of their local community, and independently of family members and chaperones. Indeed, it has been credited by some with diversifying the gene pool in rural areas.¹⁸⁵ There are many portrayals of this social trend in turn-of-the-century literature. In the anonymous short story 'A Lesson for Both' from the collection *The Humours of Cycling* (1897), Sydney Darrel, a young gentleman, poses as a cycle instructor in order to spend time with an attractive young apprentice cyclist.¹⁸⁶ When the latter discovers the ruse she is offended and speeds off down a steep hill; yet Sydney rushes after her, breaks her fall, and matrimony and tandem cycling ensue. In Zola's *Paris* (1897), the central couple's bicycle ride in the woods marks the beginning of their future marriage (and the end of Pierre's priesthood): 'la promenade à bicyclette du matin, si délicieuse, lui apparaît sous son véritable jour, comme une matinée de fiançailles, au sein de la forêt heureuse, de la forêt complice.'¹⁸⁷ Zola also connects cycling and courtship in his subsequent novel *Fécondité* (1899), the first in his series *Les Quatre Évangiles*, when exuberant young Rose Froment organises a bicycle parade to celebrate her engagement.¹⁸⁸ H. G. Wells similarly integrates cycling into the romances of his heroes in *The Wheels of Chance* (1895), *Kipps* (1905), *The History of Mr Polly* (1910), *Ann Veronica* (1913), as we saw in Chapter 2. It is fair to presume this connection between cycling and romance was established quite early on, since

185 For a case study of the effect of cycling on rural marriage patterns, see P. J. Perry, 'Working-Class Isolation and Mobility in Rural Dorset, 1837-1936: A Study of Marriage Distances', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, no. 46 (1969): 121-41.

186 Anonymous, 'A Lesson for Both', in *The Humours of Cycling* (London: James Bowden, 1897).

187 Émile Zola, *Œuvres complètes. Paris fin de siècle, 1897.*, ed. Henri Mitterand, Jacques Noiray, and Jean-Louis Cabanès, vol. 17 (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2008), 241. 'the delightful morning bicycle ride revealed itself to him in its true light, as a morning of betrothal, deep in the joyful forest, the complicit forest'.

188 Émile Zola, *Œuvres complètes. De l'affaire aux Quatre évangiles (1897-1901)*, ed. Henri Mitterand, Jean-Louis Cabanès, and Jacques Noiray, vol. 18 (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2008).

an 1880 collection of short stories by W. J. Coppen, *Romances of the Wheel*, also integrates love stories into the majority of cycling tales it includes.¹⁸⁹

In his third novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913), set in a mining community around 1900, D. H. Lawrence makes extensive use of the bicycle as a means of presenting and exploring the vicissitudes of sexual desire. The *Bildungsroman*'s central character, Paul Morel, first visits Miriam Leivers at Wiley Farm on foot;¹⁹⁰ subsequently he travels the four and a half miles in a milkman's float,¹⁹¹ and finally he makes a habit of cycling there. The vehicle operates as a narrative device that allows for the flourishing of mutual desire between Miriam and Paul, as it facilitates a frequent exchange between the pair which would otherwise have been difficult, due to the distance between their homes and their different social backgrounds (the Leivers are a puritanical, comfortably well-off family, while Paul comes from a mining background). The bicycle announces the young man's arrival each time he calls at Miriam's house: 'she heard the well-known click of the chain, and she saw Paul fling open the gate, push his bicycle into the yard. She saw him look at the house, and she shrank away. He walked in a nonchalant fashion, and his bicycle went with him as if it were a live thing.'¹⁹² In a typically Lawrentian binary opposition, female fascination and fear contrast with male self-assurance and virility, and the bicycle – almost as much a 'live thing' as the young people's desire – acts as an intermediary for the pair's budding sexuality.

A puncture to his front wheel provides an opportunity for the pair to be alone, when Miriam admires Paul at work: 'Miriam came with the bowl of water and stood close to him, watching. She loved to see his hands doing things. He was slim and vigorous, with a kind of

189 Coppen, *Romances of the Wheel*.

190 D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 155.

191 *Ibid.*, 179.

192 *Ibid.*, 211.

easiness even in his most hasty movements.’¹⁹³ When Miriam acts on her impulse and reaches for him, exclaiming ‘You are so fine!’, Paul reacts bitterly, turning back to his bicycle instead of returning the embrace:

He laughed, hating her voice, but his blood roused to a wave of flame by her hands. She did not seem to realize him in all this. He might have been an object. She never realized the male he was. He lighted his bicycle lamp, bounced the machine on the barn floor to see that the tyres were sound, and buttoned his coat.¹⁹⁴

Paul’s sexual drive alienates him from Miriam; in spite of her exclamation, he presumes she cannot recognise or return his desire, and turns to the machine that will make flight possible: his bicycle. Feeling he is himself perceived as ‘an object’, he identifies with the machine, rather than seeking to show Miriam ‘the male he was.’ His actions become mechanical as he focuses his attention on the bicycle in order to distract himself from Miriam. Like in the earlier examples of nocturnal rides, Paul seeks escape in the speed and the altered sensory perceptions he experiences riding at night. He disappears into the darkness, calling a hasty farewell over his shoulder:

His voice already came out of the darkness. She stood a moment watching the light from his lamp race into obscurity along the ground. [...] He dropped down the hills on his bicycle. The roads were greasy, so he had to let it go. He felt a pleasure as the machine plunged over the second, steeper drop in the hill. ‘Here goes!’ he said. It was risky, because of the curve in the darkness at the bottom and because of the brewers’ waggons with drunken waggoners asleep. His bicycle seemed to fall beneath him, and he loved it. Recklessness is almost a man’s revenge on his woman. He feels he is not valued, so he will risk destroying himself to deprive her altogether. The stars on the lake seemed to leap like grasshoppers, silver upon the blackness, as he spun past.¹⁹⁵

Paul’s self-destructive, aggressive riding provides him with a release valve for his pent-up desire. The pleasure and risk involved in speeding down hills with no brakes act as a means

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 233–34.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 234–35.

of expressing – and partly palliating – his unvoiced sexual frustration. The self-abandonment and satisfaction he draws from cycling mirror the sexual act, with the narrative describing how ‘he had to let it go,’ while insisting that ‘he felt a pleasure’ and ‘loved it’. Moreover, his active, energetic negotiation of the landscape on his bicycle contrasts to the inertia of the drunken waggoners, who fall asleep and passively let their horses lead them to destination. The speed of Paul’s bicycle alters his engagement with the scene, vitalising the usually inert reflections of stars, which ‘leap like grasshoppers’, and inviting an eroticised exchange with his environment.

This scene may be compared to the use of the symbol of the bicycle in *Roman d’un cycliste* (1899) by J. H. Rosny, the pseudonym used by a pair of Belgian brothers who are mostly remembered as pioneers of science fiction. In this novel the fashionable bicycle is chosen as the defining accessory for the aristocratic hero Philippe. The novel focuses chiefly on depicting Philippe’s contradictory desires for two women in the stifling French spa town in which he is staying with his aunt. In an episode mirroring Paul’s desperate flight from Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*, Philippe vents his passion for Madame d’Ombreuse by going for a fast bicycle ride:

Il avait la poitrine vide, la tête en feu, il éprouvait le besoin dévorant de fuir, et, ne concevant pas de meilleur remède que sa petite machine ailée, la bicyclette vertigineuse, il l’alla reprendre, il se lança vers Chambéry. Il goûta d’abord l’âpre joie de la vitesse. [...] Une liberté enivrante, la sensation d’être sorti de la vieille race humaine tardive et de l’esclavage du cheval ou de la machine, la volupté de tirer de soi-même la force et la souplesse, d’être plus agile que le mustang des prairies, le coursier arabe, plus subtil à tourner l’obstacle que la panthère.¹⁹⁶

196 J.-H Rosny, *Le Roman d’un cycliste* (Paris: Plon, 1899), 38–39. ‘He was breathless, his head was spinning; he felt a burning need to escape. Thinking of no better cure than his little winged machine, his dizzying bicycle, he went to get it and sped off towards Chambéry. At first he felt the crude joy of speed [...] an intoxicating freedom, the sensation of having left behind the old, outdated human race and slavery to the horse or to the machine, the delight of drawing strength and agility from oneself, of being more nimble than a mustang from the prairies or an Arab charger, more skilled at avoiding obstacles than a panther.’

Philippe, like Paul, is able to distract himself from his devouring sexual desire with the ‘voluptuous’ experience of becoming his own means of locomotion, surpassing animals and freeing himself from the slavery of the machine. The sensation of riding a bicycle is at once an antidote for and a stimulant or extension of sexual desire, however, as Philippe recounts on the ride home from a waltz where he had been dancing with his other love interest, Marthe Hauteroche: ‘Le mouvement rapide de la machine continuait la petite griserie de la valse.’¹⁹⁷ In this sequence the rhythmic action of pedalling at once mirrors and calms Philippe’s sexual desire.

In *Sons and Lovers*, when the two lovers become distant, the bicycle comes to enshrine the sudden absence of desire. Paul’s manner when parking his bicycle at Miriam’s house is enough to tell her that something is wrong: ‘There was a cold correctness in the way he put his bicycle in its place, that made her heart sink.’¹⁹⁸ Yet while operating as a symbol of Paul’s departed desire, the bicycle also represents the continuation of his life, as a free and mobile young man. He suggests to Miriam they stop seeing each other, then asks: ‘And you won’t think about it, and let it trouble you, will you? [...] Because [...] a man gets across his bicycle – and goes to work – and does all sorts of things. But a woman broods.’¹⁹⁹ Leaving her, the bicycle mirrors his despondent mood, just as it had provided a vent for his recklessness in the earlier scene: ‘He rode slowly under the pine-trees, feeling a cur and a miserable wretch. His bicycle went tilting down the hills at random. He thought it would be a relief to break one’s neck.’²⁰⁰ The machine allows him to express the same self-destructive urge present in the earlier passage, but rather than rejoicing in the bicycle’s speed, Paul

197 *Ibid.*, 75. ‘The rapid movement of the machine added to the light-headedness of the waltz.’

198 Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, 265.

199 *Ibid.*, 279–80.

200 *Ibid.*, 280.

abandons himself to the bicycle's 'random' movement over the hills, just as he has turned his back on his desire for Miriam.

These examples from literature point to the bicycle's precocious link to sexuality, suggesting that from the beginning it was a technology that encouraged its users to reconnect with their body and its sensations. Although an inanimate machine, it has the capacity to remind its users of the physical, sensual and erotic nature of being in the world. Sex is an essential expression of multisensory, embodied experience. It comes as little surprise, then, that a machine that encouraged the cultivation of all five senses should have found this precocious link to sexual desire and love, and that authors should attempt to express this unique connection on the page.

3.2.4 Vibrant interactions in Dorothy Richardson's *The Tunnel*

In the fourth novel of her 13-volume *Pilgrimage* series (1915-1938), *The Tunnel* (1919), Dorothy Richardson's heroine Miriam learns to ride a bicycle while working as a dentist's assistant in London. Based on the events in Richardson's life in the period 1891-1915, *The Tunnel* takes place in the mid-1890s, when cycling was becoming an increasingly popular and accessible activity. Chapter 26, coming two-thirds of the way through the novel, recounts Miriam's first solo ride, a 60-mile trip from London to Malborough.²⁰¹ In the space of this brief, intense chapter, Richardson provides us with a microcosmic vision of the cyclist's unique sensory experience. The account of this trip provides an ideal means to sum up the aspects of sensory engagement we have been exploring while exploring their link to the narrative technique of the modernist novel. Cycling provides Richardson with a means to

²⁰¹ This scene is also examined in my discussion of cycling and gender in Chapter 2.

present an epiphanic moment of subjective, sensory engagement with objects and others. Returning to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, I examine at close range the reciprocal processes behind the cyclist's movement and perception. By cooperating in a very direct way with their machines, cyclists performed an active exchange between subject and object, mingling their gestures and movements with those of the bicycle.

Miriam begins her ride before dawn, and the effort of cycling as far as Reading in the morning dew gives her a sense of disconnection from her own tired and damp body, feeling 'a dragged person that was not her own' (TL 230). As we have already seen in the case of nocturnal cyclists and Leblanc's protagonists, there is a paradoxical impression of gaining an out-of-body experience as a result of using the body and the senses. In achieving an altered state of being in the world, our conception of our own body is also fundamentally changed; as William Cohen argues in the case of Victorian literature, 'A fundamental aspect of the human turns out to be the strangeness to itself of the fleshy matter that composes it.'²⁰² Miriam's body, made unfamiliar to her by physical effort, seems to become capable of establishing a more direct connection with the ground she crosses: she notices how 'The earth throbbed beneath her with the throbbing of her heart' (TL 230). Vision is the sense that is most consistently described; yet it is a mobile vision, and one that overlaps and interacts with the other senses. Earlier in the novel, before she has learned to cycle, Miriam remarks on the alienating, purely visual aspect to rail travel. While waiting for a train at a station, she remarks that 'The landscape was dead. [...] Staring at the landscape she felt the lifelessness of her face; as if something had brushed across it and swept the life away, leaving her only sight. She could never feel anymore' (TL 109). As we shall see, cycling will allow Miriam to

202 Cohen, *Embodied*, xvi.

transgress the predominant visual paradigm in order to be able to ‘feel’ with her other senses and be more fully present in the world.

During her day’s cycling, a drawing-in of vision is depicted; the panoramic views of the railway traveller are refocused in on close-up objects that line the road: ‘She closed her eyes upon the dazzling growing distances of blue and white, and felt the horizon folding down in a firm clear sweep round her green cradle. Within her eyelids fields swung past green, cornfields gold and black...’ (TL 230). The bold primary colours evoked here root the sensory experience firmly in the visual. Yet the shift from the celestial colours of blue and white to earthy green, gold and black leave no doubt as to the near-range nature of the cyclist’s vision, contrasting with the distancing, panoramic view of the train traveller. Moreover, the view is no longer dazzling, distant, aggressive and alienating; it is ‘within her eyelids’, integrated into her body itself.

Just like Leblanc’s cyclists, Miriam gains a sense of belonging to the scene which she is sensing. As Merleau-Ponty insists, ‘le monde vu n’est pas “dans” mon corps, et mon corps n’est pas “dans” le monde visible à titre ultime [...] il y a insertion réciproque et entrelacs de l’un dans l’autre.’²⁰³ Where the train or car window framed views in a similar way to a cinema screen or television, here it is the cyclist’s eyelids that limit the scene, suggesting that she enacts a direct, bodily engagement, no longer mediated by means of locomotive machines. Visual impressions succeed each other, yet they mingle with the other senses; the ‘hard hot light’ (TL 231) acquires tactile qualities, and then becomes tinged with auditory elements:

[...] eyelids were transparent. It was light coming through one’s eyelids that made that clear soft buff; soft buff light filtering through one’s body... little

203 Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible*, 180. ‘the world is not seen “in” my body, and my body is not ultimately “in” the visible world [...] there is reciprocal insertion and interlacing between the two.’

sounds, insects creeping and humming in the hedge, sounds from the grass. Sudden single quiet sounds going up from distant fields and farms, lost in the sky. (TL 231)

The light that penetrates Miriam's closed eyelids also suffuses her whole body. Sensory perception is decentralised from the eyes and spreads through the body, which itself is crossed and broken up by the light that traverses it, becoming part of the scene it is sensing. Crucially, this kinaesthetic perception and renewed sense of the subject's place in the world leads Miriam to a rare state of mastery and well-being: 'I've got my sea-legs... this is *riding* – not just straining along trying to forget the wobbly bicycle, but feeling it wobble and being able to control it... being able to look about easily...' (TL 231). Calm control of the machine, now integrated into Miriam's body as though a part of it, allows the unique combination of speed and close-up vision that makes possible the embodied and mobile perception of the cyclist.

As twilight turns to night, Miriam experiences a visceral and tangible connection with the dark which, as we have seen, became an important trope in cycling literature. Riding through a dark forest, she experiences a keen pleasure in the lack of visual signals: 'Stronger than fear, was the comfort of the dense darkness. Her own darkness by right of riding through the day. Leaning upon the velvety blackness she pushed on' (TL 233). This tactile dimension to darkness recalls a scene earlier in the novel when, while walking home in London, Miriam remarks on the physical quality of the night: 'The pavement was under her feet and the sparsely lamplit night all round her. She restrained her eager steps to a walk. The dark houses and the blackness between the lamps were elastic about her' (TL 74). Both urban walking and rural riding at night are experiences that give Miriam a sense of the solidity of the objects around her; she feels she is touching and interacting with them as she progresses. This

provides a vivid illustration of Merleau-Ponty's theory that 'la vision est palpitation par le regard',²⁰⁴ suggesting a mutual imbrication of the body, the senses and the world.

The idea of porosity between the senses, and also between the sensing subject and sensed objects, gained currency in late-nineteenth century Britain. William Cohen points out how the scientist Herbert Spencer concluded that 'eyes are essential dermal structures',²⁰⁵ thus establishing the idea of a continuum between optical and tactile experience. Cohen goes on to argue that 'Spencer is representative of Victorian practice in placing the organs of sensation and ingestion midway between inner and outer aspects of being, both physical and mental.'²⁰⁶ Richardson's novel provides a compelling illustration of the notion shared by late Victorians and twentieth-century phenomenology that 'mon corps modèle les choses et les choses modèlent mon corps.'²⁰⁷ Descriptions such as 'Miriam sipped her hot tea. The room darkled in the silence. Everything intensified' (TL 69) are characteristic of Richardson's will to illustrate a circular sensory experience, in which the body and the objects surrounding it form part of an uninterrupted continuum of sensation. This connection becomes more accessible in nocturnal settings, when the predominance of sight is challenged, allowing for a broader range of sense data to come into play.

In Marlborough, a flat tyre obliges Miriam to stop short of her destination and stay the night at a hotel. Staying alone in a strange town is an entirely new experience for her, and the joyous experience of her liberty is vitally linked to her impression of being part of 'the little crowded world' (TL 235) of the unfamiliar objects that surround her. A sense of interaction between her body and the place it inhabits, intensified by her day's cycle, is conveyed in

204 *Ibid.*, 175. 'vision is touching with the eyes.'

205 Quoted in Cohen, *Embodied*, 3.

206 *Ibid.*

207 Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, 171. 'my body shapes things and things shape my body.'

descriptions such as: ‘The throbbing of her heart shook the room. Something was telling the room that she was the happiest thing in existence. She stood up, the beloved little room moving as she moved, and gathered her hands gently against her breast, to ... get through, through into the soul of the musty little room’ (TL 235-6). The room’s response to her heartbeat and her mobility, ‘moving as she moved’, mirror the sense of reciprocity with her surroundings that Miriam achieved during her ride, when ‘The earth throbbed beneath her’ (TL 230). These descriptions mirror Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that ‘mes mouvements et ceux de mes yeux font vibrer le monde [...] à chaque battement de mes cils, un rideau s’abaisse et se relève.’²⁰⁸ In Miriam’s attempt to commune with the objects around her, she looks ‘from thing to thing’ (TL 236) and names them, thus engaging the voice which, for Merleau-Ponty is the ultimate expression of sensory experience.²⁰⁹ Miriam senses the vitality of these objects, to whom she attempts to communicate the exhilarating feeling of her own freedom. As she falls asleep, Miriam reflects:

I’m alive and alone in a strange place. Everything’s alive all round me in a new way. [...] The more she relinquished the idea of harm and danger, the nearer and more intimate the room became...No one can prevent my being alone in a strange place, nearer to things and loving them. (TL 237)

Miriam feels newly alive within the space she inhabits because of her sense of being at one with the objects around her. The continuum between subject and object is emphasised by the narrative oscillation between the first and third person, where we experience Miriam’s impressions from both an internal and an external perspective. As Elisabeth Bronfen notes in her illuminating study on Richardson, ‘Interior space is felt to be protective as long as it permits a sense of belonging there. In spite of its actual enclosure, it appears porous and open

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 22. ‘my movements and my eye’s movements reverberate in the world [...] with each blink of my eyelids, a curtain is drawn and lifted up.’

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

to Miriam when it becomes the site of a transcendental experience.’²¹⁰ This scene in the hotel room is emblematic of Richardson’s spatial aesthetic, which constantly opposes external and internal spaces, gradually moving towards a transcendence of both. The day’s cycling gives Miriam a sense of being part of a vibrant world, both within walls and outside them. Her pleasant bodily fatigue reminds her of the empowering physical journey she has accomplished that day, which has given her a new sense of the nature of her interaction with the world of objects and other people.

3.3 Human-machine synthesis

We have seen that turn-of-the-century cyclist authors did not reconnect with their bodies and their senses in an entirely unmediated way. Rather, their aesthetic was a thoroughly modern one, predicated on a reciprocal relationship between bodies and machines. The speed and subjective mobility offered by the bicycle gave its first users access to a human-powered means of locomotion that privileged the senses whilst providing the mechanical means for the subject to be continuously and unexpectedly stimulated or shocked. In this final section I explore the ways in which the bicycle, by uniting man and machine, helped overcome ingrained dichotomies in contemporary attitudes towards technology.

The question of the human body’s interaction with the machines spawned by industrial society preoccupied much nineteenth-century thought, from Mary Shelley to Marx to H. G. Wells. Yet as Herbert Sussman observes, many Victorian writers ‘shied away from confronting the mechanized world’,²¹¹ while others referred to machines only in order to

210 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson’s Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, trans. Victoria Appelbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 12.

211 Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine*, 3.

explicitly oppose them to the organic or the pastoral. Sussman's survey of seven Victorian authors who believe that 'the tangible fact of mechanization shapes the intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional life of their time'²¹² highlights the fact that 'only later in the century does there emerge, in H. G. Wells and Rudyard Kipling, prose fiction that celebrates technology and scientific speculation.'²¹³ Susmann contrasts this to the strong anti-machine feeling of earlier authors such as Thomas Carlyle, William Morris and John Ruskin. The bicycle, however, was a technology that encouraged the breaking down of the engrained antithesis between humans and machines, the organic and the industrial, the aesthetic and the mechanical. As Donna Haraway argues, the figure of the cyborg allows us to recognise that 'it is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machinery. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic.'²¹⁴ Turn-of-the-century authors who integrated the bicycle into their fiction focused on the unique synthesis of human and machine it proposed, casting it as an object eminently worthy of literary attention. Moreover, thanks to its liminal status as a human-powered machine, the bicycle offered an alternative paradigm for defining technology, seen as an outcome of rather than a threat to human abilities.

In coming to understand the cyclist's relationship with the machine, it is particularly useful to integrate materialist criticism that has focused on the exchanges between subjects and their surroundings. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of assemblages, the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour, Bill Brown's research into how things have shaped the modern subject and Jane Bennett's work on vital materialism all influence my readings of

²¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹⁴ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 177–78.

texts that convey an intimate dialogue between people and their bicycles, with the senses acting as an interface between the two.²¹⁵ As William Cohen observes, theorists such as Merleau-Ponty, Bataille, Deleuze and Guattari share in common with many late Victorian authors their presentation of ‘a fluid exchange between surface and depth, inside and outside – a type of materialism that understands the organs of ingestion, excretion, and sensation not simply to model but to perform the flow of matter and information between subject and world.’²¹⁶ The cyclist enacted this fluid exchange with the world by means of a new transportation technology, and authors sought to convey the experience in text. It is the tightly bound human-machine-world cluster presented by cycling authors that makes the bicycle such an important avatar of modernity.

3.3.1 The nightmare of the machine: reimagining technology

In the technology-filled reality of the early twentieth century, there was an urgent need to recast the relationship between man and his creations. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) nightmare, conceived during the first industrial revolution, still had a striking relevance one hundred years after its publication. At the beginning of the twentieth century, an ominous new technology reared its head, transforming landscapes, provoking accidents and denying its users any sense of active participation in or responsibility for locomotion. Today we have become blandly accustomed to the death toll of the automobile,²¹⁷ but even

215 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: l’anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Les Éditions de minuit, 1980); Bruno Latour, *Aramis ou L’amour des techniques* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992); Bill Brown, *Things* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

216 Cohen, *Embodied*, vii.

217 Didier Tronchet notes that the motor car, ‘man’s greatest predator’, was responsible for 35 million deaths in the twentieth century (statistic from the Red Cross). See Tronchet, *Petit traité de vélosophie*, 14.

the motoring enthusiast Rudyard Kipling was alarmed at the loss of life on the roads at the turn of the century, providing the following macabre image in his correspondence: ‘in England the dead, twelve coffin deep, clutch hold of my wheels at every turn, till I sometimes wonder that the very road does not bleed.’²¹⁸

A striking scene is recounted by Octave Mirbeau in *La 628-E8*, where the narrator comes across a fellow car driver at the scene of an accident. He has just killed a young peasant girl, and attempts to comfort her distraught mother by offering financial compensation and claiming that her daughter has been a martyr to progress, asking: ‘Un progrès ne s’établit jamais dans le monde, sans qu’il en coûte quelques vies humaines... Il est bien évident, n’est-ce pas?... que l’automobilisme est un progrès, peut-être le plus grand progrès de ces temps admirables?’²¹⁹ The driver obstinately repeats the noun ‘progress’ in an attempt to persuade his victim – and perhaps himself – that he has done nothing wrong. He distances himself from the action of the machine, attributing blame to an inanimate motor and acquitting himself in the process. Such a lack of compassion for fellow human beings is implied in the car driver’s outlook, defined by what Mirbeau terms ‘mégalo manie cosmogonique.’²²⁰ While Mirbeau proclaims himself a socialist, all concern for fellow humans evaporates once he becomes a car passenger: ‘quand je suis en automobile, entraîné par la vitesse, gagné par le vertige, tous ces sentiments humanitaires s’oblitérent.’²²¹ In contrast to the car driver, cyclists’ mutual imbrication with their machine, their surroundings and others encourages an outlook that places collective values over individuality, accumulation and profit-seeking. The bicycle stands out from other inventions as a collective

218 Rudyard Kipling, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling, 1900-10* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 151.

219 Mirbeau, *La 628-E8*, 311. ‘Progress is never achieved in the world without some loss of life... It’s clear isn’t it?... That motor cars are an advancement, maybe the greatest development of this admirable age?’

220 *Ibid.*, 308. ‘cosmogonical megalomania.’

221 *Ibid.* ‘when I am in a motor car, carried away by speed, overcome by dizziness, all these humanitarian feelings are wiped out.’

achievement. This is true not just in terms of its cosmopolitan invention, detailed in the introduction to this thesis, but also in its use and repair. Crucially, cyclists are complicit in the working of the machine, which is absolutely dependent on human energy for its forward movement, and which is much less likely to provoke death and injury than motorised vehicles.

In *Dora Myrl, Lady Detective* (1900), a New Woman novel by Bodkin Mc Donnell, the cyclist heroine's suitor Ernest invents a flying machine that adopts this definition of technology as fundamentally grounded in the human, contrasting it to the other more harmful technologies he sees emerging around him.²²² He explains:

I was resolved to give my man wings, and teach him how to use them for his own pleasure, not his neighbour's misery. My notion was to make him his own flying machine and his own muscles the sole motive power of his flight [...] A man is not as strong as a steam or gas engine of course, but he is an infinitely more perfect machine.²²³

The power inherent in technology can easily be turned to violent ends, but Ernest suggests this can be avoided by designing a machine powered by the 'perfect machine' of the human body. Central to Ernest's idea are the concepts of pleasure, speed and efficiency combined with concern for other's welfare, aspects that were conspicuously absent in attitudes to mechanised transport, where death and injury were often viewed as necessary collateral to progress. The First World War would soon become the tragic proof of the ability of the machine to inflict death and suffering on a vast scale. In order to avoid 'his neighbour's misery', Ernest invents a machine directly inspired by the bicycle, a technology which miraculously multiplies human strength, in spite of the doubts of its early detractors, which he recalls:

222 The 1980s and 1990s witnessed various attempts to invent human-powered airplanes and helicopters. See Wilson, Papadopoulos, and Whitt, *Bicycling Science*, 420–29.

223 Matthias Mc Donnell Bodkin, *Dora Myrl, the Lady Detective*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1900), 242.

You cannot put more strength, they said, than a man has into a machine. If it carries him faster than he can walk or run it must be at the cost of a greater exertion. In a word, he cannot go far if he goes fast. We know how their wisdom worked out in practice. A man is able to do twenty miles an hour on a bicycle for a week at a stretch in spite of the tremendous drag of the track's friction against the wheel pressed down with the combined weight of rider and machine. My man-bird, with no friction to stop him, should do sixty at the least.²²⁴

Ernest imagines a civilised form of conveyance, which takes as its blueprint the physical dimensions, capacities and energy of the body in order to rationally optimise human locomotion by means of a machine. Written at a moment when inventors across Europe and the US were vying to master the secrets of flight, the image of a human-powered airplane that Mc Donnell selects to close his novel suggests an alternative vision of technology, according to which man rediscovers faith in his own body and cultivates a reciprocal, respectful and beneficial relationship with the machine. The political implications of such a human-centred outlook are far-reaching. Luckács, quoting Marx, proclaimed that the proletariat must recognise its divested power and create a society where 'man' would be the 'driving force.'²²⁵ Imagining technologies reliant on human power means not only rediscovering faith in human capacities, but taking a step away from the alienation inherent in a non-vital idea of mechanism. Once mechanism becomes vitalised, a collaborative, interactive and empowering paradigm of society takes shape.

G. K. Chesterton stresses the need to maintain a connection to human capacities in our relationship with technology. In his essay 'The Free Man and the Ford Car' (1925) he satirises the motor car industry and those behind it. Chesterton underlines the importance of moving beyond the contemporary obsession with mechanism, paradoxically suggesting that

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 243–44.

²²⁵ György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 181.

we can use machines in order to achieve this aim. He condemns the mass production of cars since it transforms thousands of factory workers into ‘cogitating cog[s]’, ‘born to make [...] small bits of cars.’²²⁶ He scathingly associates the much-vaunted standardisation of Ford cars with various literary and social phenomena, such as the uniform nature of ‘magazine stories’ and the fact that ‘American millionaires all look exactly alike’, with interchangeable noses and chins.²²⁷ The only use of machines, Chesterton continues, is to ‘create a psychology that can despise machines’; in order to illustrate this, he depicts an imaginary car driver who, on reaching the open countryside, will ‘proceed joyfully to break up the car with a large hammer’, naturally coming to view it as an ‘antiquated absurdity’ now that he has reconnected with a more logical way of life.²²⁸ For Chesterton, humanity has been incarcerated by technology, yet mechanism may perhaps provide a way of returning to a former condition: he observes that ‘It is only because the man has been set into exile in the railway-train that he has to be brought back home in a motor-car.’²²⁹ Chesterton’s concept of using ‘modern machinery to escape from modern society’²³⁰ is a compelling one in relation to early cyclists, many of whom pedalled their modern machine in a bid to reconnect with a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist past. Indeed, Chesterton uses the image of a bicycle to illustrate his point at the start of this essay: ‘If [...] we find that some machine enables us to escape from an inferno of machinery, we cannot be committing a sin though we may be cutting a silly figure, like a dragoon rejoining his regiment on an old bicycle.’²³¹ The bicycle perhaps invited ridicule from disciples of technological progress, yet it was a machine better equipped than

226 G. K. Chesterton, ‘The Free Man and the Ford Car’ [1925] in *Delphi Complete Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 2 (Hastings: Delphi Classics, 2013), 547.

227 *Ibid.*, 548.

228 *Ibid.*, 550.

229 *Ibid.*, 551.

230 *Ibid.*, 550.

231 *Ibid.*, 545.

the motor car to allow an escape from industrial society, with car drivers being rather unlikely to hammer their expensive machine to pieces in favour of a pastoral ideal.

3.3.2 Love of the machine: the aesthetics of mechanics

Whereas the majority of nineteenth-century inventions required highly specialised knowledge and tools for repair, fixing a puncture or oiling a chain was accessible to anyone who was willing to get their hands dirty. Becoming a cyclist required not only learning how to master the machine, but also gaining a certain level of mechanical know-how and autonomy, as breakdowns could occur at any point along the road, far from help. This was a feature of cycling from the very earliest days of the pursuit; as Andrew Ritchie points out, cycling guides in the late 1860s ‘often explained how to make velocipedes as well as how to ride them.’²³² This democratic proximity to the machine’s working parts invited an active, rewarding relationship with technology. As the below examples from literature go to show, the bicycle was an industrial technology that democratised the spanner. The working parts of a machine were opened up to anyone who manifested an interest in them, regardless of sex and class.²³³ This, I argue, encouraged a relationship with technology that was meaningful and rewarding rather than alienating and disempowering.

A transformation in contemporary attitudes to the machine is given expression in two books on cycling by Mary Kennard. In her non-fiction *Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (1896), Kennard insists on the importance of acquiring mechanical knowledge of the bicycle in

²³² Ritchie, *Quest for Speed*, 24.

²³³ Of course, the long-established association between mechanics and working class men did not disappear, and is still very much with us in the twenty-first century. Even if the bicycle is a technology that invites a more inclusive approach to repair, the domain of mechanics remains decidedly hostile to women and girls.

addition to mastering the actual skill of riding. ‘If you are really fond of your cycle and take an interest in it,’ she advises her readers, ‘the only plan is never to neglect an opportunity of learning things connected with its construction.’²³⁴ She argues that ‘there is no reason why any person (even in the upper classes) gifted with ordinary intelligence, should not master a few simple details connected with the care and repair of the cycle.’²³⁵ She herself takes real pleasure in this side of cycling, recounting how she and her local bicycle mechanic ‘toiled away in friendly comradeship, he all black and stained [...] I, hot and dusty from my ride, brushes and cloths in hand, worshipping on my knees at the shrine of the beloved cycle. I never could polish it enough.’²³⁶ In Kennard’s novel *The Golf Lunatic and his Cycling Wife* (1902), which recycles several autobiographical scenes from the *Guide Book*, the heroine Cynthia is meticulous about cleaning (and talking to) her mount every evening, no matter how tired or hungry she may feel after her ride. ‘I cleaned my Raleigh religiously,’ she recounts, ‘and as I cleaned it I inwardly said to it: “O, little wheel, I am grateful to you.”’²³⁷ One evening when she arrives at destination wet and exhausted after a rainy ride into the night, she privileges cleaning her bicycle over taking care of herself, much to her host’s alarm: ‘my host was so concerned at my neglecting myself in order to polish my mount, that he offered to give it a final rub.’²³⁸ When not bicycle touring, Cynthia spends her time learning mechanics or testing the latest bicycles in order to write reviews for the cycling press. She recounts how ‘on wet afternoons I haunted the workshop of our High Barbry repairer, and picked up a good deal of practical knowledge which stood me in good stead. Every now and then a machine arrived for me to report on, and this was an unadulterated

234 Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists*, 35.

235 *Ibid.*, 36.

236 *Ibid.*, 31.

237 Mary E. Kennard, *The Golf Lunatic and His Cycling Wife* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1902), 211.

238 *Ibid.*, 242.

pleasure.’²³⁹ This experience in mechanics allows Cynthia to repair her bicycle as well as those of her husband and her friend on subsequent cycling tours. She is even able to offer help to an American family cycling touring in Belgium, whose user-unfriendly single-tube tires were one of the early and unfortunate cases of built-in technological obsolescence.²⁴⁰

Kennard is not alone in suggesting that a cyclist must learn both to ride and repair her vehicle; mechanical scenes complement riding scenes in the majority of cycling narratives we have examined. In Jerome K. Jerome’s *Three Men on the Bummel* (1900), the three friends check their machines are in working order before leaving for a cycling tour in the Black Forest. The narrator is suspicious of ‘overhauling’, after witnessing a traumatic scene in which a friend pulled his bicycle to pieces in a botched attempt to repair it, and concludes: ‘There are two ways you can get exercise out of a bicycle: you can “overhaul” it, or you can ride it.’²⁴¹ In spite of Jerome’s dichotomy, most accounts bear witness to a close interrelation of the two activities. Both riding and repairing bicycles are forms of tacit, practical, sensory knowledge, that cannot be easily explained in words or writing, but can only be learned through experience.²⁴² Moreover, they both require an intimate, reciprocal relationship with and understanding of the machine.

A further noteworthy mechanical episode may be found in Richardson’s *The Tunnel*, where Miriam exhibits a keen interest in learning about how the machine works. This scene establishing intimacy between machine and rider immediately precedes Miriam’s intense

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁴⁰ See Paul Rubenson, ‘Patents, Profits and Perceptions: The Single Tube Tire and the Failure of the American Bicycle, 1897-1933.’, *Cycle History* 15 (2004): 87–96. The single-tire tube was an exception, and confined to the US, where it has been partly blamed for the languishing of the bicycle’s popularity after 1900. In the majority of cases, early safety bicycles were built with robust materials, which allowed their users to effect their own cleaning, maintenance and repair.

²⁴¹ Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men on the Bummel* (London: Penguin, 1990), 31.

²⁴² For a definition of tacit knowledge, see Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

sensory experience during the cycling trip examined earlier in this chapter. Responding to her brother-in-law Gerald's suggestion that she tighten up the bolts, she says 'I will if you'll show me where they are. I've got a lovely spanner. Did you look in the wallet?' (TL 226). The unusual choice of the adjective 'lovely' points to Miriam's growing aesthetic pleasure in the machine, based on a tactile, sensory engagement with its working parts. The epithet is repeated some lines later in the description 'there's a little oil can in the wallet, wrapped up in the rag. It's lovely; perfectly new' (TL 227). Gerald's offer to help Miriam check the nuts and bolts of her machine is indicative of a participatory attitude to bicycle mechanics; although Miriam has hired the machine, it is her own responsibility as its rider to tend to its needs, much in the same way a hired horse would be regularly fed and cleaned. Furthermore, Richardson neatly ties mechanical and corporeal registers together in this scene by staging the mechanical discussion in the presence of Miriam's heavily pregnant sister, Harriett. To begin with, the sisters prudishly avoid talking directly about the pregnancy, but when Gerald starts testing Miriam's bicycle, Harriett's thoughts on childbirth are overlain with her husband and sister's remarks on the machine :

'I simply don't think about it. You don't think about it, except now and again when you realize you've got to go through it, and then you go hot all over.'
 'The head's a bit wobbly,' said Gerald riding around the lawn.
 'Does that matter?'
 'Well, it doesn't make it any easier to ride, especially with this great bundle on the handle-bars. You want a luggage-carrier.' (TL 227)

This interesting parallel diagnostic of the bicycle and the body knits mechanical and corporeal registers together, refusing a clear distinction between one and the other. Moreover, Miriam's front-loaded bicycle vividly brings to mind her heavily pregnant younger sister, whose figure the narrator refrains from directly describing. Although Miriam has had to hire rather than buy her bicycle, her meagre savings have allowed her to invest in 'a Brooks B40;

about the best you can have. It's my own, and so's the Lucas's Baby bell' (TL 227). Her choice of bell establishes a further parallel with her sister, whose baby will be cared for and admired like Miriam's bicycle. Furthermore, Miriam's ownership of a saddle and bell reminds us that the bicycle, like any object, organism, or system, is a collection of heterogeneous parts. In installing a seat and a bell, or taking apart a chain, the cyclist interacts with a carefully engineered yet simple machine, entering into a mechanical dialogue with the object.

In engaging with the machine's mechanism, cyclists entered into an intimate relationship with the materials that made up the object. Jane Bennett recalls the central thesis of Cyril Smith's *A History of Metallography* (1960), which posits that:

It was metalworkers' intense intimacy with their material that enabled *them*, rather than (the less hands-on) scientists, to be the first ones to discover the polycrystalline structure of nonorganic matter. The desire of the craftsperson to see what a metal can *do*, rather than the desire of a scientist to know what a metal *is*, enabled the former to discern *a* life in metal and thus, eventually, to collaborate more productively with it.²⁴³

Repairing bicycles, like riding them, provides a means of physical interaction with the steel, rubber and leather that make up the machine. Cyclists discovered a life in their machines, reflected in the frequent tendency to portray the bicycle as the successor of the horse, a living being that required daily care, feeding, cleaning and rest. It was common for early cyclists to vaunt the superiority of the low-maintenance bicycle over animal-powered locomotion.²⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the bicycle appears to have inherited patterns and habits of care from its equine ancestor. The attention shown to these cherished machines was cited by Bijker et al. as an indicator of their social status in the 1890s.²⁴⁵ They quote Charles Darwin's granddaughter

²⁴³ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 60.

²⁴⁴ One contemporary example is Pierre Giffard and Albert Robida, *La Fin du cheval* (Paris: A. Colin & Cie, 1899).

²⁴⁵ Wiebe E. Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 94.

Gwen Raverat, who recalls ‘How my father did adore those bicycles! Such beautiful machines! They were as carefully tended as if they had been alive; every speck of dust or wet was wiped from them as soon as we came back from a ride; and at night they were all brought into the house.’²⁴⁶ In A. C. Pemberton’s *Cycling and Society* (1897), this solicitous contemporary attitude towards bicycles is described, reflected in the fact that they are housed indoors, in pride of place: ‘In the marble hall of Chelsea House, in Londonderry House, in Grosvenor House, and other most palatial mansions, the bicycle-stand is now a matter of course, and many people [...] are careful not to leave their machines exposed to the damp air and to dust without a cover.’²⁴⁷ F. W. Bockett remarks how many women take special care with their bicycles when transporting them by train; they ‘swathe handle-bars, frame and even spokes with wonderful bands of linen, for all the world like the swaddling clothes of a week-old baby.’²⁴⁸ The care shown to bicycles in this period not only reflects the fact that they were expensive, luxury items. It hints at a relationship with technology that recognised the vitalism of the object itself.

We saw how literature reflected concerns around the mechanisation of the body, yet authors also wrote about the possibility of machines resembling humans. Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman* (1967) provides perhaps the most memorable and humorous literary incarnation of an idea that had been in circulation from the earliest days of cycling, that is, ‘the humanity of the bicycle.’²⁴⁹ The ‘Atomic Theory’ explained by Sergeant Pluck holds that cyclists and their bicycles exchange atoms, with the result that the humans become part bicycle, and bicycles part human. Already in the early days of the bicycle, such ideas were

246 Gwen Raverat, *Period Piece: A Cambridge Childhood* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 240.

247 A. C. Pemberton, et al., *The Complete Cyclist* (London: Innes and Co, 1897), 55.

248 Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks*, 96.

249 Flann O’Brien, *The Third Policeman* (London: Paladin, 1988), 89.

circulated in literature. Jarry's *Le Surmâle*, as we have seen, experiments with the idea of porosity between human and machine, as both adopt elements from the other in his narrative. H. G. Wells, too, expressed the idea of bicycles and humans adopting patterns of behaviour from each other. When young Hoopdriver encounters the attractive cyclist Jessie, the narrator blames the moral quality of his bicycle (which he puts down to its depraved previous owner) for the panic and fall that ensue. 'No one who has ever ridden a cycle of any kind but will witness that the things are unaccountably prone to pick up bad habits—and keep them,' (WC 19) the narrator remarks, before describing the physical symptoms the bicycle exhibits: 'it became convulsed with the most violent emotions directly the Young Lady in Grey appeared. It began an absolutely unprecedented Wobble' (WC 20). This attribution of human characteristics to a machine points to a vibrant exchange and dialogue between riders and their bicycles, which led to a questioning of the limits of both the human and the mechanical.

In the light of recent materialist criticism, the idea that bicycles and humans might pick up habits, reactions or emotions from each other might not appear so far-flung. Ian Hodder, for instance, cites the example of a man riding a bicycle as emblematic of 'human-thing entanglement,'²⁵⁰ while Jane Bennett claims that the concept of an assemblage 'is perhaps best understood on the model of riding a bicycle on a gravel road.' Bennett expands the metaphor, explaining that 'one can throw one's weight this way or that, inflect the bike in one direction or toward one trajectory of motion. But the rider is but one actant operative in the moving whole.'²⁵¹ The attitude of early riders towards their machines provides a compelling illustration of Bennett's idea of 'the vitality of matter'²⁵² or of Bruno Latour's

250 Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships Between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 110.

251 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 38.

252 *Ibid.*, vii.

concept of ‘actants’,²⁵³ where both human and non-human elements actively shape events. The bicycle seems to offer a subtle compromise between the nightmare of technology with a life of its own and the alienation of a completely devitalised idea of matter. The steel and rubber of the machine cannot operate independently, but are capable of responding to and collaborating with human energy.

3.3.3 Human technology: the bicycle as a tool

The computer [...] is the most remarkable tool that we’ve ever come up with. It’s the equivalent of a bicycle for our minds.²⁵⁴

In the midst of the digital revolution, Steve Jobs, who almost named his Macintosh computer “Bicycle,”²⁵⁵ recognised the importance of creating tools that accompany human effort and intelligence rather than providing substitutes for them. During the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, Marx reflected on the difference between a machine and a tool; two concepts which, Raymond Williams informs us, were only distinguished from each other in the eighteenth century.²⁵⁶ Marx cites thinkers who describe a machine as that which has an external source of energy, and a tool as a human-powered implement, before complicating this dichotomy by arguing that a machine is composed of many tools operating at once, and may in fact be powered by a human. Yet Marx maintains that the role of ‘the machine, which is the starting point of the industrial revolution’²⁵⁷ is to replace the worker by usurping his

253 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

254 Steve Jobs, ‘Computers are like a bicycle for our minds.’ Online video clip. *YouTube*, 1 Jun 2006. Web. Accessed 5 March 2015.

255 Schwartz, James D. ‘How Apple’s “Macintosh” almost became the “Bicycle”.’ *The Urban Country*, 8 Jan 2012. Web. Accessed 17 July 2016.

256 Williams, *Keywords*, 201.

257 Marx, *Capital*, 1:497.

tools and giving him ‘the merely mechanical role of acting as the motive power.’²⁵⁸ It is incidental whether or not another source powers the machine, Marx insists; the important thing is that the machine has taken over from the human skill, intelligence and experience previously required to produce an object. Indeed, Marx maintains that it is the act of taking agency away from the human that results in the machine taking on an ominous life of its own, as the following description suggests: ‘As soon as tools had been converted from being manual implements of man into implements of a mechanical apparatus, of a machine, the motive mechanism also acquired an independent form, entirely emancipated from the restraints of human strength.’²⁵⁹

The machine, whether powered by human, animal, wind or steam energy, takes the tools from the worker’s hands and gains a measure of autonomy, beyond the limitations human strength can place on it. The tool, on the other hand, is intimately tied to the body; it relies on the person using it both to power and direct it. For Marx, the tool gives the worker a sense of meaning and satisfaction in his work, while the machine is no more than ‘a means for producing surplus-value’,²⁶⁰ alienating workers from production and siphoning off capital to the rich. I contend that the bicycle stands out from other vehicles in that it may be defined as a tool, since it is entirely dependent on human energy and skill to function. As Michel Bouet observes, human-powered machines such as the bicycle amplify the body rather than marginalising it:

Le fait de disposer d'une « machine » avec lequel le sportif s'identifie doit être interprété non comme une mise entre parenthèse du corps mais comme son amplification. Le corps de l'homme est précisément celui de l'être qui, parmi les animaux, s'est construit des outils dont la mécanique n'a pas mécanisé son corps, et qui, restant à sa disposition sans s' imposer à lui, peuvent devenir de

258 *Ibid.*, 1:496.

259 *Ibid.*, 1:499.

260 *Ibid.*, 1:492.

seconds corps que le corps originel s'incorpore.²⁶¹

Bouet recognises tool-building as a fundamentally human activity that enhances the body's innate capacities. In this sense the bicycle is quintessentially a tool; it does not mechanise the body, but optimises its potential, and acts as a 'second body' intimately incorporated into that of its user.

In his essay 'Being and Time' (1927) Heidegger formulates a definition of a tool as 'the ready to hand,' observing that the tool does not assert itself, but acts as an extension of the will of the person using it.²⁶² Drawing on Heidegger's essay 'The Question Concerning Technology' (1954), Margaret Linley recalls the Greek origin of the term technology: *techne*, the name for 'the activities and skills of the craftsman' as well as for 'the arts of the mind and the fine arts.'²⁶³ Technology, for Heidegger, is inherently a manual and artisanal endeavour. Pushing this argument further, Marcel Mauss claimed in 1936 that even the most basic human activities, such as eating, walking or talking, deserved the status of 'techniques' insofar as they had been learned and were embedded in a particular collective context.²⁶⁴ Indeed, this historical and essential link appeared to have been severed in the industrial age, when technology and humans were often depicted as polar opposites. However, the literary imaginaries surrounding the bicycle sought to undo this schism, insisting on the continuity between these machines and the humans who powered them. In Leblanc's *Voici des ailes*, for instance, Pascal contrasts the bicycle with the 'vilaine' motor car, a machine that 'dissimule

261 Bouet, *Signification du sport*, 19. 'The fact that the athlete uses and identifies with a "machine" should not be interpreted as the marginalisation of the body but rather as its amplification. Amongst other animals, the human body distinguishes itself by its ability to build tools whose mechanism does not mechanise the body, and which, remaining at his disposition without becoming obligatory, may become second bodies which become incorporated into the original body.'

262 Martin Heidegger and William Lovitt, 'Being and Time', in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 95–107.

263 Margaret Linley, 'The Living Transport Machine: George Eliot's *Middlemarch*', in *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940*, ed. Andrew F. Humphries and Adrienne E. Gavin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 86.

264 Marcel Mauss, *Les Techniques du corps* (Chicoutimi: J.-M. Tremblay, 2002).

ses organes comme une honte' (VA 26).²⁶⁵ Pascal develops a corporeal aesthetic, where the machine must mirror the human body it is designed to serve. In contrast to the motor car, he is able to admire the moving parts of a steam engine, which he describes as 'ces muscles de fer qui se tendent et se détendent' (VA 26).²⁶⁶ The beauty of the bicycle, Pascal reflects, can be explained by the fact that it conforms to and mirrors the proportions of the body. He asks:

[...] y a-t-il rien qui évoque plus l'idée de vitesse que ces deux roues égales, aux rayons ténus et vibrants comme des nerfs, deux jambes sans commencement ni fin ? Y a-t-il rien qui soit plus stable, plus solide d'aspect que ces reins d'acier, que cette échine rigoureuse, que tout cet appareil de muscles logiques et nécessaires ? (VA 20)²⁶⁷

The corporeal lexicon repeatedly employed to describe the machine's working parts points to the close interaction it invites with the body and the senses. Several days into their transforming bicycle trip, Pascal no longer compares the human body to the bicycle but, like Jarry, depicts it as a culmination of human potential, no longer distinguishable from the body but an outgrowth of it: 'L'homme maintenant est pourvu de tous ses moyens. [...] La bicyclette est un perfectionnement de son corps lui-même, l'achèvement, pourrait-on dire. [...] Il n'y a pas un homme et une machine. Il y a un homme plus vite' (VA 34-35).²⁶⁸ Pascal's praise of the object's conformity to the proportions of the human body suggests an affinity with a Renaissance outlook, which took man as the blueprint for architecture, technology and the universe. Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man provided a vivid illustration of this principle, presenting the human body as a geometrically perfect object whose proportions should be mirrored in human creations.

265 'ugly'; 'hides its organs as though it were ashamed.'

266 'steel muscles that contract and relax.'

267 'Can anything suggest the idea of speed more than these two equal wheels, the spokes tensed and vibrating like nerves, two legs without a beginning or an end? Can anything be thought of as more stable, more solid than this steel body, these rigorous ribs, this device made of logical and necessary muscles?'

268 'Man is now in possession of all his capabilities [...] The bicycle perfects the body itself, completes it one might say [...] There is not a man and a machine. There is a quicker man.'

Technology designed around the body provides a beneficial, perennial augmentation of human capacities. Lewis Mumford pointed to the inherent paradox of modern technology in *Art and Technics* (1952), where he argued that the ‘perversion of technics in our time naturally saps the vitality of real art,’ enslaving rather than freeing its users.²⁶⁹ At the root of this alienating relationship with technology is ‘style obsolescence,’ or the constant search for new consumer objects. Rather than seeking to be continually renewed, useful technology should change little, as Mumford argues: ‘Once established and perfected, type objects should have a long period of use. No essential improvement in the safety pin has been made since the bronze age.’²⁷⁰ Although many models of bicycle appeared in rapid succession in the late nineteenth century, each claiming to be superior to the last, the standard Safety design has hardly been changed at all since 1885. Unlike the safety pin, industrial manufacture is required for its construction, yet the enduring design of the bicycle, like that of the safety pin, at once proves its fruitful role in society and invites a more fulfilling relationship with technology. As Watson and Gray argue, ‘the cycle represents a subtle compromise between the demands of engineering and those of our bodies. Indeed, its evolution has been more intimately bound up with our own physical capacities and dimensions than that of any other machine one can think of.’²⁷¹ The bicycle’s simplicity, the stability of its design and its correspondence to the dimensions of the human body all distinguish it as a tool that has been developed to accompany and extend rather than distort human capacities.

Thanks to this tight collaboration between mechanism and the human body, the bicycle allowed a unique means for reimagining the social and political role of technology. In his cycle touring account *Wheel Magic*, J. W. Allen’s narrator marvels at a medieval church

²⁶⁹ Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 80.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁷¹ Watson and Gray, *The Penguin Book of the Bicycle*, 84–85.

he comes across on one of his rides, which leads him to reflect on the interrelation between technology and the people who make it. Rather than being accredited to a single architect, it is a collective construction that had meaning and use for the whole community. He reflects ‘more minds than one had directly co-operated in the building of it and indirectly very many more. It was built for the needs of a whole generation. It was a folk-poem: the symphony of an age.’²⁷² The cyclist’s admiration of the medieval church leads him to reconsider what defines technology, engineering and its place within a community. His perspective brings to mind a scene in the later best-selling novel by Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974). The protagonist (or, rather, one side of his split personality, Phaedruss, named after Plato’s eponymous character), recalls admiring an adorned wall when fighting in the Korean war:

The wall in Korea that Phaedruss saw was an act of technology. [...] It was beautiful because the people who worked on it had a way of looking at things that made them do it right unselfconsciously. They didn’t separate themselves from the work in such a way as to do it wrong [...] The way to resolve the conflict [between human values and technology] is to break down the barriers of dualistic thought that prevent a real understanding of what technology is not an exploitation of nature, but *a fusion of nature and the human spirit into a new kind of creation that transcends both*.²⁷³

Phaedruss’s response to the alienating effect of technology is to cultivate ‘Quality’, a term he employs to describe an intimate and artisanal knowledge of the working parts of a machine, such as that practised by cyclists. It implies a fresh engagement with the machines produced by the industrial age, and a reimagining of technology as a fundamentally human endeavour. The bicycle discourages a dualistic view and participates in the reintegration of machines into the human realm.

²⁷² Allen, *Wheel Magic*, 144.

²⁷³ Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* [1974] (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 373. Author’s italics.

This vision of the bicycle as an outgrowth of human capacities reflects certain strains in nineteenth-century thought; Emerson argues in ‘Works and Days’ (1870), for instance, that ‘all the tools and engines on earth are only extensions of [the body’s] limbs and senses.’²⁷⁴ Yet as we have seen, Victorian authors such as John Ruskin insisted on the antithesis between the organic and the mechanical. Bicycles are tools that permit us to break down this dualistic thought, allowing for an extension and optimisation of human locomotive and sensory potential. Rather than threatening to overpower their creator, bicycles accompany humans in their locomotive efforts.

3.3.4 A literature of the machine

In performing this active, creative exchange with a machine, cyclists and writers aestheticised an activity that had been portrayed as ugly and degrading throughout the industrial period. By taking pleasure in a mechanical object, cyclists turned the demeaning act of machine-tending into a meaningful and beautiful task worthy of literary attention. Sussman argues that while Rudyard Kipling sought to develop ‘new literary forms that could include the fact of the machine,’²⁷⁵ he ultimately failed because of the exceeding technical complexity of the objects he sought to portray. In stories such as ‘The Bridge Builders’ (1893), Kipling attempted to expand the literary use of technological idiom, but his effort was thwarted by the necessity to write a comprehensible and interesting story, not a civil engineering manual. As Sussman sums up, ‘The main reason for the success, and for the limitations, of Victorian writers on the machine is that, mystified by technology, they were

²⁷⁴ Quoted in Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, 80.

²⁷⁵ Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine*, 208.

forced to stay within the bounds of what they, and the layman, could understand.’²⁷⁶

Kipling’s attempt to write a work of literature about a suspension bridge may be contrasted to Grant Allen’s creative use of the names of bicycle parts in the following passage from *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* (1899). When the heroine first meets a North American inventor who has patented a new chainless bicycle, she humorously misinterprets his use of the technical term ‘eccentric’:

‘Oh, I knew you were an eccentric,’ I said, ‘the moment I set eyes upon you.’
He surveyed me gravely. ‘You misunderstand me, miss,’ he corrected. ‘*When* I say eccentric, I mean a crank.’
‘They are much the same thing,’ I answered, briskly. ‘Though I confess I would hardly have applied so rude a word as *crank* to you.’
He looked me over suspiciously, as if I were trying to make game of him, but my face was sphinx-like. So he brought the machine a yard or two nearer, and explained its construction to me. He was quite right: it *was* driven by a crank. It had no chain, but was moved by a pedal, working narrowly up and down, and attached to a rigid bar, which impelled the wheels by means of an eccentric.²⁷⁷

Even though she is unfamiliar with this precise system of transmission, Miss Cayley is quickly able to understand the modification the inventor has made to the design of the bicycle. The reader, too, is able to grasp the basic working of this chainless bicycle, and appreciate the joke.²⁷⁸ Allen can count on his readership to laugh at his word play with bicycle parts, supposing the public to be familiar with the terms he employs. The simple nature of a bicycle’s mechanism, the relatively small number of parts it comprised (compared to, say, a steam train or a motor car), and their visibility to the naked eye, meant that writers such as Kennard, Jerome, Richardson and Allen could write metaphorically or humorously about the technical aspect to cycling in their novels, and expect to be understood. In this sense the

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

²⁷⁷ Grant Allen, *Miss Cayley’s Adventures* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2008), 48. Author’s italics.

²⁷⁸ There was a worldwide, short-lived craze for chainless bicycles around the turn of the century. See Michael Grutzner, ‘The Chainless Bicycle Craze in Germany around 1900’, *Cycle History* 18, 2007, 100–107.

bicycle offered a unique means for imagining a literature of the machine, avoiding Kipling's paradox as theorised by Sussman. Thanks to the simple and human-scaled nature of the technology, writers were able to avoid technological jargon while making creative use of bicycle terminology in their texts.

A compelling example of this tendency to invite the technical aspects of cycling into a literary text is provided by *Plato's Dream of Wheels* (1902). In this humorous work, the Scottish classicist R. J. Muir retells the chariot allegory from Plato's *Phaedrus* (c.370 BC). Rather than representing the soul as a pair of winged horses driven by a charioteer, Muir's fictional Socrates reinvents the myth: 'Originally the souls of men lived in the outermost sphere of the highest heavens. There, moving round and round, swiftly and regularly, upon two wheels, they enjoyed great felicity.'²⁷⁹ It was the ability to steer towards the falling side that allowed these souls to remain spinning around heaven, the philosopher explains: 'the former wheel, being turned cunningly towards the side on which there was an inclination to fall, supported the soul and kept it upright.'²⁸⁰ Whereas Plato's original souls fell to earth on losing their wings, in Muir's version it is the inability to steer and balance correctly that leads to the fall of the celestial beings. These erring souls then became men, and lost all knowledge of 'circular motion': 'therefore they move awkwardly upon two pins, moving first the one and then the other, so vilely are we fallen away from our former glorious condition. But it seems that in these latter days the human race is to have an opportunity of attaining again to circular motion.'²⁸¹ Muir depicts the cyclist's motion as an ideal form of innate human mobility; an original state to which we now have the possibility to return, thanks to

279 Robert James Muir, *Plato's Dream of Wheels; Socrates, Protagoras, and the Hegeleatic Stranger; with an Appendix by Certain Cyclic Poets*. (London: T.F. Unwin, 1902), 41–42.

280 *Ibid.*, 42–43.

281 *Ibid.*, 44.

technology. It is easy to imagine why Plato's celestial incarnation of the soul – a charioteer and horses – composed of human, animal and mechanical elements, became a cyclist in Muir's retelling, since the figure offered a striking amalgam of the technical and the corporeal working together in tight collaboration.

Moreover, by integrating this technology into their texts, authors were able to convey a hybridised, transcendental experience, where human senses and the opportunities offered by mechanism combined to produce new aesthetic possibilities. W. S. Beekman asks 'What is more pleasing to the senses than the delicate odor of sweet flowers? [...] And it is only a machine that will so quietly carry you along among such situations; coming so rapidly and silently upon them that they are not wafted away by the vibration of the air before you reach them.'²⁸² Cycling, Beekman recognised, is characterised as much by its mechanical side as its bodily or natural aspect. It is in the hybridisation of these two previously opposed registers that the cycling aesthetic may be located, as Beekman notes elsewhere:

The language of Nature is to be heard throughout all the length and breadth, and is not drowned out by the rapid whirl of the resilient tires. One can hear it in the delicate swish of the individual blades of grass, the rustling of the leaves, the humming of the insects, the bowing of the boughs, the singing of the birds, and the purring tones of the babbling brooks. One and all keep up an ever-changing accompaniment to the rapid and cheerful click of the endless sprocket-chain.²⁸³

Here, the noises the cyclist hears (which are inaccessible to the passenger of a train or car) and through which he interprets his environment are a symphony of sounds produced by animals and plants, and the pleasing whirl and click of the mechanised parts of the bicycle. Beekman willingly mingles the pastoral description of 'the language of Nature' with the 'whirl of the resilient tires' and the 'cheerful click of the endless sprocket-chain,' thus

²⁸² Beekman and Eric, *Cycle Gleanings*, 14.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 44.

aestheticising the mechanical noises of the bicycle. For Maurice Leblanc's hero Pascal, the sounds of the machine directly recall those of the human body, while mingling with the other ambient sounds: 'le cliquetis égal de la chaîne, c'est la palpitations d'un cœur, le bruit discret des roues sur le sol, c'est le battement du sang dans les veines' (VA 80).²⁸⁴ While riding a bicycle, mechanical, corporeal and natural sounds combine, and each are complemented by the various elements in the cyclist's soundscape.

Elsewhere, Pascal characterises the cycling aesthetic as a holistic one; rather than focusing on the details as a walker would, the cyclist achieves a cinematic, multisensory engagement:

À pied vous respirez le parfum de cette plante, vous entendez le chant de cet oiseau. A bicyclette vous respirez, admirez, entendez la nature elle-même. C'est que le mouvement produit tend nos nerfs jusqu'à leur maximum d'intensité et nous dote d'une sensibilité inconnue jusqu'ici (VA 39).²⁸⁵

The machine's movement and speed, Pascal claims, sharpens and intensifies our sensory experience, allowing access to a new sensibility. Significantly, the experience afforded by this new mobility can stimulate the very urge to write, as J. W. Allen notes in his preface:

We needed to babble of our vision of the wonderful country-side, all clothed with miraculous, live, green things, over-hung with incredible blue, quivering in a golden glory, inhabited, too, by mysterious creatures like ourselves, full of memories, full of anticipations. We would babble of this machine that had brought us to this vision – not with much knowledge nor with too nice an accuracy – but with a great sense of joy.²⁸⁶

This vivid description conveys the cyclist's sense of being one actant in an active, vibrant world. The bicycle opens his eyes up to the 'live, green things' that surround him and allows him come to a fresh appreciation of the 'mysterious creature' he himself is. The verb 'babble'

284 'the regular clicking of the chain is the beating of the heart, the discreet sound of the wheels on the ground is the blood pulsing through the veins.'

285 'When walking you inhale the smell of this plant, you hear the song of this bird. On a bicycle you breathe, admire, hear nature itself. The movement produced extends our nerves to their maximum intensity and gives us a sensitivity we had not known until now.'

286 *Ibid.*, viii.

stresses the author's instinctive, child-like, joyous reaction to his discovery of these places and sensations. The equal need he feels to babble of 'our vision' and 'this machine' reminds us of the cyclist's hybridised experience, where sharp sensory awareness is coupled with close collaboration with a machine. Moreover, the cyclist here is equivocally placed between past and future, being 'full of memories, full of anticipations.' As I show in Chapter 4, the ability to look both backwards and forwards was crucial in allowing cyclists to formulate alternative visions of progress and modernity.

The hybrid between corporeal and mechanical means of locomotion offered by the bicycle offers a mode of sensory engagement which may be located somewhere between the close attention of the walker and the instantaneous, visual satisfaction of the car driver. While occupying this liminal space, turn-of-the-century cyclists performed resistance to a binary corporeal/ mechanical classification that had plagued much Victorian thought and which continues to pose problems in our contemporary relationship to technology. On the one hand, cyclists rediscovered the importance of the senses and the body in the wake of the train and in opposition to the emerging automobile. On the other hand, the bicycle laid the basis for a modern approach to travel based on mechanism, speed, simultaneity, spontaneity and subjectivity. This particular synthesis of the body's capacity for sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell and the machine's speed and agency introduced a unique aesthetics founded on the combination of these two registers and a redefinition and transcendence of both. The next and final chapter will lead us to consider how the cyclist's aesthetic uniquely managed to integrate technology into a liberating, human-centred vision of space, time and progress.

Chapter 4. Cycling forward: The modern(ist) and counter-cultural bicycle

Ce n'est pas rêver d'un retour à la nature que de signaler l'inutilité machinique radicale des autos dans les villes, leur caractère archaïque malgré les gadgets de leur présentation, et la modernité possible de la bicyclette, dans nos cités non moins que dans la guerre au Vietnam.¹

This final chapter draws together various threads explored throughout this thesis in order to focus on the alternative modernity of the bicycle, as it was experienced when the technology was new. While Theodor Adorno famously viewed the aesthetic project of modernism as a rejection of industrial modernity,² other critics have viewed the two phenomena as intimately intertwined, emerging together in response to novel, technologically mediated experiences in the early twentieth century.³ The bicycle, I argue, occupies an equivocal position in this debate. Along with a host of other turn-of-the-century technologies, the bicycle shaped aspects of emerging modernity by favouring a subjective, mobile relationship to one's surroundings. Yet it also incarnated a rejection of the excesses of technologies that fundamentally distorted human experience and interaction, and many of the discourses that grew up around cycling in this period suggest resistance to industrial modernity. The bicycle offered a rich mode of embodied spatial engagement that went counter to the disembodiment

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- 1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: l'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Les Éditions de minuit, 1980), 480. 'It is far from dreaming of a return to nature to point to the utter mechanical uselessness of cars in cities, their archaic character despite their flashy portrayal, and the possible modernity of the bicycle, in our cities just as much as in the Vietnam war.' In the opening pages of this work (p. 10-11) the authors offer an interesting reflection on the Freudian symbolism of the bicycle in Beckett's novels.
 - 2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978).
 - 3 See, for example, Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

tendencies of other technologies such as the motor car or telephone. I argue that it is this in-between position that allowed cycling to contribute to both emerging modernity and literary modernism, in the works of authors including E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley and Dorothy Richardson. For these authors, cycling incarnated a protest against the violent, heavily mechanised, accelerated, commodified reality towards which the twentieth century was hurtling, while suggesting an alternative, human-powered route to the future.

In this survey of the bicycle's status as both a modern and a counter-cultural symbol in literature, I first explore the new geographies of cycling, which favoured a re-engagement with space, in contrast to the bulk of contemporary communication and transport technologies. Adopting a theoretical framework from Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Marc Augé and others, this chapter engages with fictional and non-fictional representations of the spatial modes offered by both the motor car and the bicycle, with the latter being broadly interpreted as an antidote to the 'loss of space' engendered by various mechanised means of transport. The second part of the chapter extends the reflection on the cyclist's relationship to modernity by examining the figure's ability to straddle past, present and future. While they were initially seen as avatars of modernity and associated with visions of the future, cyclists in literature soon became symbols of a bygone world. As such, from the early years of the twentieth century bicycles appear in texts in relation to a sense of history, or a connection to a primitive past, that itself was a paradoxical expression of modernity. I argue that by allowing us to rethink our relationship with space and time, the bicycle made a unique contribution both to modernity and to the emerging modernist movement in fiction.

4.1 Bicycle space: new geographies

Does the city exist for people, or for motorcars?⁴

Perhaps the bicycle's most crucial contribution to both modernity and modernism in the early twentieth century was its transformation of space, a theme that was interwoven into my discussion of sensory aesthetics in Chapter 3. Due to the interrelated phenomena of suburbanisation and rapid transport, profound changes were taking place in both the identity of spaces and the subjective experience of moving through them at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Glen Norcliffe observes, 'Personal geographies are transformed by cycling [...] It follows that bicycles have reconfigured space, and continually do so.'⁵ Several critics have argued that the desire to achieve a subjective, spatial engagement with the world is a defining feature of modernist literature, which casts off the regular pace and structure of realist fiction in order to present a geographical rather than a temporal account of reality.⁶ Early twentieth-century society inherited aspects of a Victorian time-centred outlook, yet modernist literature incarnated a reaction to this tendency, reasserting spatial modes of engagement over temporal ones. Literary depictions of cyclists in the early twentieth century mirror the desire to connect spatially with the world, while experimenting with a longer, more subjective time. The approach adopted by cyclists therefore challenged the negation of space and time which many critics have seen as a defining characteristic of the modern era.⁷

4 Lewis Mumford in a 1960 film produced by the National Film Board, 'The City: Cars or People', quoted in Zack Furness, *One Less Car: Bicycling and the Politics of Automobility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 53.

5 Glen B. Norcliffe, *Critical Geographies of Cycling: History, Political Economy and Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 23.

6 See, for instance: Elisabeth Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, trans. Victoria Appelbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Andrew Thacker, *Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

7 See, for instance, Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*

4.1.1 Theorising space: Lefebvre, Foucault, De Certeau, Augé, Virilio

It will be useful for our study of the spatial engagement of cyclists in literature to begin with a brief consideration of the theories of several major French critics who have developed conceptual frameworks for examining space. This will allow us to reflect on the important distinctions that have been made between space and place, while introducing several concepts that will help us to reflect on the particular forms of spatial engagement associated with cyclists in literature in subsequent sections.

Henri Lefebvre provides one of the most complete critical frameworks for reflecting on space in his 1972 *La Production de l'espace*. For this Marxist theorist, uses and definitions of space are overtly political – within a capitalist system, spaces are ‘produced’ by those in power – and it is through the formulation of the concept of empty, uninhabited space that the bourgeoisie attempts to ensure its hegemony in society. Lefebvre maintains that space is never empty; it cannot exist independently of the humans who use, define and traverse it; people, too, are actively shaped by the spaces through which they move. The efforts made from the eighteenth century to formulate a scientific, rational idea of empty space are, for Lefebvre, a defining element of modernity, a cultural project largely shaped by and for the bourgeoisie. Lefebvre establishes a link between abstract, empty concepts of space and time when he observes that ‘l’espace pris séparément devient abstraction vide ; et de même l’énergie et le temps.’⁸ This attempt to establish space and time as discrete entities set apart from the humans who give them meaning characterised much of the modern period, Lefebvre argues, yet he notes an important shift that occurred in our conception of space at the

(London; Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990); Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, eds., *Contested Natures* (London: Sage, 1998).

8 Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1986), 20. ‘space taken separately becomes an empty abstraction; the same goes for energy and time.’

beginning of the twentieth century:

[...] vers 1910, l'espace commun au bon sens, au savoir, à la pratique sociale, au pouvoir politique, contenu du discours quotidien comme de la pensée abstraite, milieu et canal des messages, celui de la perspective classique et de la géométrie, élaboré depuis la Renaissance, à partir de l'héritage grec, [...] cet espace s'ébranle.⁹

This questioning of our relationship to space was in large part provoked by the appearance of new transport and communication technologies, which had the effect of effectively compressing time and space. Contemporary accounts suggest that a change in everyday life was keenly felt at this time; Virginia Woolf, for one, claimed that 'on or about December 1910, human character changed.'¹⁰ Lefebvre does not maintain that this shake up of space resulted in a revolutionary attack on 'abstract' space, however. The bourgeoisie continued to ensure its stranglehold on definitions of space through what Lefebvre defines as 'les représentations de l'espace',¹¹ and which is one of three guiding concepts in his theory of space.

First of all Lefebvre defines everyday uses of space (such as living in a house or travelling to work) as 'la pratique spatiale, qui englobe production et reproduction [...] À la fois compétence certaine et une certaine performance'¹² (terms he borrows from Noam Chomsky's linguistics, and which have been given renewed relevance in the work of Judith Butler).¹³ Secondly, he outlines 'les représentations de l'espace',¹⁴ referring to definitions of

9 *Ibid.*, 34. '[...] around 1910, the shared space of common sense, knowledge, social practices, political power, which contained both everyday discourses and abstract thinking, the means and channel of communication, of classical perspective and geometry, developed since the Renaissance from Greek models [...] this space was shaken.'

10 Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' [1923] in *Collected Essays*, vol. 1 (London: Hogarth, 1966), 320.

11 'representations of space.'

12 Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace*, 42. 'spatial practice, which includes production and reproduction [...] Both assured competence and a certain performance.'

13 See Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenonology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–31; Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

14 Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace*, 43. 'representations of space.'

space formulated by governments, businesses, city planners, and other organs of power, and imposed on the users of such spaces by means of specific rules, signs and codes. Finally, the category of ‘espaces de représentation’ refers to subversive spaces ‘liés au côté clandestin et souterrain de la vie sociale, mais aussi à l’art.’¹⁵ Lefebvre insists that these three broad types of space are not separate categories, but rather constantly overlap and merge into each other. Indeed, Lefebvre refuses the idea of inert space, underlining the fluctuating, dynamic aspect to any locality, which is never empty but always being acted upon and transformed by the various currents running through it. The first and especially the last categories may become means by which the dominant capitalist logic (‘les représentations de l’espace’) can be challenged, allowing a redefinition of space by those who make use of it.

A parallel may be established between Lefebvre’s theory of space and the Situationist movement in the 1950s, which aimed to reinvent everyday life by constructing situations which disrupt the hegemonic use of space. The bicycle was one tool used by the Situationists and movements inspired by them, such as the Provos in the Netherlands, in order to propose alternative means of interpreting and interacting with urban space. As the critic Zack Furness shows, the Situationists ‘abhorred the centrality of cars in urban design because [...] they saw it as a symbol of a much larger problem: a spatio-cultural arrangement designed to suppress human spontaneity and wilful participation in the city’s construction.’¹⁶ In a bid to actively contribute to the spatial arrangement of their city and counteract contemporary car-centred political choices, the Provos rode bicycles and dotted painted white bicycles around the city, intended for free public use.¹⁷ Guy Debord’s 1959 ‘Positions situationnistes sur la circulation’

15 *Ibid.*, 42–43. ‘spaces of representation’; ‘linked to the clandestine, underground side of social life, but also to art.’

16 Furness, *One Less Car*, 53–54.

17 Amsterdam was not always the cycling-friendly city it is today. The Provos and other Dutch movements in the post-war period were instrumental in resisting the car-centred planning which was being adopted by governments and city planners across Europe.

argues that revolutionary city planning should struggle against car-centred city design, attempting to ‘briser ces chaînes topologiques, en expérimentant des terrains pour la circulation des hommes à travers la vie authentique.’¹⁸ In the post-war period, the car-centred projects of city planners such as Le Corbusier in Paris and Robert Moses in New York led to a rise in personal car ownership and fears that cities would soon be built for cars rather than people, as the quote from Lewis Mumford that opens this section goes to show. The use of the bicycle by these movements in the 1960s and 1970s was prefigured by its symbolic and actual role at the turn of the century, when it became a means to perform an alternative, people-centred approach to the use of space, as we shall see in the course of this chapter.

Michel Foucault provides a further theoretical cornerstone for reflecting on the use of space. In his essay ‘Des espaces autres’, Foucault notes that a shift from temporal to spatial preoccupations occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, observing that: ‘la grande hantise qui a obsédé le XIXe siècle a été, on le sait, l’histoire [...] l’époque actuelle serait peut être plutôt l’époque de l’espace.’¹⁹ As we have seen, this reorientation towards space has to do with the sudden irrelevance of linear time in a world of technologies that promote a simultaneous temporal experience. Foucault traces a tripartite shift from medieval spaces, which he characterises as ‘espaces de localisation’, to a post-Renaissance ‘espace infini, et infiniment ouvert’, to a present-day concept of ‘emplacement.’²⁰ For Foucault, like Lefebvre, these ‘emplacements’ are shifting and always defined by power dynamics in society. What interests Foucault in this illuminating essay is *emplacements* that display ‘la curieuse propriété d’être en rapport avec tous les autres emplacements, mais sur un mode tel qu’ils

18 Guy Debord, ‘Positions situationnistes sur la circulation’ [1959].

<http://carfree.fr/index.php/2011/04/28/positions-situationnistes-sur-la-circulation/>. Accessed 04/05/16.

‘Break these topological chains, by testing out terrains for the circulation of humans through real life.’

19 Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1571. ‘As we now, the nineteenth century was haunted and obsessed by history [...] the current era could rather be qualified as the era of space.’

20 *Ibid.*, 2:1572. ‘spaces of localisation’; ‘infinite and infinitely open space’; ‘location.’

suspendent, neutralisent ou inversent l'ensemble des rapports qui se trouvent, par eux, désignés, reflétés ou réfléchis.'²¹ These spaces are of two types: 'utopies', which are imaginary spaces corresponding to no real physical location, and 'hétérotopies' which refer to 'des lieux réels [...] qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d'utopies effectivement réalisées dans lesquels les emplacements réels [...] sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés.'²²

Foucault provides several examples of heterotopias, which often have the function of ensuring social control rather than contesting it. Present-day 'hétérotopies de déviation', for example, include prisons and retirement homes, which allow those who fail to conform to social norms to be placed elsewhere, out of sight.²³ Within these alternative spaces, many different spaces and temporalities are reflected and juxtaposed; the cinema, the theatre and the garden are used as illustrations of this characteristic.²⁴ Heterotopias, Foucault claims, always have a social function; either of 'illusion' or 'compensation' in relation to society at large.²⁵ Yet while they are often used to reinforce social control, they may also provide an imaginative release from hegemonic spaces. Foucault's final example of a boat underlines this point: 'Le bateau, c'est un morceau flottant de l'espace, un lieu sans lieu [...] le navire, c'est l'hétérotopie par excellence. Dans des civilisations sans bateaux les rêves se tarissent, l'espionnage y remplace l'aventure, et la police, les corsaires.'²⁶ For Foucault, means of transport offer a fascinating example of multi-layered spatial engagement; earlier in 'Des

21 *Ibid.*, 2:1574. 'the curious property of being related to all the other locations, but in a way in which they suspend, neutralise or invert the relations which are designated, mirrored or reflected by them.'

22 *Ibid.*, 2:1575. 'utopies'; 'heterotopias'; 'real places [...] which are types of counter-locations, utopias that have actually been put in place and in which real locations [...] are variously represented, contested and inverted.'

23 *Ibid.*, 2:1576. 'heterotopias of deviation.'

24 *Ibid.*, 2:1577.

25 *Ibid.*, 2:1580.

26 *Ibid.*, 2:1581. 'The boat is a floating bit of space, a place without a place [...] the ship is the ultimate heteotopia. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, spying takes the place of adventure and police replace pirates.'

espaces autres' he notes: 'c'est un extraordinaire faisceau de relations qu'un train, puisque c'est quelque chose à travers quoi on passe, c'est quelque chose également par quoi on peut passer d'un point à un autre et puis c'est quelque chose également qui passe.'²⁷ This multi-layered spatiality specific to vehicles make them a compelling object of study for a shifting, mobile, interactive conception of spaces.²⁸ Unlike Foucault's heterotopia, the bicycle does not constitute its own closed-off space within which one can circulate. Indeed, it is thanks to this openness that its rider can enjoy a keener spatial engagement than the car or train passenger, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3. However, like Foucault's various examples of heterotopias, the bicycle allows its user to juxtapose various spatial and temporal registers and suggests an alternative, imaginative, counter-hegemonic organisation of both space and society.

Unlike many other vehicles, then, the bicycle does not constitute a space in itself. Contrary to Foucault's above description of the train, a cyclist cannot move around within her bicycle. It is therefore a vehicle by means of which we pass and which passes, but which we cannot pass through. It is this absence of its own space which aligns the bicycle with Michel de Certeau's theory of bodily animation of spaces, a concept I engaged with in Chapter 3. In his influential study *L'invention du quotidien* (1980), de Certeau makes use of the theories of both Lefebvre and Foucault to formulate his idea of the incarcerating train, a vehicle he describes as 'une cellule rationalisée. Une bulle du pouvoir panoptique et classificateur, un module de l'enfermement qui rend possible la production d'un ordre, une insularité close et autonome, voilà ce qui peut traverser l'espace et se rendre indépendant des enracinements locaux.'²⁹ Unlike the train or car passenger, who move through external spaces within their

27 *Ibid.*, 2:1574. 'a train is an extraordinary bundle of relations, since it is something through which we pass, something that allows us to pass from one point to another and also something that passes by.'

28 As we saw in the Introduction, Einstein was also inspired by the complex spatio-temporal nature of the train to illustrate his theory of relativity to non-specialists.

29 Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 165. 'a rationalised cell. A bubble of panoptic, classifying power, a means of imprisonment which makes the reproduction of

own enclosed space, the cyclist is present in the spaces through which she passes, having no personal space of her own. The cyclist creates and animates the space she occupies, and is shaped by this space in turn. Car drivers and train passengers, on the other hand, effectively refuse the collective co-construction of space, occupying an artificial personal space that makes the shared space around them invalid and unlivable. As Lefebvre reminds us, space can only be constructed with those around us; as such, car drivers' personal appropriation of space contributes to making localities uninhabitable for other people.

Like Lefebvre, de Certeau maintains that those in power promote an idea of a fixed, immobile, abstract, visual space in an attempt to negate the complexity and mutability of localities, which are defined by complex, shifting social practices.³⁰ De Certeau focuses on walking as a style ('un style d'appréhension tactile et d'appropriation kinésique') which actively 'spatialises' localities, transforming them from places into spaces.³¹ Andrew Thacker provides an overview of some of the above critics in his spatial study of modernism, *Moving Through Modernity*, summarising the essential difference between space and place in the following terms: 'many theorists think of space in connection with movement, history, becoming – and place as a static sense of location, of being or of dwelling.'³² Thacker traces this line of thinking in the writings of Martin Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau and David Harvey. Out of all these critics, it is de Certeau who perhaps makes this distinction most clearly, arguing that:

Il y a espace dès qu'on prend en considération des vecteurs de direction, des quantités de vitesse et la variable du temps. L'espace est un croisement de mobiles. Il est en quelque sorte animé par l'ensemble des mouvements qui s'y

social order possible, through closed-off and autonomous insularity. This is the vehicle that can travel through space making itself independent from local particularities.'

30 *Ibid.*, 141.

31 *Ibid.*, 147. 'a kinetic and tactile type of perception.'

32 Thacker, *Moving through Modernity*, 13.

déployent. [...] En somme, l'espace est un lieu pratiqué.³³

This crucial distinction between space and place founded on mobile, physical presence is highly relevant in terms of cyclists' specific form of spatial engagement. Cyclists' direct bodily presence in spaces and their creative dialogue with urban planning invites them to be included among de Certeau's 'pratiques inventrices d'espaces.'³⁴

As I underlined in Chapter 1, de Certeau aligns the mobile, embodied animation of space with the act of speaking, producing or reading a text, referring for instance to 'une rhétorique de la marche.'³⁵ The two opposing approaches to space he formulates are symbolised in the images of a map and a tour. While a map provides a 'scène totalisante',³⁶ or an immobile, bird's eye view, a tour provides a 'parcours d'espace.'³⁷ The tour, like storytelling, constantly transforms places into spaces, and vice versa: 'les récits effectuent donc un travail qui, incessamment, transforme des lieux en espaces ou des espaces en lieux',³⁸ enacting the constant mutability of any locality, and composing space itself through the act of narration. In the essay 'One-way Street' (1928), Benjamin establishes a corresponding link between travel and text, focusing on the difference between reading a text and copying it out, observing that: 'The force exerted by the country lane varies according to whether one walks along it or flies over it in an aeroplane. Similarly, the force exerted by a text varies according to whether one is reading it or copying it out.'³⁹ Like Benjamin, de Certeau argues that the shifting spatial perspective of the pedestrian on the ground provides a much richer experience

33 De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 173. 'Space exists when we take into consideration directional vectors, levels of speed and the variable of time. Space is a crossing of mobile elements. It is in some sense animated by the totality of movements that take place within it [...] In other words, space is a place that is used.'

34 *Ibid.*, 161 'practices that invent space.'

35 *Ibid.*, 151. 'a rhetoric of walking.'

36 *Ibid.*, 179. 'totalising scene.'

37 *Ibid.*, 170. 'journey through space.'

38 *Ibid.*, 174. 'stories work to constantly transform places into spaces or spaces into places.'

39 Walter Benjamin, *One-way Street and Other Writings*, trans. J. A Underwood (London: Penguin, 2009), 51.

than the uniform bird's eye view of the airplane passenger. Narration, like de Certeau's tour, is inherently mobile and 'délinquant', as it opposes and undermines the fixed, immobile logic of the map: 'là où la carte découpe, le récit traverse.'⁴⁰ De Certeau's thinking on space thus brings together crucial elements of Lefebvre's and Foucault's spatial theories while focusing on the subversive, bodily and textual engagement of walkers in the city. As we shall see with reference to literature, many of de Certeau's concepts are directly relevant to cyclists' specific approach to space.

A further critical approach to space and (post)modernity is offered by Marc Augé in *Non-lieux* (1992). Inspired by de Certeau, Augé makes a distinction between places and non-places, where places correspond to animated and lived-in 'espaces', and non-places refer to empty, dehumanised, mechanised spaces, such as motorways, supermarkets and airports. Augé argues that 'la surmodernité est productrice de non-lieux, c'est-à-dire d'espaces qui ne sont pas eux-mêmes des lieux anthropologiques et qui, contrairement à la modernité baudelairienne, n'intègrent pas les lieux anciens.'⁴¹ Conceptions of space and time are thus closely intertwined; it is the failure of the spaces of postmodernity to take the past into account that transforms them into nightmarish non-places, concerned only with 'l'expérience simultanée du présent perpétuel.'⁴² A further element of de Certeau's thinking which is extended by Augé is the connection between texts and spatial engagement. Non-places deform the walker's creative 'parcours d'espace' on by taking over this essential narrative function; 'ils se définissent aussi par les mots ou les textes qu'ils nous proposent [...] Ainsi sont mises en place les conditions de circulation dans des espaces où les individus sont censés

40 De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 190. 'delinquent'; 'the map divides up, the story crosses through.'

41 Marc Augé, *Non lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 100. 'supermodernity produces non places, that is, spaces which are not in themselves anthropological places and which, in contrast to Baudelairean modernity, do not take older places into account.'

42 *Ibid.*, 131. 'simultaneous experience of the perpetual present.'

n'interagir qu'avec des textes.'⁴³ Thus, rather than inviting mobile bodies to interactively weave their own stories, non-places are invaded by text, obliging people to understand spaces in a strictly defined way, by means of signs, billboards, notices, etc (a process recalling Lefebvre's 'représentations de l'espace'). Evidently, this purely textual engagement has negative outcomes on our relationship to others and the shape of society. As Augé puts it, 'L'espace du non-lieu ne crée ni identité singulière, ni relation, mais solitude et similitude.'⁴⁴ Augé is unhopeful about the prospects for any society founded on non-places, arguing that 'Le non-lieu est le contraire de l'utopie: il existe et il n'abrite aucune société organique.'⁴⁵ Augé is the only one of the above critics to have written at length about the bicycle as a means to promote a re-engagement with space, allowing us to overcome the dehumanised non-spaces that proliferate in present-day society. In his *Eloge de la bicyclette* (2008), he claims 'Nous avons besoin de la bicyclette pour nous recentrer sur nous-mêmes en nous recentrant sur les lieux où nous vivons.'⁴⁶ The bodily and social interaction of the cyclist can provide an alternative to the mechanised, empty spaces of modernity and post-modernity, as my examination of literature will show.

A final French critic who has offered a compelling critical reflection on space is Paul Virilio. He examines the effect of technologies on our interaction with time and space, often drawing attention to the negative effects of mechanisation. In *Vitesse et politique* (1977), he notes that 'la contraction des distances est devenue une réalité stratégique aux conséquences

43 *Ibid.*, 120. 'journey through space'; 'they are also defined by the words or the texts they offer us [...] Thus, conditions of circulation are put in place within spaces where individuals are only meant to interact with texts.'

44 *Ibid.*, 130. 'The space of the non-place does not create specific identities or relationships, but solitude and sameness.'

45 *Ibid.*, 140. 'The non place is the opposite of a utopia: it truly exists and harbours no organic society.'

46 Marc Augé, *Éloge de la bicyclette* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2008), 52. 'We need the bicycle to refocus our attention on ourselves by refocusing on the places where we live.'

économiques et politiques incalculables puisqu'elle correspond à la négation de l'espace.'⁴⁷

In common with the above critics, Virilio argues that the attempt to create absolute, empty space has been aided by the spread of new technologies and is paramount to domination of society by a political elite. In response to this he adopts the term 'dromologie', adapted from 'Dromomanes. Nom donné aux déserteurs sous l'Ancien Régime et en psychiatrie à la manie déambulatoire.'⁴⁸ He thus aligns his philosophy with a counter-cultural figure associated with walking, recalling both the *flâneur* and de Certeau's urban walker. Virilio focuses on the revolutionary space of the street animated by bodily presence. Revolution can only arise in the reclaimed space of the street, Virilio argues, when 'la multitude des passants [...] cesse pour un temps d'être le relais technique de la machine et devient lui-même moteur [...] c'est-à-dire *producteur de vitesse*.'⁴⁹ As we saw in Chapter 3, the liberating experience of providing one's own locomotive energy allowed cyclists to challenge the dominant model built on machine dependency and alienation from the body.

In *La Vitesse de la libération* (1995) Virilio concentrates on the immobilising, incarcerating effects of the compression of space brought about by a host of twentieth century technologies and accentuated since the digital revolution. It is the loss of bodily points of reference in this cyberspace which Virilio points to as deeply problematic in terms of our current relationship with technology and space. He asks '*De quelle spatialité s'agit-il en effet, dès lors que nous perdons tout appui, toute portance, et donc toute référence posturale ?*'⁵⁰ This lack of bodily connection to space leads to what Virilio calls 'la pollution

47 Paul Virilio, *Vitesse et politique: essai de dromologie* (Paris: Galilée, 1977), 131. 'the contraction of distances has become a strategic reality with incalculable economic and political consequences, since it corresponds to the negation of space.'

48 *Ibid.*, 13. 'Dromomanes. Name given to deserters during the Ancien Régime and also to the walking mania in psychiatry.'

49 *Ibid.* Author's italics. 'the multitude of passers-by [...] momentarily ceases being the technical relay of the machine and itself becomes a motor [...] in other words, *a generator of speed*.'

50 Paul Virilio, *La Vitesse de libération: essai* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), 159 Author's italics. 'What spatiality are

immatérielle des distances’, a concept he illustrates elsewhere with the image of flying over the Atlantic rather than sailing across it.⁵¹ The space of the Atlantic is effectively negated by refusing to engage with it as a “sol de référence” de l’expérience sensible de la géographie.’⁵² Flying and digital communication are generally perceived as liberating technologies, yet Virilio points out how they oblige us to disengage from the essential imbrication of our body in space, which he argues is the foundation for our presence in the world.

Many of the theoretical concepts above will prove useful in coming to an understanding of the cyclist’s animation of and interaction with space in literary texts. At a moment when relationships to space were being radically redefined, notably due to contact with mechanised transport and communication technologies, the bicycle proposed an alternative mode of spatial interaction. Cyclists produced a modern, accelerated space that nevertheless remained convivial and human-scaled. Contemporary treatments of transport technologies in literature allow us to examine these changes in the production of space at close range.

4.1.2 ‘We live in spacious times’: Ford Madox Ford’s *The Soul of London*

In Ford Madox Ford’s impressionistic portrait of an imperial metropolis *The Soul of London: A Survey of a Modern City* (1905), the author reflects on the evolving contemporary relationship to space, focusing on temporal and spatial transformations and continuities in the urban environment. Ford follows the Baudelairean tradition by engaging with the traces of

we referring to, in fact, when we lose our bearings and our foothold, and therefore all postural reference points?’

51 *Ibid.*, 162 Author’s italics. ‘the immaterial pollution of distances.’

52 Paul Virilio and Philippe Petit, *Cybermonde: la politique du pire* (Paris: Textuel, 1996), 42. “reference ground” for a sensory experience of geography.’

the past in the city, claiming that ‘This author’s endeavour should be to make the Past, the sense of all the dead Londons that have gone into the producing of this child of all the ages, like a constant ground-bass beneath the higher notes of the Present.’⁵³ Yet Ford is also interested in depicting new spatial configurations that have appeared as a result of transport and communication technologies, making the striking observation that ‘We live in spacious times.’⁵⁴ Reflecting the turn-of-the-century spatial outlook theorised by Foucault and Lefebvre, Ford Madox Ford adopts an explicitly geographical approach in *The Soul of London*, contemplating the city ‘From a Distance’ in the first chapter, and approaching it by various means of transport in Chapter 2, entitled ‘Roads into London.’ Ford constantly seeks to depict London as a shifting entity, composed of many superimposed and overlapping spaces, a strategy that recalls Lefebvre’s insistence on the fluctuating nature of spaces. Ford’s focus on mobility in connection with the urban experience also reflects de Certeau’s emphasis on the centrality of movement and physical presence in the animation of spaces. The author considers many different ways of entering the city, including the motor car, the electric tram, the bicycle, on foot, the omnibus and the train, each of which creates its own unique space and interaction with one’s surroundings.

Ford Madox Ford attests to a disorienting loss of connection to localities when travelling by motor car, remarking that ‘To come into a city by means of one of these new, swift carriages, to come from any distance, say by a motor car, is to fly too fast for any easy recognition of the gradual changes from country to town.’⁵⁵ This is a result of the car passenger’s speed as well as his perspective, since ‘the motorist is too low down as a rule, the

53 Ford Madox Ford, *The Soul of London: A Survey of a Modern City* (London: Alston Rivers, 1905), xiii.

54 *Ibid.*, 59.

55 *Ibid.*, 37.

air presses against the eyes and half closes them.’⁵⁶ Ford reasons that this experience of mobility will inevitably lead us to an altered relationship to space, as we will begin ‘thinking of distances, as it were, in terms of the motor car.’⁵⁷ He displays concern about the ‘psychological effects’ of this technology, while suggesting that the reassuring movement of the electric tram provides a more serene, contemplative and ‘romantic’ means of entering London.⁵⁸ Moreover, the capacity of means of transport to create and transform the fabric of the city is apparent; Ford lists London’s spreading suburbs before asserting that ‘The electric tram is doing all this.’⁵⁹

By 1905, Ford already considers the bicycle one ‘of the older methods of communication’,⁶⁰ and is less than enthusiastic about this means of entering the city, as shown in the following extract:

I have always found entering London by this way to be tedious and dispiriting. You have to attend to yourself even more particularly than when you are in a motor-car; you have only half a horizon – the half that is in front of you. You are nearer the dust when there is dust, or nearer the mud. Transition from country to town becomes rather wearisome; you think a good deal in miles. London manifests itself slowly [...] ⁶¹

Ford is hardly enamoured by the bicycle, yet his depiction of the form of spatial engagement it proposes is significant, as is his choice to include the bicycle in his list of means of entering the city.⁶² This description highlights its liminal position between pedestrian and motorised means of transport. On the one hand, the physical effort required can make it ‘tedious’, ‘dispiriting’ and ‘wearisome’, while the lack of enclosure leaves the cyclist, like the walker,

56 *Ibid.*, 38.

57 *Ibid.*, 39.

58 *Ibid.*, 39–41.

59 *Ibid.*, 37.

60 *Ibid.*, 41.

61 *Ibid.*

62 A choice that is omitted by Andrew Thacker when he refers to Ford’s work (reflecting the general tendency in criticism to overlook the bicycle): ‘Ford’s intuition concerning the spatiality of modern life occurs in a chapter devoted to means of transport into London: by motor car, electric tram or railway.’ Thacker, *Moving through Modernity*, 2.

exposed to dust and mud. On the other hand, Ford suggests that the cyclist shares elements of the car driver's subjective, visual relation to space, having only 'half a horizon.' Yet crucially, the cyclist's steady progress makes possible an 'easy recognition of the gradual changes from country to town'⁶³ that Ford recognised was impossible in a motor car. 'London manifests itself slowly'; the cyclist takes the time to notice and engage with the transforming landscape. His bodily presence in the scene might leave him open to mud and dust, but it provides him with the means to creatively and meaningfully engage with urban and rural spaces.

In Chapter 3, 'Work in London', Ford returns to the bicycle as a symbol of spatial and imaginative escape for overworked Londoners, observing that 'London, in fact, if it make men eminently materialist in their working hours [...] makes them by reaction astonishingly idealist in their interior souls.'⁶⁴ Ford depicts two subjects who are literally imprisoned by society's thirst for mechanised mobility; a railway signalman he once met who 'spends dreadfully long hours, high up in a sort of cage of wood and glass, above the innumerable lines of shimmering rails just outside the dim cave of a London terminus'⁶⁵ and 'a man of forty, a cashier of a London 'bus company.'⁶⁶ The railway signalman finds release from his daily drudgery by making models of English cathedrals, while the cashier uses his spare time 'to cover, on his bicycle, every road of the United Kingdom. He inked over on his ordnance map each road that he travelled on.'⁶⁷ Both these examples vividly illustrate how the infrastructure of mechanised mobility immobilises certain people, robbing them of a bodily engagement with space.⁶⁸ This is countered in both cases by a physical, manual activity that

63 Ford, *The Soul of London*, 37.

64 *Ibid.*, 85.

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*, 86.

67 *Ibid.*

68 Henry James illustrates the incarcerating capacity of technology in his story 'In the Cage' (1898). The young telegraphist on whom the story centres recognises that her position is 'that of a young person spending, in framed and wired confinement, the life of a guinea pig or a magpie.' Henry James, *Selected*

recreates or mimics a more organic interaction with spaces.

The signalman seeks to reconnect with past spaces by creating models of historic buildings, thus enacting a creative interaction with spaces which, as Lefebvre and others remind us, are constantly made and remade by human activity, and in which layers of the past persist. The London cashier, on the other hand, compensates for his lack of spatial engagement by riding his bicycle throughout the country. Here the bicycle offers a space corresponding to Foucault's heterotopia; it provides compensation and release from society at large, while reflecting and inverting the dominant spatial paradigm. The cashier's fixation on colouring every road on his map suggests he is in fact prey to the dominant 'map' style of viewing spaces theorised by de Certeau. Rather than embarking on bicycle journeys as part of a bodily, creative 'tour', his outlook reflects the dominant spatial view of roads as lines to colour on a map, viewed from above rather than engaged with from below. When interpreted in this way, cycling may function as a compensatory heterotopia, effectively inverting the hegemonic, immobilised, totalising approach to space characterised variously by all of the above critics. Yet above all it is a crucial, overlooked part of a momentous renegotiation of space at the turn of the century, a technology that suggested a means of achieving a human-centred, sociable, subversive connection with localities.

The form of spatial engagement offered by the bicycle went counter to the general thrust of industrial modernity, which sought to conquer time and space through technological innovation. When we consider the aesthetic project of modernism from Adorno's point of view – as a reaction to and rejection of the tenets of modernity⁶⁹ – the bicycle emerges as an object that was singularly well equipped to fulfil a counter-cultural role in modernist

Tales (London: Penguin, 2001), 314.

⁶⁹ See Adorno, *Minima moralia*.

literature. In contrast to other vehicles and in common with the pedestrian mode, the bicycle offered a spatial mode of engagement that mirrors the ambition of many modernist authors to spatially represent reality.⁷⁰ As we saw in our analysis of *The Tunnel* (1919) in Chapters 2 and 3, Dorothy Richardson makes compelling use of the bicycle in order to convey a renewed form of spatial interaction with her surroundings. Elisabeth Bronfen notes the spatial structure to Richardson's novels, noting that she 'locates each event which is described in the text [...] in a specific material space, even though not necessarily in a specific time.'⁷¹ The form of mobility offered by the bicycle mirrors Richardson's overall aesthetic project, which is founded on a spatial, multisensory, mobile narrative perspective.

Richardson's outlook concurs with Lefebvre's theory in affirming that space is not an abstract quantity, but rather an element that must be constantly animated and remade by human social practices and movements. It cannot exist independently of human presence, in spite of the efforts made to theorise space as an empty vessel since the Renaissance.⁷² Richardson's protagonist Miriam observes for instance that: 'You don't GRASP [space]. You go through it' (TL 93). Before learning to ride, Miriam feels both physically and intellectually imprisoned within the spaces that patriarchal society has assigned to her. She upbraids herself for her pensiveness and immobility, imagining that 'If I went straight on things would come like that just the same in flashes – bang, bang, in your heart, everything breaking into light just in front of you, making you almost fall off the edge into the expanse coming up before you, flowers and light stretching out' (TL 42). While Miriam is here describing a specific attitude to life, her depiction closely mirrors the sensations of a cyclist. The epiphanic

70 An iconic example is James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1923), in which the city of Dublin is mapped from the perspective of the pedestrian.

71 Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory*, 10.

72 See Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace*, 20.

moment she anticipated occurs when she is finally able ‘to ride alone, balanced, going along through the air’ (TL 146). The bicycle allowed women a measure of freedom previously denied to them, as we saw in Chapter 2. Beyond this, cycling seems to allow Miriam to be fully and authentically engaged with the present and the shifting spaces around her. The specific type of mobile engagement she discovers mirrors the narrative ambition of Richardson’s novel, by confronting its reader with successive, intense sensory impressions that combine to produce a sense of space.

It was in praising Richardson’s novels that May Sinclair first coined the term ‘stream of consciousness’, and Virginia Woolf admired Richardson’s efforts to construct a ‘novel [that...] walks the high road, alive and alert, and brushes shoulders with real men and women.’⁷³ In *The Tunnel*, Richardson’s heroine cycles the high road, discovering a fresh, direct way of being present in the world. Cycling was an individual means of mobility that provided Richardson with a unique means to express a subjective, female experience of modernity in the novel form. The bicycle could uniquely provide this means of expression because it combines rapid movement, physical effort, a connection to surrounding places and people, close observation and subjectivity. Richardson’s rich use of the bicycle in her narrative exemplifies its crucial role in conveying present, lived experience, in contrast to various mechanised modes of apprehending the world that were proliferating in the early twentieth century. An analysis of fiction by Forster and Huxley will allow us to appreciate the specific characteristics of the contrasting spatial paradigms offered by two contemporary transport technologies: the motor car and the bicycle.

73 Virginia Woolf, ‘Romance and the Heart. Review of *The Grand Tour*, by Romer Wilson, and *Revolving Lights*, by Dorothy Richardson’, *The Nation and the Athenaeum*, 19 May 1923.

4.1.3 Loss of space: E. M. Forster's 'The Machine Stops' and *Howards End*

E. M. Forster manifests a recurrent concern with the theme of loss of spatial engagement as a symptom of contact with modern technologies. Although the bicycle only makes fleeting appearances in Forster's writing, his fiction engages meaningfully with the ways in which technologies can shape or distort our experience of space.⁷⁴ Moreover, his characters experiment with bodily engagement as a means of reconnecting with space. Rather than the bicycle, it is the pedestrian mode which is most often depicted as a means for re-engaging with space in a highly mechanised present, which takes as its symbol the motor car. As I have maintained throughout this thesis, the cyclist aligns herself with the walker who provides de Certeau with a means for promoting an individual, bodily, creative relation to space. For these reasons, it is worth delving into Forster's portrayal of the themes of transport and spatial experience in order to engage with the cyclist's specific contribution to spatiality at the turn of the twentieth century.

In his science fiction short story 'The Machine Stops' (1909), Forster examines the theme of loss of space as a symptom of the machine age. This story depicts a distant future in which humans live in individual rooms 'like the cell of a bee',⁷⁵ with their every need supplied by the revered Machine. Due to pollution, the air outside their rooms has become unbreathable, and human interaction is limited to on-screen calls and lectures. Although most people have ceased to question this system, in the course of the story Kuno comes to the subversive realisation that:

⁷⁴ See E. M. Forster, *A Room With A View* (London: Penguin, 1990). In this novel Sir Harry Ottaway remarks on the tangible changes cycling has wrought on people's lifestyles, asking 'And what are five miles from a station in these days of bicycles?' (p.100), while the outspoken Miss Lavish and the curate Mr Beebe both ride bicycles.

⁷⁵ E. M. Forster, *The Machine Stops: and Other Stories* (London: André Deutsch, 1997), 87.

We created the Machine, to do our will, but we cannot make it do our will now. It has robbed us of the sense of space and the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralysed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it.⁷⁶

Prefiguring the portrayal of the motor car in *Howards End*, this story depicts the Machine robbing its users of a spatial, bodily interaction with their environment by imprisoning them permanently inside its own spatial regime. Kuno observes to his mother that ‘we have lost the sense of space. We say “space is annihilated,” but we have annihilated not space but the sense thereof. We have lost a part of ourselves.’ As Lefebvre insists, spaces and people mutually construct each other, and in denying humans any active participation in the construction of the spaces around them, the Machine has effectively annihilated an essential building block of human society. Space has been polluted, in Virilio’s terms, due to the crippling absence of any bodily reference points within it.

Faced with this realisation, walking becomes Kuno’s means of subverting the inhuman logic of the machine. In an attempt to recover a sense of space, Kuno begins pacing up and down the platform outside his room, gradually gaining a sense of the concepts of “Near” and “Far”. “Near” is a place to which I can get quickly on my feet, not a place to which the train or the air-ship will take me quickly. “Far” is a place to which I cannot get quickly on my feet.’ From this lesson he reaches the Vitruvian conclusion that ‘Man is the measure [...] Man’s feet are the measure for distance, his hands are the measure for ownership, his body is the measure for all that is lovable and desirable and strong.’⁷⁷ Forster’s story warns against the consequences of handing our locomotive, social, digestive, sexual and other functions over to a machine. The future he imagines is extrapolated from his fears about the society in which he lived, whose upper classes were in the process of enthusiastically

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

adopting the motor car in spite of the danger it posed, the pollution it left behind, and the distortion of human interaction with space it entailed.

In *Howards End* (1910), various means of transport, including railways, cars and pedestrian travel, are portrayed as vectors of modern mentalities. The novel notably depicts society's traumatic encounter with the motor car, a technology which Forster, along with his contemporary C. F. G. Masterman, portrays as a manifestation of the 'extravagance of wealth and waste' endemic in Edwardian society.⁷⁸ The motor car is a technology closely associated with the family of Henry Wilcox, a rich businessman. The novel contrasts the ruthless, progressive Wilcox outlook with that of the Schlegel sisters, who have a more literary, contemplative disposition. Whilst railways are romantically introduced into the novel (from Margaret Schlegel's perspective) as 'our gates to the glorious and the unknown',⁷⁹ the motor car makes a noisy, unpleasant entrance in the third chapter, in the form of Charles Wilcox's vehicle. The narrator's disdain for the motor car is expressed in the description of the car owner 'pouring in petrol, starting his engine, and performing other actions with which this story has no concern,'⁸⁰ thus positing an incompatibility between car driving and the act of narration. This brings to mind the intimate connection de Certeau establishes between storytelling and walking, where the regular, sinuous rhythms of the moving body weave the texture of narrative. Motorised transport denies this bodily and creative presence in space, taking over the narrative function in a gesture that recalls Augé's observation that non-places – many of which, such as motorways and out of town shopping malls, are connected with the car – impose specific readings of places on their users by means of signboards. Rather than inviting people to create their own 'parcours d'espace', in de Certeau's terms, non-places

78 C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen, 1909), 23.

79 E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (London: Penguin, 2000), 10.

80 *Ibid.*, 14.

establish a prescriptive use and interpretation of places while usurping the narrative function of travel. At the end of this first scene featuring the motor car, Forster's narrator again interjects to express his surprise at the railway porter's admiration for the technology ('life is a mysterious business,'⁸¹ he remarks), thus introducing the vehicle to the reader as an antipathetic object that is singularly unworthy of literary interest.

From its first appearance in the novel, the motor car fails to positively animate spaces like de Certeau's urban walker, or in the manner of Lefebvre's spatial practices. Rather, it disregards the people and localities it passes by, literally rendering them uniform and homogeneous by covering them in a 'cloud of dust.' When Charles parks the car, he turns around to observe the settling dust raised by the car. He describes how 'Some of it had percolated through the open windows, some had whitened the roses and gooseberries of the wayside gardens, while a certain proportion had entered the lungs of the villagers.'⁸² Rather than animating this rural setting with its presence, the car covers this space in a dusty, noxious shroud, refusing its passengers a rich spatial engagement due to their enclosure within the subjective, closed space of the vehicle. Within the space of the car itself, relationships are presented as strained and conflictual. In this chapter, the car is the scene of Mrs Munt (the Schlegel sisters' aunt) and Charles Wilcox's misunderstanding and argument, during which Mrs Munt makes an attempt to get out of the car and walk the rest of the way to Howards End.

On arrival at Howards End, the motor car is sharply contrasted to our first glimpse of Ruth Wilcox, who 'seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it. One knew that she worshipped the past.'⁸³

81 *Ibid.*, 15.

82 *Ibid.*, 15–16.

83 *Ibid.*, 19.

Despite belonging to the Wilcox family, Ruth and her house embody a nostalgic outlook that will provide the means for connecting the seemingly opposed perspectives of the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes. The car itself is depicted as incapable of a connection with the past, in contrast to the house and its owner. The motor car metaphor returns later, when Ruth Wilcox's reaction to 'clever talk' is described: 'it was the social counterpart of a motor-car, all jerks, and she was a wisp of hay, a flower.'⁸⁴ In this chapter the basic opposition between two approaches to life represented by the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels is thus symbolised by means of the motor car and the house, objects that embody binaries such as progress and conservatism, city and countryside, industry and nature. While the attempt to live up to the epigraph and 'only connect' these two spheres permeates Forster's novel, it seems that the motor car belongs firmly in the Wilcox camp, and cannot become a means to achieve this aim. The narrative suggests that this is in large part due to its distortion of space, which runs counter to the organic interaction with space that people and societies depend upon.

The bicycle's sole, brief appearance in *Howards End* comes at a crucial narrative moment, on the morning following Ruth Wilcox's funeral, when the grieving family discover that the dying woman wrote a note to her husband asking him to leave the country house to her new friend Margaret Schlegel. Significantly, Henry Wilcox receives news of his dead wife's last request while his eldest son Charles is inspecting his new motor car in the garage. This appendage to the house had been built against Ruth Wilcox's wishes, as it involved the destruction of her much-loved paddock, itself a symbol of an older, slower-paced, non-motorised form of transport. As such, it is a space that represents an intrusion of the Wilcox world of 'telegrams and anger'⁸⁵ (and, we might add, motor cars) into the 'gentle

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

conservatism'⁸⁶ of *Howards End*. The provocative content of Ruth's short note comes as a direct challenge to the Wilcoxes' conceptions of property and inheritance, forcing a confrontation between Charles's outlook, symbolised by the garage and the motorcar, and that shared by Margaret and his mother, which is incarnated in the eponymous country house.

The male members of the family proceed to apply an exacting, temporal logic to Ruth's eccentric request. Rather than taking the note at face value, they divide it into discrete units, like a piece of machinery, diffusing the financial and emotional threat it poses to them: 'considered item by item, the emotional content was minimised, and all went forward smoothly.'⁸⁷ While the family discuss what action to take, the narrative focuses on temporal markers – 'the clock ticked', 'the clock struck ten [...] Other clocks confirmed it, and the discussion moved towards its close.'⁸⁸ Meanwhile, the house and its natural surroundings suggest an alternative temporal framework and a mode of spatial engagement that goes counter to the Wilcoxes' rational, ordered outlook: 'Unnoticed, the sun occupied his sky, and the shadows of the tree stems, extraordinarily solid, fell like trenches of purple across the frosted lawn. It was a glorious winter morning.'⁸⁹ Insensitive both to their natural surroundings and their dead wife and mother, the family decide to overlook her last request, unable to fathom why she would have made it, since 'To them *Howards End* was a house: they could not know that to her it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir.'⁹⁰ A crisis is thus avoided by callously overlooking Ruth's last wish, yet the scene prefigures Margaret's future ownership of *Howards End* through her marriage with Henry Wilcox. At the end of this decisive chapter, Charles derisively dismisses Margaret as 'a German

86 *Ibid.*, 76.

87 *Ibid.*, 84.

88 *Ibid.*

89 *Ibid.*

90 *Ibid.*

cosmopolitan' before announcing 'I want to run down and see Chalkeley. A bicycle will do.'⁹¹ This unusual choice for the motor-crazed Wilcoxes comes just after their heated discussion on the ownership of Howards End, and in the same breath as the mention of Margaret Schlegel. Both Margaret and the bicycle suggest the slower pace of life of the house and of their deceased mother, which is endangered by her inheritors. Yet the bicycle remains sufficiently modern for Charles to think of riding one; from a Wilcox outlook, it provides considerable time efficiency in comparison with walking. The bicycle, then, with its mixture of mechanism and bodily presence, perhaps offers one means to 'connect' the two worlds that Forster constantly confronts in this novel.

While the bicycle only appears fleetingly in *Howards End*, the motor car reappears throughout the narrative, and is continually associated with a sense of a loss of a sense of space and connection to localities. The motor car's damaging effect on spaces and society at large is underlined in the following description of the changes taking place in London, which must have directly mirrored Forster and his contemporaries' experience:

And month by month the roads smelt more strongly of petrol, and were more difficult to cross, and human beings heard each other speak with greater difficulty, breathed less of the air, and saw less of the sky. Nature withdrew; the leaves were falling by midsummer; the sun shone through dirt with an admired obscurity.⁹²

This sketch vividly portrays how motorised transport make spaces unlivable for people, whose senses and bodily functions are unable to operate normally due to the smell, sound, pollution and danger of cars. The street becomes a non-place, no longer animated by bodily presence, but occupied by machines. In descriptions such as this, the narrator opposes the organic and the industrial, establishing an incompatibility between two spheres that

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 92.

characters such as Margaret Schlegel seek to ‘connect.’ In a later sequence describing Margaret’s first journey to Howards End after her engagement to Henry Wilcox, the motor car causes her to lose ‘all sense of space.’⁹³ Once in the house itself she is able to ‘[recapture] the sense of space which the motor had tried to rob from her’,⁹⁴ yet on the return journey to London ‘she lost the sense of space; once more trees, houses, people, animals, hills, merged and heaved into one dirtiness.’⁹⁵ This ‘one dirtiness’ recalls the settling dust from Charles’s motor car, highlighting the fact that from both perspectives, inside and outside the vehicle, the car contributes to making spaces unlivable, homogeneous and nondescript.

Margaret’s traumatic spatial experience while driving is not shared by her fiancé, who encourages her to look into the distance if she is worried about stray chickens or children on the road: ‘The motor’s come to stay,’ Henry affirms, ‘one must get about. There’s a pretty church – oh, you aren’t sharp enough. Well look out, if the road worries you – right outward at the scenery.’⁹⁶ Henry has developed a commodified attitude to space, which he engages with as a spectacle rather than an element to be animated and interpreted by his physical presence within it. In contrast to Margaret’s spatial outlook, he enacts a time-centred approach: ‘he lived for the five minutes that have passed, and the five to come; he had the business mind.’⁹⁷ Henry provides a precocious illustration of Augé’s post-modern subject, who inhabits non-places which disregard the past, engaging solely with ‘l’expérience simultanée du présent perpétuel.’⁹⁸ Henry Wilcox’s motor car allows him to overcome space, rushing through it and, from Margaret’s point of view, robbing landscape ‘of half its magic by

93 *Ibid.*, 170.

94 *Ibid.*, 171–72.

95 *Ibid.*, 174.

96 *Ibid.*, 169.

97 *Ibid.*, 212.

98 Augé, *Non lieux*, 131. ‘the simultaneous experience of the perpetual present.’

swift movement.’⁹⁹ Margaret’s urgent need to ‘[recapture] the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty’¹⁰⁰ acts as a counterfoil to the Wilcoxes’ drive to annihilate space by rapid movement.

While making localities less and less inhabitable for people, cars pose a serious danger to the lives of those they encounter. Drivers’ lack of sympathy for road casualties is evoked in a scene where Margaret desperately jumps from a moving car and runs back to the spot where their vehicle had just run over a cat, in order to apologise to its owners.¹⁰¹ She is upbraided and mocked by her fellow passengers, who fail to think of the impact of their rapid transport on the landscapes, people and animals they encounter. Extending this exploitative attitude towards space, the novel also engages with the colonial space impacted on by the use of motor cars, by means of Henry Wilcox’s rubber business in Africa. Motor cars (as well as bicycles and many other turn-of-the-century technologies) relied on rubber for their tyres, which began to be extracted in large quantities in central Africa at the turn of the century.¹⁰² In his motoring account *La 628-E8* (1908), Octave Mirbeau demonstrates a keen awareness of the exploitation and suffering that lies behind the rubber business, recounting recent massacres perpetrated by the French in the Congo before scathingly remarking: ‘Et il faut toujours plus de pneus, plus d’impermeables, plus de réseaux pour nos téléphones, plus d’isolants pour les câbles des machines [...] Si du sang nègre poisse à tous nos pneus, à tous nos câbles, la belle affaire !’¹⁰³ As the contemporaries Mirbeau and Forster recognised, cars were a technology that had a damaging impact on both local and global spaces, imposing a

99 Forster, *Howards End*, 180.

100 *Ibid.*, 174.

101 *Ibid.*, 182.

102 See William Woodruff, *The Rise of the British Rubber Industry During the Nineteenth Century*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press) 1958.

103 Octave Mirbeau, *La 628-E8* (Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908), 121–22. ‘And we must always have more tyres, more waterproofs, more telephone networks, more insulation for machine cables [...] If negro blood oozes from all our tyres, all our cables, what do we care?’

hegemonic use of space by the most powerful groups in society. The bicycle participated in this exploitative colonial space to an extent, since it also relied on rubber for tyres. Yet the bicycle does not require the extraction of petrol, and its construction requires fewer materials and labour than the car. Moreover, the bicycle does not pollute localities and poses little threat of injury or death. As such, rather than endangering lives, it promotes a collaborative human presence and engagement with spaces.

Rather than the bicycle, it is the pedestrian mode that offers the most compelling challenge to the space-annihilating motoring paradigm represented by the Wilcoxes in *Howards End*. The Schlegel sisters are keen walkers, a pastime that clearly goes counter to the Wilcox ideal. When Margaret asks her fiancé Henry ‘Are you aware that Helen and I have walked alone over the Apennines, with our luggage on our backs?’, he coldly replies ‘I wasn’t aware, and, if I can manage it, you will never do such a thing again.’¹⁰⁴ The counter-cultural pedestrian is most powerfully enshrined in the figure of Leonard Bast, who the sociable Schlegel sisters meet by chance at a concert. He is a typical industrial subject: ‘one of the thousands who have lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the spirit.’¹⁰⁵ As an overworked clerk, Leonard’s body and its waking hours no longer belong to him. He hopes to reach the ‘life of the spirit’ through books, which he devours in utilitarian fashion during his scant leisure hours. Yet it is his account of a nocturnal tramp in Surrey that catches the intellectual Schlegel sisters’ attention and arouses their sympathy. In a one-man battle against technology, Leonard leaves behind the gas lamps of London and the city’s markers of time (‘it got too dark to see my watch’),¹⁰⁶ strikes off the road into the woods, and walks across the North Downs until morning. In relating to Margaret and Helen what had seemed a banal

104 Forster, *Howards End*, 153.

105 *Ibid.*, 98.

106 *Ibid.*, 100.

adventure to him, all three come to realise the importance of Leonard's gesture. Where he had hitherto supposed the unknown to be 'books, literature, clever conversation, culture, [...] in that quick interchange a new light dawned. Was that "something" walking in the dark among the suburban hills?'¹⁰⁷ It is the rhythm of his body over the land, rather than his eye over the text, that acts as a crucial education for Leonard. As de Certeau reminds us, walking and reading or writing are interrelated activities that both construct the spaces we move through. Walking allows Leonard access to the realm in which the ideas and inspiration needed to write are formed. As we saw in the case of Wells's hero Hoopdriver in Chapter 1, or Zola's character Marie in Chapter 2, the subjective and physical exploration of landscapes may function as an education in itself.

When Margaret replies to Mr. Wilcox's question about why she and her sister enjoy Leonard's company, she explains 'Firstly, because he cares for physical adventure, just as you do. You go motoring and shooting; he would like to go camping out. Secondly, he cares for something special *in* adventure. It is quickest to call that special something poetry.'¹⁰⁸ Margaret's connection between 'physical adventure' and 'poetry' once again recalls de Certeau's association between bodily movement through space and the written word. As we saw earlier, the car counteracts this vital connection by robbing its users of a physical, active presence in localities, enclosing them in the incarcerating, hermetic space of the vehicle. Leonard's nocturnal walk in Surrey challenges dominant uses of space, opening up a Lefebvrian 'espace de représentation', or a version of Foucault's heterotopia, which 'suspends, neutralises or inverts' hegemonic spatial practices.¹⁰⁹ Leonard's physical

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, 2:1574.

movement and free exploration ‘off the roads’¹¹⁰ challenges the Wilcoxes’ rapid criss-crossing of the country in their motor car. Along with walkers, cyclists enact an alternative model, gaining spatial, embodied knowledge of the world, while actively animating the spaces they inhabit. By the end of the novel, *Howards End* becomes a privileged site in which its inhabitants can attempt to reconnect with space and past modes of being, while promoting an alternative vision of progress. This is expressed in Margaret’s reflection to her sister Helen at the end of the novel. She remarks:

This craze for motion has only set in during the last hundred years. It may be followed by a civilization that won’t be a movement, because it will rest on the earth. All the signs are against it now, but I can’t help hoping, and very early in the morning in the garden I feel that our house is the future as well as the past.¹¹¹

In *Howards End* Forster consistently portrays the car as the main agent of this ‘craze for motion’, while non-motorised travel as well as the act of dwelling¹¹² in one place are seen as possible means to rediscover a way to ‘rest on the earth’, reconnect with the past and recover our basic humanity.

In both *Howards End* and ‘The Machine Stops’, Forster selects the pedestrian as a symbol of resistance to the contemporary direction of society towards increased mechanisation and a corresponding loss of space. As we have seen throughout this thesis, the cyclist promotes a bodily engagement with space that has much in common with the figure of the pedestrian. Perhaps for Forster the bicycle was still too modern an instrument to adopt a counter-cultural symbolic function in his writing. However, the bicycle’s combination of bodily and mechanical registers seems to provide a way to ‘only connect’ the two spheres

110 Forster, *Howards End*, 101.

111 *Ibid.*, 290.

112 On the concept of dwelling, see ‘Building, Dwelling, Thinking’ (1951) in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). In this essay Heidegger argues that ‘the relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling.’

Forster opposes in order to promote a modern yet embodied experience of space. As Forster's contemporary Aldous Huxley shows, the bicycle can offer a means of bodily spatial reengagement in a highly mechanised present.

4.1.4 Rediscovering space on two wheels: Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*

In Aldous Huxley's first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), Denis Stone is introduced to us as a character who longs to recover a bodily, unmechanised connection with his surroundings, much like Forster's characters Leonard Bast and Kuno. In the first chapter of the novel, Huxley vividly demonstrates a contemporary desire for spatial engagement, with the transition from the Victorian to the modern era being symbolised by a journey by train and bicycle. When the novel opens Denis is travelling on a slow train to Crome, a stately home to which he has been invited. He is impatient to arrive, obsessed by his loss of 'Two hours. One hundred and twenty minutes', in which 'he might have done so much, so much – written the perfect poem, for example, or read the one illuminating book.'¹¹³ His thoughts focus on time; not only on the length of the train journey and the number of stops, but also on his age: 'He was twenty-three, and oh! So agonizingly conscious of the fact.'¹¹⁴ His enumeration of the various stops the train makes on its journey from London – 'Bole, Tritton, Spavin Delawarr, Knipswich for Timpany, West Bowlby, and, finally, Camlet-on-the-Water'¹¹⁵ – recalls de Certeau's characterisation of the 'map', a 'scène totalisante',¹¹⁶ which imposes an immobile, hegemonic definition of spatial practices. Agitated, he moves his belongings from one place

¹¹³ Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* [1921] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 5.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 179.

to another within the train: 'A futile proceeding. But one must have something to do.'¹¹⁷ He feels cooped up, and this pointless physical agitation betrays a desire to engage his body in his movement; to effect a mobile, physical 'tour', in de Certeau's terms, rather than travel on a fixed itinerary within the incarcerating space of the rail carriage.¹¹⁸

The stasis of the journey contrasts sharply with Denis's busy movement once the train stops, when he 'jumped up', 'seized a bag in either hand' and 'ran up the train towards the van.'¹¹⁹ On reaching the guard, he makes his first, 'breathless' utterance, 'A bicycle, a bicycle!', adopting the posture of 'a man of action.'¹²⁰ Denis's enthusiasm hardly affects the guard, however, who takes his time handing out various packages, stoically replying 'All in good time, sir.'¹²¹ The guard belongs firmly to the Victorian world of the railways, a fact emphasised by his physical description as 'a large, stately man with a naval beard. One pictured him at home, drinking tea, surrounded by a numerous family.'¹²² Denis's enterprising attitude is temporarily dampened by the guard's response, and Huxley employs a cycling metaphor in order to humorously convey his sentiment of deflation when faced with this inertia, describing how: 'Denis's man of action collapsed, punctured.'¹²³ The figure of the train guard embodies the railway's incarcerating temporal and framework; yet once Denis retrieves his bicycle, he is able to enact an embodied, creative engagement with space, an experience that impacts directly on the texture of the narrative. Denis's specific interaction with the landscape once he gets in the saddle illustrates Marc Desportes's observation that 'Chaque grande technique de transport modèle donc une approche originale de l'espace

117 Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, 5.

118 De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 170.

119 Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, 6.

120 *Ibid.*

121 *Ibid.*

122 *Ibid.*

123 *Ibid.*

traversé, chaque grande technique porte en soi un “paysage.””¹²⁴

The protagonist’s first reflections on cycling relegate temporal considerations to the realm of the anecdotal, inviting the reader to focus on the spatial outlook inherent to travel. The narrator recounts how Denis ‘always took his bicycle when he went into the country,’ promising himself that ‘One day one would get up at six o’clock’ and cycle through a succession of picturesque villages. Yet despite this laudable intention, ‘Somehow they never did get seen.’ Denis simply enjoys the idea that he might get up at six, but fails to put his plan into practice. While poking fun at the inertia of the dilettante protagonist, this observation also hints at his refusal of a linear approach to spatial exploration, since the imagined early start and the ‘succession’ of localities simply mirror the mode of travelling proposed by the railway. Rather than concentrating on the time taken or the number of stops, as he did on the train, Denis’s journey to Crome is recounted in terms of the contours of the land he passes over and the views he beholds. Huxley’s descriptions recall Ernest Hemingway’s observation that ‘It is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best, since you have to sweat up the hills and coast down them.’¹²⁵ Moreover, a physical connection to the landscape is given expression in the correlation between the lay of the land and Denis’s mood; for instance, as he reaches ‘the top of the long hill which led up from Camlet station, he felt his spirits mounting.’

Inspired by the ‘tree-lines that changed as he moved’ and the ‘curves’ in the landscape, Denis begins to put his frustrated literary intentions formulated during the train journey into practice, composing lines of poetry in his head. The reader is once again invited

124 Marc Desportes, *Paysages en mouvement : transports et perception de l’espace, XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 8. ‘Each major transport technology therefore models an original approach to the space one passes through, each major technology carries its own “landscape” within it’.

125 Ernest Hemingway, *By-Line: Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades.*, ed. William White (New York: Scribner, 1967), 364.

to laugh at Denis, as his poetic efforts nearly cause him to fall off his bicycle when ‘he made a gesture with his hand, as though to scoop the achieved expression out of the air.’ We are reminded that he is riding a vehicle which imposes certain restrictions on his body (as we saw in Chapter 3), yet the mental state it provokes suggests a certain subjective transcendence of this fact. Denis’s literary inspiration while cycling recalls Leonard Bast’s poetic tramp through the Surrey hills, suggesting a subjective re-mapping of space that contests the fixed map of the railways. Illustrating de Certeau’s concept of ‘errance du sémantique,’ or the intimate link between physical movement and narration,¹²⁶ Denis seeks bodily metaphors for describing the ‘curves of those little valleys,’ which he thinks are ‘as fine as the lines of a human body.’¹²⁷ This instinctive connection between the forms of the human body and the landscape is encouraged by a technology that actively promotes a bodily connection with space.

It is ‘the crest of a descent’ which brings Denis’s attention back to the ‘outer world,’ when he first catches sight of Crome, his destination. He admires the view of the old house, before speeding down the hill, to arrive ‘five minutes later.’ This first mention of a temporal marker since leaving the train brings the reader back to the time-conscious world Denis inhabits; similarly, the distant view of the house suggests de Certeau’s immobilised, totalising view, rather than the spatialised, bodily approach his bicycle journey has allowed him to adopt. Nonetheless, the bicycle opens up a space in the narrative which permits sustained, creative spatial engagement. In sharp contrast to the time-conscious, incarcerating experience of rail travel, Denis’s cycle ride from the station to Crome presents both a subjective means of engaging with space and an alternative narrative mode.

126 De Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 154.

127 Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, 6.

Huxley's use of the bicycle may be compared to its symbolism in Zola's *Paris*. When the priest Pierre Froment visits his brother Guillaume in Montmartre, bicycles feature in the utopian description of the Froments' home. The vehicles are a crucial element in a portrait of a house that seems to offer an alternative means of apprehending the city's complex spatiality:

Et Pierre [...] retrouvait [la maison] telle qu'il l'avait vue, lors de sa première, de son unique visite, silencieuse, souriante, baignée d'une infinie tendresse. C'était d'abord l'étroit couloir qui traversait le rez de chaussée, pour s'ouvrir sur l'immense horizon de Paris. Puis, c'était le jardin réduit à deux pruniers et à un bouquet de lilas, égayés de feuilles maintenant ; et il y aperçut, cette fois, trois bicyclettes appuyées contre les pruniers. Enfin, c'était le vaste atelier de travail, si joyeux et si recueilli, où vivait toute la famille, et dont le large vitrail dominait l'océan des toitures.¹²⁸

The narrative description of the house on which the novel centres adopts an approach similar to de Certeau's 'tour', where each part of the house is described and animated as an imagined body moves through it. This corresponds with Gaston Bachelard's theory developed in *La Poétique de l'espace* (1957), in which he argues that the sense of place is formed within the house, through the act of inhabiting. Within the framework of Bachelard's 'topoanalysis', the house itself is seen as a kind of body which interacts with its inhabitants and actively shapes their experience of being present in the world.¹²⁹ To return to de Certeau's theory, his 'totalising' view of the city viewed from above is suggested in the Froment family's panorama of Paris, a form of spatial appropriation that contrasts with the bodily movement through the house and garden described immediately before. This opening out onto the space

128 Émile Zola, *Œuvres complètes. Paris fin de siècle, 1897.*, ed. Henri Mitterand, Jacques Noiray, and Jean-Louis Cabanès, vol. 17 (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2008), 207. 'Pierre found [the house] just as he had seen it on his first and only visit, silent, joyful, bathed in infinite tenderness. First of all came the narrow corridor that crossed the ground floor before opening up onto the immense horizon of Paris. Next, there was the garden with only two plum trees and a lilac bush, which had now sprung into leaf; and this time, he noticed three bicycles leaning against the plum trees. Finally came the vast workshop, so joyful and calm, where the whole family lived and whose large window looked out over the ocean of roofs'.

129 Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris: PUF, 1957).

of the city and beyond is connected to the sight of the three bicycles and their promise of mobility. Pierre had not noticed the bicycles on his first visit, and the narrative insists on their novelty as an element in the portrait of the Froments' home. The description of the bicycles in this scene subtly hints at their duality. Comfortably leaning against the plum trees, they both belong to the domestic sphere and invite movement beyond it, into the seemingly infinite space which the inhabitants of the house contemplate. Later in the novel, Marie and Pierre discover the joy of riding through the countryside in an escape from the stifling and overcrowded city environment. 'Regardez, regardez !', Marie cries, 'N'est-ce pas délicieux, cette forêt où nous roulons ensemble ? Et quel bon vent cela met dans nos poitrines ! Et comme cela vous purifie, vous calme et vous encourage !'¹³⁰ Interestingly, this outward mobility is also an inward movement for the pair, for whom the bicycle ride marks the beginning of their courtship, and thus acts as a prelude to their future domestic, married life.

In *Crome Yellow*, Denis's introductory bicycle ride may be contrasted to the arrival of Ivor by motor car half-way through the novel. The guests at Crome await Ivor, looking out upon the hills and valleys around the house. As they contemplate the landscape, the narrator recalls Denis's physical response to the 'curves of those little valleys'¹³¹ on his bicycle, describing how 'Under the level evening light the architecture of the land revealed itself [...] The surface of things had taken on a marvellous enrichment.'¹³² In contrast, the motor car intrudes suddenly into the landscape:

On the opposite side of the valley, at the crest of the ridge, a cloud of dust flushed by the sunlight to rosy gold was moving rapidly along the sky-line. [...] the dust descended into the valley and was lost. A horn with the voice of a sea-lion made itself heard, approaching. A minute later Ivor came leaping

130 Zola, *Œuvres complètes. Paris fin de siècle, 1897.*, 17:237. 'Look, look! Isn't it delightful, this forest we're riding through together? How it fills our lungs with fresh air! How it purifies you, calms and encourages you!'

131 Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, 6.

132 *Ibid.*, 84–85.

round the corner of the house. His hair waved in the wind of his own speed; he laughed as he saw them [...] ‘Well, here I am. I’ve come with incredulous speed.’¹³³

The speed and spatial engagement proposed by the motor car actively deny the specificity of the landscape just described by the narrator. Like in Forster’s portrayal of the motor car, the vehicle is ‘a cloud of dust’, at once shrouding it from the outside world and making the world invisible for its passenger. It creates its own artificial space within the landscape, refusing to interact productively with the successive spaces which it enters. When it disappears entirely, it becomes an uncanny aural presence for the onlookers, incongruously suggesting the cry of a marine animal, before its driver suddenly and incongruously appears amongst the company. Ivor embodies solely ‘his own speed’ rather than entering into a reciprocal relationship with the spaces and people around him. The driver has enclosed himself in a mechanised space, and thus shut himself off from the inherently spatial and collaborative construction of society as theorised by Lefebvre and others.

The extension of the subjective spatial mode proposed by the car into society at large results in a world like that imagined by Forster in ‘The Machine Stops’, where the only space people engage with is that of their personal room. The proliferation of this model in the twentieth century may be illustrated by the fact that the 1949 Ford brochure announced that ‘the ’49 Ford is a living room on wheels.’¹³⁴ The mechanised, individual, mobile space created by the car exists at the expense of a collective social space. Co-construction of spaces is denied in a society in which people move from place to place within sealed, subjective environments. Perhaps it is the new spatial configuration offered by the motor car that leads the owner of Crome, Mr Wimbush, to imagine a world in which reliance on machines would

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹³⁴ Quoted in John Urry, ‘The “System” of Automobility’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4–5 (1 October 2004): 30.

make all human interaction superfluous:

How gay and delightful life would be if one could get rid of all the human contacts! Perhaps, in the future, when machines have attained to a state of perfection – for I confess that I am, like Godwin and Shelley, a believer in perfectibility, the perfectibility of machinery – then, perhaps, it will be possible for those who, like myself, desire it, to live in a dignified seclusion, surrounded by the delicate attentions of silent and graceful machines, and entirely secure from any human intrusion. It is a beautiful thought.¹³⁵

Although this novel reflects contemporary society, traces of the nightmarish future world Huxley would bring to life in *Brave New World* (1932) can be detected in this début novel. Mr. Scogan, who stands for faith in industry and technological progress, similarly imagines a future in which ‘An impersonal generation will take the place of Nature’s hideous system. In vast state incubators, rows upon rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires.’¹³⁶ Like Forster, Huxley suggests that an over-reliance on mechanism distorts our basic interaction with space and society. A technology such as the car creates a mechanised personal space, which negates the basic, social, embodied nature of humanity. I argue that this spatial configuration is an even more insidious and crucial element in the formation of the twentieth century subject than the dominant spatial discourses, or ‘représentations de l’espace,’ theorised by Lefebvre. Hegemonic spatial discourses can be undermined by subversive uses of space, whereas the automobile provides an impression of spatial freedom while in fact stripping its oblivious passenger of any authentic engagement with space or other people. In addition, the ‘free’ motor car driver effectively colonises the spaces he moves through and makes them unlivable for others.

135 Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, 162.

136 *Ibid.*, 28.

4.1.5 Reclaiming and reviving the road

It is important to recall that the bicycle provided access to rural spaces for an increasingly urbanised population, and revived country roads that had been abandoned with the coming of the railway. In 1893, the touring cyclists Joseph and Elizabeth Robins Pennell depicted the Saint Gotthard railway in the Alps as an invasive element in the surroundings, observing that:

When it was out of sight there was no forgetting it; the black smoke hung over the valley, the smell of coal dust filled it, and everywhere were the signs of the change its coming had worked. Old posting inns and chalets were falling into ruins by the roadside. We did not meet a diligence, not a wagon, not a carriage, and only one tourist – a German on a bicycle, who tore past like a cyclone.¹³⁷

Trains, like cars, simultaneously pollute their surroundings and make smaller towns disappear from the map, by flying past them and effectively negating their existence. Cyclists, on the other hand, engage with the in-between places, much like the diligences, wagons and carriages whose absence the Pennells regret. Yet the Pennells also remind us that the cyclist occupies an ambivalent position, and must make the choice between two modes; that of the observant traveller hoping to revive the aesthetic experience of past modes of locomotion, or that of the ‘scorcher’ glimpsed on an Alpine road, who fails to optimise the full aesthetic and spatial potentialities of the vehicle, and whose commodified approach to localities prefigures that of the car driver.¹³⁸ Yet while allowing rapid transport, bicycles, like walkers and coaches, revived the road as a collectively animated space, after decades of reliance on the railways. F. W. Bockett remarks on the tangible changes the technology had brought to rural communities, noting for instance that in the old-fashioned English village of London Colney

137 Joseph Pennell and Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *Our Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1893), 77.

138 See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the scorcher versus touring cyclist debate.

‘cycling has given the village a new lease of life, and the old inn has put on a new coat of paint to attract the thousands of London wheelmen who will pass along this famous north road during the coming summer.’¹³⁹ As Bockett’s description goes to show, the road and the places it led to were revived by the bodily presence of cyclists.

Contemporaries witnessed a traumatic metamorphosis on the roads at the turn of the twentieth century. Once the domain of the stagecoach, they had been neglected during the railway age, and were rediscovered by cyclists in the late nineteenth century. Yet with the appearance of the automobile roads became sites of danger and conflict, reflecting and amplifying social inequalities. Bockett, in 1901, senses the end of an era, warning that ‘cyclists should enjoy the delights of this perfect road as frequently as they can, while there is yet time, for I fear the day will soon be here when that rattling, snorting, and spitting Apollyon, the motor car, will make the road impossible for all but himself.’¹⁴⁰ Twelve years later, the roads Edward Thomas took on his ride were ‘travelled by an occasional (but not sufficiently occasional) motor car.’¹⁴¹ The colonisation of the roads by the motor car removed the possibility of spontaneous, bodily interaction within these spaces, closing them off to the non-motorised majority. It is perhaps in reaction to this tendency that H. G. Wells’s hero in *The History of Mr Polly* (1910) has a strange, idyllic vision while travelling on a suburban train. Looking out the train window, he is depressed to observe that ‘every road [...] was bordered by inflexible palings or iron fences or severely disciplined hedges’, and begins dreaming of ‘beautifully careless, unenclosed high roads’ (MP 76). An image arises in his mind in response:

He was haunted by the memory of what was either a half-forgotten picture or a

139 F. W. Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks for Pilgrims on Wheels* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1901), 254.
140 *Ibid.*, 200.

141 Edward Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring* (Albany, CA: Berkeley Hill Classics, 2013), 81.

dream; a carriage was drawn up by the wayside and four beautiful people, two men and two women graciously dressed, were dancing a formal ceremonious dance full of bows and curtseys, to the music of a wandering fiddler they had encountered. They had been driving one way and he walking another—a happy encounter with this obvious result. (MP 77)

Mr Polly's pastoral, idealised vision of convivial use of space perhaps corresponds to no real or historical space, functioning only as a utopia in the definition adopted by Foucault.¹⁴² Yet this imagined scene, as well as Polly's 'explorations meanderings' (MP 79) by bicycle which begin directly after this vision, are a reaction against bourgeois control of space in the early twentieth century. The motor car was a crucial element in the performance of class hegemony. The enclosure of spaces in 'inflexible palings or iron fences' mirrors (and, in Lefebvre's terms, produces) Polly's social imprisonment in his role as a toiling draper. His desire to reinvent the road as a space of encounter and spontaneity is intimately connected to his attempt to free himself from the determinism of the society he inhabits.

The bicycle helped reinvent the road as a space of encounter, while also reviving it as a rich literary terrain. Edward Thomas conveys a sense of the social and literary potential of the road when animated by human presence in his depiction of the other travellers he meets on his journey out of London one Good Friday:

I had left behind me most cyclists from London, but I was now continually among walkers. There were a few genial muscular Christians with their daughters, and equally genial muscular agnostics with no children; bands of scientifically minded ramblers with knickerbockers, spectacles and cameras; a trio of young chaps singing their way to a pub; one or two solitaires going at five miles an hour with or without hats; several of a more sentimental school in pairs, generally chosen from both sexes, disputing as to the comparative merits of Mr. Bellock and Mr. Arthur Sidgwick; and a few country people walking, not for pleasure, but to see friends seven or eight miles away, whom perhaps they had not visited for years, and, after such a Good Friday as this, never will again.¹⁴³

142 Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, 2:1574.

143 Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, 36.

This varied portrait of the walkers the cyclist encounters underlines his affinity with them, as well as the intellectual, voluntary aspect to their activity. Whether participating in the muscular Christian movement,¹⁴⁴ debating on science or the relative merits of classical scholars, or sporting the latest fashions and inventions, these walkers give us a sense of intellectual ferment closely associated with their physical activity. For the perceptive, literary-minded cyclist, such encounters with various classes of people provide a rich source of inspiration. The combination of diversity and observation experienced when moving at a moderate speed on a bicycle allows the writer to paint vivid, shifting portraits of his fellow travellers and the spaces they move through. Rather than slicing through and dividing communities in the manner of a railway or a motorway, when animated by human presence, the road becomes a meeting place teeming with energy and potential.

The sociologist of sport Michel Bouet characterises the cyclist's relationship to and animation of the road in the following compelling description, insisting on the difference between the car driver and the cyclist's outlook:

[...] dans le cas de l'automobile, la route est débitée, mise en pièces par la vitesse. Elle n'est qu'un prétexte à faire foncer l'engin, une sorte de rampe d'élancement, de piste d'élán, aussitôt oubliée que conquise. Tandis qu'à bicyclette la route s'accroît d'elle même, en une durée bergsonienne qui déroule sa mélodie et qui a en commun avec elle les variations indéfinies, l'hétérogénéité constitutive. [...] La route est explorée, auscultée, conquise en ses détails dynamiques. [...] Le cycliste fait vivre la route. Il vit avec la mélodie de la route, intimement proche de celle-ci, visuellement et tactilement.¹⁴⁵

144 On this influential Victorian movement that preached the spiritual value of physical exercise, see Donald E. Hall, *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

145 Michel Bouet, *Signification du sport* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1968), 194–95. '[...] in the case of the motor car, the road is chopped up and torn apart by speed. The road is only a pretext for speeding along, a sort of springboard or runway, forgotten as soon as it has been conquered. On a bicycle, however, the road rolls out organically, in a Bergsonian duration that unfurls its melody that shares with the road its ever-shifting nature and inherent heterogeneity. [...] The road is explored, examined and conquered in all its dynamic detail. [...] The cyclist revives the road. He lives with the melody of the road, intimately close to it, visually and tactually.'

Here Bouet pinpoints and vividly describes the cyclist's active and bodily animation of the space of the road, which is not simply an obstacle to be overcome between departure and destination, but rather a vibrant and meaningful space in itself. The cyclist revives the road by exchanging with it and paying attention to the details it offers her. In de Certeau's terms, the cyclist transforms the road from a place into a space, mingling her body's movements with the road's passage through the landscape. Her engagement with and use of space stands in contrast to the car's generation of an internal, subjective space and the external non-places theorised by Augé. The cyclist's unique spatial engagement necessarily implies a transformed relationship to time, described by Bouet with reference to Henri Bergson's concept of *durée*. Compared to the train or car traveller, the cyclist may take longer getting from departure to destination, yet the longer time of the journey is reinvested with significance. In the next section, I examine the alternative temporal framework offered by the cyclist, who looked backwards while moving forwards.

4.2 Bicycle time: progress and primitivism

La vie est courte ; la seule manière de la faire paraître plus longue, c'est d'éclaircir son horizon. Or, les chemins de fer deviennent tellement dangereux qu'il faut bien trouver autre chose pour les affamés de nouveauté, d'air et d'espace.¹⁴⁶

As this quote from the preface to an 1892 collection of short stories on cycling goes to show, at the point of its introduction the bicycle was understood as both a progression from rail travel, and an alternative to the hazards posed by mechanised means of transport. Yet this citation also epitomises the ambivalence of a technology that contributed to the generalised speeding up of life while providing a means to make ever-accelerating time seem fuller and longer. The bicycle is a technology that allows its users to experiment with Henri Bergson's *durée*, a subjective, mobile, shifting experience of time that cannot be quantified with scientific methods.¹⁴⁷ Cycling, briefly a prodigiously rapid way of getting from place to place, soon became a slow-paced, subjective mode in an accelerated world of automobiles and aviation. The cyclist's slow, deliberate progress corresponds to what Sue Zemka theorises as a 'practice in duration' in her illuminating study *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature* (2011). Zemka's key example of this practice is reading a modernist novel, an activity which she argues provided a connection with long time, or Bergson's 'durée', in contrast to the 'moment-consciousness of modernity.'¹⁴⁸ Just as the bicycle invited its users into an in-depth engagement with space, it encouraged a qualitative approach to time that refused the contemporary drive to segment time into ever smaller units.

146 Richard O'Monroy, 'Preface' in Jehan de La Pédale, *Contes modernes. Pédalons !* (Paris: Véloce-Sport, 1892), 13. 'Life is short; the only way to make it seem longer is to widen your horizon. Well, the railways are becoming so dangerous that something new must be found for those hungering for novelty, air and space.'

147 See Henri Bergson, *Introduction à la métaphysique* (Paris: PUF, 2011).

148 Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 226–27.

Here I focus on the bicycle's equivocal relationship to time and modernity, demonstrating that the technology was associated with both progress and nostalgia. From the first, the bicycle was heralded as a thoroughly modern instrument by many of those who chose to put pen to paper in its praise or condemnation; and in more recent criticism, it has been appraised as a modernising influence in turn-of-the-century society.¹⁴⁹ Testimonies from literature of the period allow us to come into contact with the technology at the point of its introduction, and so to gain an insight into the alternative, utopian visions of the future that surrounded the bicycle when it first appeared. The bicycle's modernity was short-lived; the appearance of the motor car and the airplane soon made it an outdated means of transport. After 1900, those who chose to write about bicycles rarely cited them as emblems of modernity. In F. T. Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* (1909), modernity is synonymous with speed, violence, machinery and war. In the short narrative that opens the *Manifesto*, the car-driving narrator comes across:

[...] two bicyclists right in front of me, cutting me off, as if trying to prove me wrong, wobbling like two lines of reasoning, equally persuasive and yet contradictory. Their stupid argument was being discussed right in my path . . . What a bore! Damn! . . . I stopped short, and to my disgust rolled over into a ditch, with my wheels in the air. . .¹⁵⁰

Bicycles were decidedly not part of the Futurists' pantheon, which readily included motor cars, airplanes and modern weaponry, yet they were a considerable obstacle for the speed-crazed car driver. They are 'persuasive' and 'contradictory', both participating in modernity and rejecting it, and their innocuous 'wobbling' is capable of sending the car driver into a

149 See, for instance, Glen Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity: The Bicycle in Canada, 1869-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Furness, *One Less Car*.

150 F. T. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism (1909)', in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 50. While the Futurists rejected the bicycle, a range of early twentieth-century artists were inspired by the object, including Natalia Goncharova, Umberto Boccioni, Marcel Duchamp, Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso and Fortunato Depero.

ditch.

In this section I engage with diverging contemporary standpoints on the modernity and anti-modernity of the bicycle, while reflecting on the technology's place within the theories of those who have considered the specific role of various transportation technologies in shaping modernity. Manifold definitions of 'modernity' have been formulated by critics, and it is a term that continues to stimulate lively debate. Since recent cultural criticism on cycling has centred on the bicycle's contribution to automobility – which, for the critic John Urry, is the defining feature of twentieth-century modernity – here I focus on the bicycle's contribution to this particular definition of modernity, which will be outlined below. My study reveals that the bicycle not only generated and reflected the changes occurring in society at large, but also contested them. Hartmut Rosa points to an acceleration threshold beyond which social integration becomes impossible,¹⁵¹ while Ivan Illich before him argued that 'Once some public utility went faster than 15 mph, equity declined and the scarcity of both time and space increased.'¹⁵² Poised on the cusp of modernity, the bicycle allows us to conceptualise a unique window before the invention of motor cars and airplanes, when an efficient, individual and modern means of transportation accelerated social relations while respecting the social 'speed limit' and thus ensuring that a human-scaled relationship to time and space was retained. The bicycle's rapid change in status from novelty to antiquity provided it with new counter-cultural possibilities. As it ceased to be seen as modern in the early years of the twentieth century, authors on both sides of the Channel reassessed the bicycle as a means to connect with the slower time of the pre-industrial past, and to reject what were seen as the negative influences of runaway technological progress.

151 Hartmut. Rosa, *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity*, trans. William E. Scheuerman (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 35.

152 Ivan Illich, *Energy and Equity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 11.

4.2.1 Automobility: bike to the future

The bicycle was a form of mobility that allowed rapid, individual movement from one place to another, offering a radically new paradigm of travel. This has led some critics to claim that cycling helped lay the basis for the twentieth century paradigm of automobility, a transformation in society's relationship to space and time that has been theorised by John Urry.¹⁵³ A progression from the 'collective' or 'clock' time and the 'panoramic gaze' that the railways helped to establish in the mid-nineteenth century,¹⁵⁴ Urry argues that the autonomous mobility provided by motor cars was accompanied by 'fragmented' or 'instantaneous' time.¹⁵⁵ He claims that such an outlook came to characterise the twentieth century, replacing 'the pattern of nineteenth century "public mobility"' with 'individualised mobility built on instantaneous time, fragmentation and coerced flexibility.'¹⁵⁶ Automobility, Urry claims, has expanded into all areas of life, and continues to define our on-screen interactions in the digital age, where we may be fleetingly present in many different places at once. It is a system that gives us an impression of autonomy while in fact obliging us to be extremely flexible and adaptable, effectively imprisoning us within a machine and estranging us from our body.

Urry mainly focuses on the psychological impact of the railway, the car and, later, the computer, yet he briefly mentions the bicycle in his study *Mobilities* (2007), claiming that 'the humble bicycle paved the way for the car and for its subsequent domination of paths and pavements, roads and freeways.'¹⁵⁷ Zack Furness extends and develops this line of reasoning in *One Less Car* (2010), arguing that many elements of the automobile subject's outlook were

153 Urry, 'The "System" of Automobility.'

154 See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th century* [1979], trans. Anslem Hollo (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986).

155 Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*.

156 Urry, 'The "System" of Automobility', 36.

157 John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 112.

first formulated by and for cyclists. Furness makes a case for the bicycle's preponderant role in founding the very concept of automobility through 'the development of an entire meaning system around personal transportation, and the disciplining of bodies and the environment in the service of an autonomous mobility.'¹⁵⁸ The cyclist, he goes on to claim, 'effectively previews the emergence of the driver-car or the car-driver, a "hybrid" assemblage, not simply of autonomous humans but simultaneously of machines, roads, buildings, signs and entire cultures of mobility.'¹⁵⁹ While I agree with elements of Furness's analysis, I contend it is misleading to view the bicycle's relationship to modernity purely through this lens. In order to avoid teleological interpretations, with the bicycle being viewed simply as the precursor of the automobile, it is crucial to re-examine the discourses that grew up around cycling before the appearance of the motor car. As we shall see, the bicycle participated in founding certain elements of the automobility paradigm while simultaneously formulating an alternative vision of progress and modernity.

As we saw in Chapter 3, far from being a simple 'walking machine',¹⁶⁰ the form of mobility offered by the bicycle was itself part and parcel of a modern, technologically-mediated experience of mobility. This machine indeed represented a major technological improvement on walking. Its first users discovered a rapid, efficient means of locomotion, with which 'one can traverse a given territory six times as fast, or with one-sixth the amount of exertion, or cover six times as much space', when compared to walking, as W. S. Beekman from the US enthused in his 1894 account *Cycle Gleanings*.¹⁶¹ In this brief window of time before the spread of the motor car, cyclists were at the very pinnacle of technological

¹⁵⁸ Furness, *One Less Car*, 17.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶⁰ This was one of the many appellations given to the bicycle's ancestor, a wooden two-wheeler invented by Karl von Drais in 1817 (see Introduction).

¹⁶¹ W. S. Beekman and Allan Eric, *Cycle Gleanings: Or, Wheels and Wheeling for Business and Pleasure, and the Study of Nature* (Boston: Skinner, Bartlett & Co., 1894), 9.

advancement, promoting a form of individual mobility that no other vehicle could allow. As Beekman asked:

Who can visit the hills and dales, mountains and valleys, forests and meadows, brooks and streams, in more rapid succession than the cyclist? We must wait for products of future evolutions before we can frame a different answer, that in the majority we all shout in unison “NO ONE!”¹⁶²

The Irish champion cyclist, newspaper editor and writer R. J. Mecredy echoed this Darwinian terminology to boast in 1890 that ‘it would be difficult to find any more beautiful example of evolution, and the survival of the fittest, than the development of the modern cycle from the rude hobby-horse of 1818.’¹⁶³ Writers in the early period of the bicycle’s adoption thus attest to a sense of astonishment and wonder experienced as a result of coming into contact with a technology that provided a radically new form of mobility. As Tom Gunning observes, this amazement can be partly explained by the fact that ‘Every new technology has a utopian dimension that imagines a future radically transformed by the implications of the device or practice.’¹⁶⁴

Literary imaginings of the potential of this new technology are varied and numerous. Especially in the early period of its adoption, various fanciful futures involving bicycles were thought up by writers. In the 1884 story ‘Pedali sul Mar Nero’ (‘Pedals on the Black Sea’) the Italian author Amadeo Tosetti depicts a fortified city, built entirely of iron and in the shape of an egg, hidden in a marsh. Powered by Tartar cyclists, the city lay in waiting to arise out of the earth and unleash its legions of cyclists upon the Tsar.¹⁶⁵ The bicycle also emerges as an avatar of modernity in a French book of short stories written under the pseudonym Jehan de

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶³ R. J. Mecredy, *The Art and Pastime of Cycling* (Dublin: Mecredy & Kyle, 1890), 40.

¹⁶⁴ Tom Gunning, ‘Re-Newng Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn of the Century’, in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 56.

¹⁶⁵ Amadeo Tosetti, ‘Pedali sul Mar Nero’ [1884] in Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi, *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2000), 395-415.

La Pédale, and entitled *Contes modernes. Pédalons !* (1892). In the preface to the collection Richard O'Monroy claims "'Pédalons!' est devenu le grand cri des sociétés modernes.'¹⁶⁶ In one of the short stories of this collection, the 'légende du vélo' is recounted, in which 'l'ange Vélo (ou le progrès, comme il vous plaira)' when trying to recall the means to fly back to heaven, invents the bicycle.¹⁶⁷ The author here suggests that 'progress' and 'bicycle' are near synonyms, depicting the technology as an expression of the future direction of society.

No real consensus exists on the precise character of the cycling society to come. Throughout this thesis we have encountered many different expressions of the social, psychological or literary changes the technology would bring, and even within the collection *Pédalons* the authors' opinions diverge. While Richard O'Monroy imagines that 'le cheval de fer arrivera à remplacer le cheval de guerre,'¹⁶⁸ attributing a possible military role to the bicycle (along with Tosetti and others),¹⁶⁹ the majority of stories in the collection focus on the sexually liberating potential of cycling, suggesting that the bicycle would engender a more permissive society, as we saw in Chapter 2. The collection ends with a story entitled 'Paris-Idylle-Brest', in which the young heroine, Blanche, dresses up as a man in order to compete in the famous Paris-Brest-Paris cycle race. A flirtation with a fellow cyclist is about to be consummated when Blanche realises he has really taken her for a man; disgusted by his 'vice', she implores her female correspondent and friend to join her so they can 'nous venger des hommes, follement, passionnément, délicieusement !'¹⁷⁰ This transgressive tale hints at some of the myriad new sexual constellations the bicycle could engender. While not all early

166 La Pédale, *Contes modernes. Pédalons !*, 11. "'Let's pedal!' has become the great cry of modern societies.'

167 *Ibid.*, 42. 'The legend of the bicycle'; 'the angel Bicycle; (or progress, as you please).'

168 *Ibid.*, 13. 'the iron horse will manage to replace the war horse.'

169 The bicycle was used by troops in both World Wars, a military role that H. G. Wells also imagined for it in *Anticipations* (1901). See also Martin Caidin and Jay Barbree. *Bicycles in War* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1974).

170 La Pédale, *Contes modernes. Pédalons !*, 245. 'get our revenge on men, madly, passionately, deliciously!'

cycle apologists shared this specific version of the future, many of them nursed optimistic or utopian visions about the bicycle's effect on the shape of future society.

The bicycle's extreme modernity could even send its users hurtling into the future, giving impetus to the budding genre of science fiction. In Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), the Time Traveller's mysterious machine recalls a familiar object: it is equipped with a saddle and levers, and the Psychologist likens its rapid rotation to 'the spoke of a wheel spinning.'¹⁷¹ In addition, the hero resembles an exhausted cyclist when he returns from his journey 'dusty and dirty', and 'starving for a bit of meat.'¹⁷² The dystopian future to which he travels suggests one possible direction in which human society might evolve as a result of gender-levelling devices such as the bicycle, since the sexes of the future have evolved to become hardly distinguishable from one another.¹⁷³ The narrator makes clear that twentieth-century transport and communication technologies have directly impacted on this future world, reasoning, for example, that the Morlocks' subterranean existence has developed as an outcome of the 'tendency to use underground space for the less ornamental purposes of civilization; there is the Metropolitan Railway in London, for instance, there are new electric railways, there are subways, there are underground workrooms and restaurants.'¹⁷⁴ Wells included the bicycle in the panoply of new technologies that fed into his imaginary of progress and modernity, especially in the early period of its popularity.

171 H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (London: Book Club Associates, 1980), 24; Alfred Jarry, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Garnier, 2013); As Paul Edwards noted in a new edition of Jarry's 'Commentaire pour la construction pratique de la machine à explorer le temps', the object described is also closely resembles a bicycle. It has a 'fourche', but runs on gyrostats instead of wheels. See the annotated edition: Alfred Jarry, 'Commentaire pour la construction pratique de la machine à explorer le temps', *Les Cahiers iconographiques de la société des amis d'Alfred Jarry* 95–96 (2002): 69–88.

172 Wells, *The Time Machine*, 26.

173 This vividly recalls the gender-blurring associated with the bicycle which I analysed in Chapter 2.

174 *Ibid.*, 47.

4.2.2 Accelerating individuals: cycles of modernity¹⁷⁵

Texts from the early period of the bicycle's adoption allows us to perceive some of the changes in outlook that accompanied the uptake of this form of transport. According to Urry and Furness, the psychological transformations that accompanied rapid, individual mobility contributed to defining the modern subject. The impact of this personal, subjective and rapid approach to travel is in evidence in Mary E. Kennard's *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (1896), for instance, where she remarks of her first cycle tour: 'Our plans were just a little vague, and subject at any moment to modification, but that is the chief beauty of the cycle tour. You are independent of trains and stations, and can go where you like – stop where you like.'¹⁷⁶ It is significant that Kennard should consciously contrast the previous collective mode of railway travel, which rigidly defined times and places of departure and arrival, to the spontaneous, individual paradigm of mobility that the bicycle introduced. This is one clear means by which the bicycle made a contribution to Urry's concept of automobility; it inaugurated what Furness calls a 'mobile subjectivity'¹⁷⁷ or the ability to move independently from one place for another at any moment. Kennard expresses a preference for this fleeting approach, remarking that 'touring had taken such a hold on us, that we were much happier on the move than stationary.'¹⁷⁸ The draw of continual movement finds root in the exhilaration of constantly receiving new sensory impressions of one's surroundings. As Kennard notes, 'Each turn in the road revealed some new beauty, some variation in the wonderfully fair and verdant landscape.'¹⁷⁹ Elements of this 'mobile subjectivity' were inherited by the first car

175 'Cycles of modernity' is a term borrowed from Gunning, 'Re-Newng Old Technologies', 39–61.

176 Mary E. Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists* (London: F.V. White & Co., 1896), 70.

177 Furness, *One Less Car*, 17.

178 Kennard, *A Guide Book for Lady Cyclists*, 110.

179 *Ibid.*, 87.

drivers, many of whom had been keen cyclists in the 1890s.¹⁸⁰ Yet the cyclist's ability to 'go where you like – stop where you like' was predicated on a keen awareness of the body's capabilities and sensations as well as the type of terrain being crossed, as we saw in Chapter 3. Moreover, cyclists are open to the elements and able to become a pedestrian should an obstacle present itself, in sharp contrast to the car driver, who inhabits an enclosed space and is incapable of carrying or wheeling his machine should it break down. While the possibility of rapid individual mobility was certainly shared between these two modes, from the outset important differences existed in the ways and means of putting it into practice, as I show in the final sections of this chapter.

Automobility relies on rapid individual movement, and speed left a deep impression on early cyclists. Alongside Urry, several contemporary theorists have pointed to the cultural impact of subjective speed as an essential element in the construction of modernity. Stephen Kern argues that an accelerated relationship to time and space was inaugurated at the end of the nineteenth century, in part thanks to new transportation and communication technologies that allowed individuals to communicate and move over great distances. Kern quotes the French writer Paul Adam, who wrote that the bicycle created a 'cult of speed' for a generation that wanted 'to conquer time and space.'¹⁸¹ Hartmut Rosa similarly claims that the temporal structure of modernity was defined by a general impression of 'social acceleration' at the turn of the century.¹⁸² The thrilling bodily sensation of speed was central to the experience of cycling, and this theme frequently recurs in literary depictions of the pursuit. In J. H. Rosny's *Roman d'un cycliste* (1899), for instance, cycling gives the hero Philippe an experience of

180 For instance, Mary Kennard and Louis Baudy de Saunier both wrote books advocating cycling in the 1890s before turning to the defence of the motor car in the 1900s.

181 Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 72.

182 Rosa, *High-Speed Society*, 10.

‘liberté enivrante’¹⁸³ and the narrative repeatedly celebrates ‘ce triomphe de la vitesse humaine.’¹⁸⁴ Rosny’s cycling hero seems to fly above the earth: ‘L’homme-oiseau plane sur les gouffres. Par la délicieuse vitesse, il semble que tout a grandi dans son corps. Il est multiple, il occupe une part plus grande de l’espace, il participe des fluides, il se libère de l’angoisse et de l’analyse, il possède le monde magique.’¹⁸⁵ The bicycle’s speed of upwards of fifteen miles per hour was truly something new, and the first cars travelled at a similar speed.¹⁸⁶ As we saw in Chapter 3, speed was experienced in a much more direct way than in the train, where the enclosure of passengers transformed it into something of an abstraction. The bicycle’s first users discovered a means of individual mobility that allowed them to progress at what seemed a magical speed in whatever direction they chose. It was a technology that made previously unthinkable feats a reality, altering the subject’s conception of her own capacities and transforming her relationship to her surroundings. Yet while the bicycle permitted a direct experience of speed, J. W. Allen bears testament to the ambivalent position of the speeding cyclist in *Wheel Magic*:

You are deliciously divided between the temptations of pace, the luring corners, the rapid swerve round the curves, the rush past of that enchanting procession of beech trees, the delightful regret of the beauty you are leaving so fast – and, on the other hand, the urgent need you feel to break the pace, to dismount, to get up on that low bank and look, to absorb the curves and the

183 J.-H Rosny, *Le Roman d’un cycliste* (Paris: Plon, 1899), 38. ‘intoxicating freedom.’

184 *Ibid.*, 106. ‘this triumph of human speed.’

185 *Ibid.*, 115. ‘The man-bird glides above the abyss. Thanks to delicious speed, it seems that everything has grown larger in his body. He is multiple, he takes up more space, he is at one with fluids, he is freed from anxiety and analysis, he possesses the magic world.’

186 Although speed limits were widely broken by motorists, their evolution in the early twentieth century gives an idea of contemporary attitudes towards speed, and the gradual acceleration that accompanied the spread of the automobile. The 1865 ‘Red Flag Act’ set the UK speed limit at 4 mph, in the country and 2 mph in towns, with vehicles being preceded by an escort waving a red flag to warn pedestrians and horse drawn traffic of the approach of a vehicle. The speed limit was increased to 14 mph in 1896, and 20 mph in 1903, before all speed limits were abolished in the 1930 Road Traffic Act. A 30 mph limitation was subsequently introduced for urban areas in 1934, but a national speed limit of 70 mph was only reintroduced in 1965. ‘Road Safety History 1861 – 1903.’ Road Safety UK, n.d. Web. Accessed 8 July 2016. <<http://www.roadsafetyuk.co.uk/history1.htm>>

shadows.¹⁸⁷

Here Allen's syntax mirrors the rapid impressions of the cyclist in the first part of the sentence, before slowing down to reflect the possibility of slower movement or immobility. His description lucidly depicts the crucial difference between mechanised modes of transport and the new mobility offered by the bicycle. It is an ambivalent technology, since it allows 'the temptations of pace,' providing the ability to move rapidly through landscapes, while provoking the 'urgent need' to stop and 'absorb' more closely. The cyclist experiences many rapid impressions, yet he remains open to his surroundings and may 'break the pace' at any moment.

The bicycle, in Furness's reading, prefigures the car, which was characterised by Urry as 'the literal "iron cage" of modernity, motorized, moving and domestic', while mirroring the 'incarceration' of the train carriage theorised by Michel de Certeau.¹⁸⁸ Although the bicycle does not physically encage its rider like the car or the train, authors do convey a certain sense of constraint associated with this new mobility. In Wells's *Wheels of Chance*, Hoopdriver has a series of strange dreams after his first day's cycling. In one dream, he is prevented from chasing his rival, Bechamel, 'by the absurd behaviour of his legs. They would not stretch out; they would keep going round and round the treadles of a wheel, so that he made the smallest steps conceivable.' (WC 51). These subconscious imaginings hint at an important aspect of the bicycle's contribution to automobility; that is, its potential to deform the movements of the human body by forcing it to adapt to the demands of mechanism. As we saw in Chapter 3, in certain respects the bicycle's demands on the body prefigured the car in which, according to Urry, 'the driver's body is itself fragmented and disciplined to the

187 J. W. Allen, *Wheel Magic; Or, Revolutions of an Impressionist* (London: J. Lane, 1909), 7.

188 Urry, 'The "System" of Automobility', 28; De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 165–69.

machine.’¹⁸⁹ In a scene recalling Hoopdriver’s dream, J. W. Allen recounts a nightmare he had after a day spent cycling, in which his bicycle morphs into a merry-go-round:

It was like a crowded London street; except, indeed, that all the vehicles and people were moving in the same direction [...] Suddenly I asked myself “Where am I going? Where is this all going?” [...] I felt I must stop. I was full of protest. The motion of the machine merely took on a new quality, and the handle-bars went from me. I found myself in a sort of chair and still moving forward, faster than ever, on a sort of circular track. Apparently it was an enormous merry-go-round I had got into.¹⁹⁰

Although the narrator is initially riding a bicycle, the description of the vehicle suggests that in the course of the dream it morphs into a vehicle resembling a car. He loses control over the machine (‘the handlebars went from me’), and we can presume he is no longer the one powering it, since he describes how the motion ‘took on a new quality.’ This loss of autonomy intensifies the impression of senseless, rapid movement on a ‘sort of circular track’, going nowhere. The narrator, ‘full of protest,’ is carried away by the vehicle, and the abrupt syntax conveys a feeling of helplessness and of being confronted with a series of rapid impressions. The bicycle was a technology that contributed to the general increase in mobility and sense of disorientation that went hand in hand with the modern era. However, it only provoked this disorientation to a certain extent. As Allen’s dream suggests, it is when mechanism takes over from human power that a sense of control is lost, and that human will and life are jeopardised. The bicycle may have planted the seeds for a speed based, fragmentary, disorienting, subjective interaction with one’s surroundings, as Furness suggests. Yet the trauma that is associated with this is largely inherited from the car, which quickly succeeded the bicycle and came to be associated with it in contemporary mindsets, in spite of the very different form of mobility it offered.

¹⁸⁹ Urry, ‘The “System” of Automobility’, 31.

¹⁹⁰ Allen, *Wheel Magic*, 17.

Allen's merry-go-round image can be compared to a metaphor employed in a prose poem entitled 'The Merry Go Round' by the young Aldous Huxley. In the third volume of the annual poetry anthology *Wheels*, edited by Nancy Cunard from 1916, Huxley writes:

[...] with a roar and a rush we go round and round, for ever whirling on a ceaseless Bank Holiday of drunken life and speed [...] But I happened to look inwards among the machinery of our roundabout, and there I saw a slobbering cretin grinding at a wheel and sweating as he ground and grinding eternally. And when I perceived that he was the author of all our speed and that the music was of his making, that everything depended on his grinding wheel, I thought I would like to get off. But we were going too fast.¹⁹¹

Here the alliteration and repetition of 'a roar and a rush' and 'round and round' emphasise the dizzying, endless motion of the machine. Both Allen and Huxley convey the experience of an alienating rush of jumbled impressions, leaving the subject feeling disempowered and unable to get off the machine transporting them. The theme of nauseating speed and disorientation recurs within the poetry anthology *Wheels*, in 'Fatigue' by Huxley and 'Myself on the Roundabout' by Edith Sitwell, suggesting that this impression was widely felt at the time. It is significant that Huxley should recognise the human energy being spent in order to create this movement; his 'slobbering cretin grinding at a wheel' recalls the exertions of a cyclist, but with important differences. The cretin's energy is here being used to propel the movement of others rather than his own, and his efforts are hidden, unlike the visible movements of the cyclist.

We may compare Huxley's 'slobbering cretin' to a description by Ford Madox Ford in *The Soul of London*. While travelling in an electric tram, he observes a steam crane in action:

It was impressive enough- the modern spirit expressing itself in terms not of men but of forces, we gliding by, the timbers swinging up, without any visible human action in either motion. No doubt men were at work in the engine-belly of the crane, just as others were very far away among the dynamos that kept us

191 Aldous Huxley, 'The Merry Go Round.' *Wheels, a Third Cycle*, ed. Edith Sitwell (Oxford; New York: B.H. Blackwell; Longmans, Green, 1918), 21–22.

moving. But they were sweating invisible. That, too, is the Modern Spirit: great organisations run by men as impersonal as the atoms of our own frames, noiseless, and to all appearances infallible.¹⁹²

Huxley's peek into the mechanism of the roundabout reveals what Ford imagines behind complex machines; passive forms of transport, along with 'the Modern Spirit', are prefigured on an exploitative outlook towards other human beings. Ford, along with Huxley, retains a critical awareness of the human energy being spent in order to power and maintain the vertiginous pace of modernity. Here, then, is what sets the bicycle apart from other technologies of the industrial age. While cycling may provoke a certain sense of disorientation, the bicycle requires direct energetic input from the person using it, thus implicitly refusing an exploitative paradigm of travel. The cyclist does not 'sweat invisible' for the comfort of others, but rather takes charge of her own mobility. Importantly, her effort and the movements of the machine she propels are visible and transparent, rather than being a small part of an alienating, incomprehensible, dizzying superstructure.

In the late nineteenth century the bicycle became a symbol of wondrous progress, incarnating for some authors a new vision of society. Writing about the inspiration for his romance *The Wheels of Chance* (1896) over forty years after its initial publication, Wells recalled 'the bicycle was the swiftest thing upon the roads in those days, there were as yet no automobiles, and the cyclist had a lordliness, a sense of masterful adventure, that has gone from him altogether now.'¹⁹³ Wells draws attention here to the elements that constituted the bicycle's fundamental modernity (speed, and a subjective sense of achievement, adventure and self-importance) while underlining the short-lived nature of its status as a modern form of transport, due to the appearance of the automobile. Like many late-nineteenth century

¹⁹² Ford, *The Soul of London*, 40–41.

¹⁹³ H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, vol. 2 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 543.

inventions, the bicycle's passage 'from dazzling appearance to nearly transparent utility, from the spectacular and astonishing to the convenient and unremarkable'¹⁹⁴ was exceptionally quick. Paradoxically, the fact that the bicycle fell from favour so rapidly also helps to constitute it as a modern artefact; since, as Tom Gunning and others have remarked, 'the attractions of a consumer society depend on novelty as much as utility.'¹⁹⁵ While I have shown that the bicycle prefigured certain elements of the automobility paradigm developed by Urry, I argue that this interpretation is largely teleological. When cycling was a new and wondrous pursuit, it was mainly connected with utopian visions of the future that suggested freedom, communication and equality between cyclists.

4.2.3 Colonising cyclists

A further element in the automobility model, as theorised by Urry, is a certain self-aggrandisement, as well as a sense of dominion over one's surroundings, theorised in his concept of the 'tourist gaze.'¹⁹⁶ Zack Furness argues that early cyclists cultivated a domineering relationship to their environment, claiming that a 'colonizing impetus' was built in to the 'tourist gaze' of the cyclist.¹⁹⁷ He maintains that turn-of-the-century touring cyclists used their new-found individual mobility to perform a certain sense of possession of the landscapes they passed through, especially when these were indigenous lands, as in the case of the US.¹⁹⁸ In a European context, certain elements of this appropriative relationship may also be traced, with the bicycle acting as an outward sign of civilization conquering over

194 Gunning, 'Re-Newing Old Technologies', 39.

195 *Ibid.*, 40.

196 Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*.

197 Furness, *One Less Car*, 17.

198 *Ibid.*, 44.

barbarism. Indeed, the bicycle made its appearance when Great Britain and France were at the apogee of their colonial power, both seeking to extend their influence into distant lands across the globe. Glen Norcliffe observes that the bicycle, appearing shortly after Sir David Livingstone's exploration of the interior of Africa in the mid-nineteenth century, participated in the formulation of new land based approaches to conquest, where previously the model of colonisation had been largely maritime.¹⁹⁹ As Norcliffe convincingly argues with reference to Richard Lesclide's 1870 novel *Le Tour du monde en vélocipède*, early cycle tourers fed into a growing interest in continental exploration at the time. In a further example from fiction, Mary Kennard's cycling heroine Cynthia in *The Golf Lunatic and his Cycling Wife* is fascinated by explorers such as Cecil Rhodes and Kitchener. 'They were men in the true sense of the word; toiling, striving, sacrificing their lives without repine,' she reflects, before comparing her own more modest adventures with theirs: 'My horizon was limited, and duty prescribed that I should not attempt to overstep its boundaries. So my superfluous energy found vent in cycling and writing about cycling.'²⁰⁰ Cynthia's adventures take place in England, yet the geographical liberation the bicycle provides her with encourages her to identify herself with men who led continental explorations on behalf of imperial Britain.

Grant Allen's 1899 novel *Hilda Wade* provides a striking example of the bicycle being mobilised as a symbol of Western civilization confronting 'primitive' societies.²⁰¹ When the narrator Dr. Hubert Cumberledge follows his betrothed, the genius detective, nurse and globe-trotter Hilda Wade, from England to Rhodesia, he first catches sight of her riding

199 Glen Norcliffe, 'Velocipedes and Their Riders in the 19th Century: Geographical Imaginaries in Richard Lesclide's *Le Tour Du Monde En Vélocipède*', *Cycle History* 26 (2015): 72.

200 Mary E. Kennard, *The Golf Lunatic and His Cycling Wife* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1902), 72.

201 Allen's depiction of the bicycle in this novel may be contrasted to Chinua Achebe's narrative use of the 'white man's horse' in *Things Fall Apart* [1958] (London: Penguin, 2001). Set in pre-colonial Nigeria in the 1890s, the first white man to arrive in the village of Abame is travelling on a bicycle. The villagers kill him and tie his bicycle to their sacred tree 'because it looked as if it would run away to call the man's friends' (102). When later white settlers see the bicycle, they return to slaughter the whole village.

across the barren landscape on a bicycle. ‘I could hardly believe my eyes,’ the narrator exclaims, ‘Civilisation indeed! A bicycle in these remotest wilds of Africa!’²⁰² Hilda’s body language suggests she has carried refined British manners into this ‘crude, unfinished land’, such as in following description: ‘She stepped lightly from her pedals, as if it had been in the park.’²⁰³ The bicycle plays a central role in a later scene where the couple use the vehicle to escape from murderous Matabele natives, who have slaughtered most of the white settlers in the surrounding area. Writing at the beginning of the Boer War, Allen’s narrative mirrors contemporary preoccupations, while grossly misrepresenting the colonial origins of violence in what amounts to a deeply racist narrative from a present-day perspective.²⁰⁴ Returning to the remote farm where they are staying to find their Boer hosts have been killed, Hilda manages to save the family’s baby, and once Hubert returns she thinks up an escape plan involving her bicycle. She worries, however, that the attackers ‘may have taken it... or ridden over and broken it.’²⁰⁵ The bicycle, however, has valiantly survived the massacre; the narrator focuses on its resilience when describing how he ‘examined the bearings carefully; though there were hoof-marks close by, it had received no hurt.’²⁰⁶ It is portrayed as a superior vehicle to Hubert’s horse, which is tired and thirsty, as well as the animals with which the natives pursue them.

Watching the sky turn red as they ride for their lives, the narrator reflects ‘It seemed as though all nature had conspired in one unholy league with the Matabele.’²⁰⁷ Nature is on

202 Grant Allen, *Hilda Wade, a Woman with Tenacity of Purpose* [1900] (New York: Jefferson Publication, 2015), 72.

203 *Ibid.*

204 However, we later discover that the Matabele uprising was organised by an Englishman, Professor Sebastian, with the aim of assassinating Hilda, who suspects Sebastian of framing her late father for a murder.

205 Allen, *Hilda Wade*, 81.

206 *Ibid.*

207 *Ibid.*, 82.

the side of the ‘primitive’ Matabele, while progress and technology, personified in the bicycle, are aligned with the two British heroes. Hilda, having trouble cycling while holding the baby, jumps on to the horse with the infant, and Hubert takes her bicycle, allowing the pair to outpace their pursuers and arrive safely in the town of Salisbury. Hubert concludes that they were saved not only by the bicycle’s speed, but also the strong impression it left on their ‘uncivilised’ aggressors:

I feel sure that the novelty of the iron horse, with a woman riding it, played not a little on their superstitious fears; they suspected, no doubt, this was some ingenious new engine of war devised against them by the unaccountable white man; it might go off unexpectedly in their faces at any moment.²⁰⁸

The bicycle here exemplifies the ‘superior’ civilization and technology by means of which British imperialists such as Cecil Rhodes justified and implemented their dominance of indigenous, ‘primitive’ people the world over. As Furness argues, then, ‘a colonizing impetus’ could indeed go hand in hand with the cyclist’s gaze when the technology was associated with the industrial prowess of imperial Britain.

A less violent but equally appropriative tourist gaze can also be traced in the outlook of the literary cycle pilgrims I analyse at greater length below. The UK-based American couple Joseph and Elizabeth Robins Pennells have an idealised outlook on road-dwellers, as conveyed in a scene where Elizabeth congenially approaches a group of people she encounters in France and introduces herself, saying: ‘I was a Gipsy come from over the seas, with news of their brothers in America. “But we’re not Gipsies,” said they, “we live in Boulogne, and we’re busy.”’²⁰⁹ This amusing encounter is complemented by idyllic descriptions of the gypsies’ traditional way of life, while several of Joseph’s illustrations take them as their subject. Of course, the gap between these middle class cyclists and the homeless

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁰⁹ Pennell and Pennell, *Our Sentimental Journey*, 38.

people they encounter on the road is much greater than the former may be willing to admit. These cyclists' fascination with the lives of the rural poor may point to Furness's 'colonizing impetus', which idealises hardship, rather than indicating a genuine interest in helping to improve living conditions, or, on the other hand, in adopting this lifestyle themselves.²¹⁰

A sense of appropriation and domination of one's surroundings can also be traced in an account of Hoopdriver's dreams after his first day of cycling in Wells's *The Wheels of Chance*. In a description that echoes the biblical Apocalypse and prefigures the Martian invasion in *The War of the Worlds* (1897), the sleeping Hoopdriver pedals 'Ezekiel's Wheels across the Weald of Surrey, jolting over the hills and smashing villages in his course [...] The villages went off one after another with a soft, squashing noise' (WC 49). Cycling has noticeable destructive potential in Wells's imaginary; in his autobiography he explicitly connects his inspiration for both novels with his journeys through Sussex by bicycle, remarking 'I rode wherever Mr. Hoopdriver rode in that story. Later on I wheeled about the district marking down suitable places and people for destruction by the Martians.'²¹¹ The power of technology for harm is emphasised in this surreal sequence, where the hero's bicycle allows him to wreak havoc on an otherwise peaceful setting, prefiguring the coming trauma of the automobile age. Yet Wells was an enthusiastic apostle of technological progress, and the destruction of sleepy Surrey villages by Hoopdriver's bicycle (and later, by the Martians) should not simply be read as a cautionary tale about the dangers of technology.

210 However, as Dave Buchanan notes, cycling could become a 'picturesque-immersion-travel-experience' for middle class travellers. In the 1880s cycle-travel writing of Thomas Stevens, Charles Edward Reade and others, cycling is conceived as a form of 'tramping.' Dave Buchanan, 'Cycling and the Picturesque: Illustrated Cycle-Travel Writing of the 1880s', *Cycle History* 19, 2008, 67–72. Buchanan quotes Elizabeth Robins Pennell, who complained that some landlords 'do not understand that men and women of leisure and means can find amusement in putting on rough clothes and tramping or wheeling it up hill and dale.'; Elizabeth Robins Pennell, 'From Coventry to Chester on Wheels', *The Century Magazine*, September 1884, 653.

211 Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, 2:543.

Rather, it may be considered a joyous flight of fancy about bringing conservative, traditional communities up to date with modern life. The actual danger the bicycle posed to human or animal life was minimal, and it cannot be simply equated with the car, whose drivers were responsible for widespread death and injury from the outset. Hoopdriver's dream highlights the fact that the bicycle exposed many traditional communities to the shock of modernity, without however putting their lives at risk in the manner of the automobile or the Martian invasion.²¹²

Hoopdriver's second dream that night draws attention to the appropriation and commodification of landscapes that could accompany the cyclist's 'tourist gaze.' Schivelbusch argues that 'For the twentieth century tourist, the world has become one huge department store of countryside and cities',²¹³ and this is precisely the image that Wells conveys when Hoopdriver dreams he is working in the drapery emporium. His customer, the Young Lady in Grey, asks for "The Ripley Road". So he got out the Ripley Road and unrolled it and showed it to her, and she said that would do very nicely [...] and he began measuring off eight miles by means of the yard measure on the counter, eight miles being a dress length, a rational dress length.'²¹⁴ Here landscape is equated with commodities, available for sale and consumption by those with means or power, rather than being humanity's common inheritance. Moreover, this image effectively conveys the tangible effect of the bicycle on our relationship with distance, as it transforms eight miles from a significant length into a segment of a whole, an easily rideable stretch. Hoopdriver's choice of the Ripley

212 A further surreal cycling dream associated with planetary destruction occurs in another novel by Wells which I examine below, *The War in the Air* (1909). Flying above the earth in a German war machine headed for New York, Bert dreams that he is 'riding a bicycle in an extremely perilous manner through the upper air amidst a pyrotechnic display of crackers and Bengal lights.' H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 156.

213 Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 197.

214 Wells, *The Wheels of Chance*, 50.

Road in particular is a suggestive one, as it became the ‘Mecca of all true wheelmen’²¹⁵ in the late nineteenth century, frequented by hoards of day-tripping cyclists from London.

We have seen that the cyclist’s approach to people and landscapes could be associated with a colonising, appropriative outlook. Yet the democratising mobility it offered, examined in Chapter 2, encouraged cyclists to question concepts of social hierarchy and property. Grant Allen’s narrator in *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897) offers an alternative means of interpreting the cyclist’s appropriative outlook. In this novel the heroine Juliet boldly claims:

I have large estates in Herefordshire and the adjoining counties, free of land tax. Some noble marquis, I am assured, lays claim to the bare loam, the ploughed fields, the turnips; but who counts mere mud? The rest is mine, to do as I will with [...] I own the stripling streams that break against sharp stones in the sloping stickles [...] The sky overhead is mine, mine the road under foot [...] All these I own, by virtue of my freehold in the saddle of my bicycle.²¹⁶

Juliet expresses a sense of proprietorship over the countryside that her bicycle permits her to access, before promptly turning this very concept on its head. She refuses the very idea of owning, and in fact positions herself against the concept of individual property by claiming that the land belongs to everyone. This outlook is clearly manifested in Juliet’s decision to sell her belongings in London (all except her bicycle) and ride to an anarchist settlement. The ambivalence of the cyclist’s perspective is well summed up in Juliet’s pronouncement. Akin to the Victorian imperialist, she feels the land is hers since she beholds it, yet in the same breath she rejects the idea of ownership. In the same way, the bicycle accompanied the appropriative, tourist gaze while encouraging a critical outlook towards contemporary attitudes around property. We have seen how the bicycle accompanied the emergence of the modern, automobile or colonising outlook at the start of the twentieth century. I now turn my

215 Arthur C. Armstrong and Harry Robert Gall Inglis, *Short Spins Round London* (London and Edinburgh: Gall and Inglis, 1903), 70.

216 Grant Allen, *The Type-Writer Girl* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2004), 194–95.

attention to the ways in which the cyclist incarnated a backward-looking, nostalgic gaze, which flatly refused many of the tenets of industrial modernity.

4.2.4 Looking back: the cycling *flâneur*

Many cyclists performed an engagement with the past that corresponds to the Baudelairean definition of modernity as ‘coexistence voulue de mondes différents.’²¹⁷ In his *Tableaux Parisiens* (1861), Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) depicts an archetypal nineteenth-century pedestrian, the *flâneur*, who seeks out traces of the past in the modern city. This complex and amorphous figure was famously theorised by Walter Benjamin as a cornerstone of modernity in *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940). The *flâneur* became an important symbol in literature, closely associated with mid-century Paris, even if he may have been a cross-Channel or even pan-European construct.²¹⁸ Like turn-of-the-century cyclists, the *flâneur* of the 1860s negotiated and responded to a metamorphosing urban milieu. Where cyclists contended with increasingly busy, mechanised and fast-paced streets, the *flâneur* moved through cities undergoing profound upheaval. Baron Haussman’s renovation of Paris displaced 350,000 people as winding medieval streets and labourers’ slums made way for straight, tarred boulevards and bourgeois town houses. In a matter of years, the city became unrecognisable, adapted to accommodate new modes of transportation and consumption.²¹⁹ The *flâneur* has been seen as an ambivalent figure whose inherent modernity was coupled

²¹⁷ Augé, *Non lieux*, 116.

²¹⁸ See the PhD thesis by Estelle Murail, ‘Beyond the Flâneur: Walking, Passage and Crossing in London and Paris in the Nineteenth Century’ (King’s College London; Université Paris 7-Diderot, 2014) for a rich examination of the complex figure of the *flâneur*.

²¹⁹ Schivelbusch points out how Haussman’s boulevards took railways as their model, cutting heedlessly across the cityscape in a straight line and leading to the train stations on the periphery of the city. Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 182.

with slow, circuitous movement and a backward gaze that refused concepts of speed and efficiency that had become inherent to modern life. As we shall see, in many respects the cyclist reconnected with the *flâneur* aesthetic as a protest and alternative to the runaway pace of progress at the turn of the century.

While the widespread adoption of the bicycle did not take place until the late nineteenth century, it is important to note that Pierre Michaux's velocipede, the first commercialised two-wheeler equipped with pedals, enjoyed a moment in the limelight in Paris simultaneously with the *flâneur*. As Glen Norcliffe observes, 'it was [...] on these very boulevards [built by Hausmann] and in nearby gymnasia and parks that the prototypes of the world's first commercially produced bicycles were tested.'²²⁰ Just as the bicycle's ancestor, the draisine, was an important if overlooked cultural artefact in early nineteenth-century Britain,²²¹ the velocipede of the 1860s has been largely neglected as a technology that actively interacted with the modernising city. Both the Parisian velocipede craze and *flânerie* played an important role at the mid century, shaping discourses around mobility, urban development and progress.

Late-century cyclists inherited and renewed central traits of the *flâneur*, such as his marriage of close observation and movement, his equivocal position in and outside the crowd, and his resistance to the dizzying pace of modernity. The cyclist aesthetic relied on a direct experience of speed, as we have seen, yet it also encouraged slow-paced interaction and the desire to seek out hidden traces of the past. For instance, Philippe, the hero of J. H. Rosny's *Roman d'un cycliste* (1899), takes pleasure in cycling slowly, contrasting his bicycle to other recent technological discoveries, and observing that: 'Il y a aussi un plaisir d'être lent

²²⁰ Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity*, 8.

²²¹ See Brian Rejack, 'Nothings of the Day: The Velocipede, the Dandy, and the Cockney', *Romanticism* 19, no. 3 (September 2013): 291–309. This is discussed in Chapter 1.

dans ce monde où la vitesse est devenue énorme – locomotive, automobile, steamer – où la voix de l’homme franchit l’océan en un éclair.’²²² Here the bicycle allows the protagonist to reconnect with a pre-industrial world, offering an antidote to the negation of time and space operated by a host of contemporary technologies.

Like the *flâneur*, the cyclist seeks the position of an anonymous observer amongst and of the crowd. John Urry remarks that: ‘the anonymity of the crowd provided an asylum for those on the margins of society who were able to move about unnoticed, observing and being observed, but never really interacting with those encountered.’²²³ This description certainly brings to mind the cyclist, who observes and is observed, but whose interaction with those he encounters is minimal, due to his rapid movement. However, an important difference between the *flâneur* and the cyclist should be noted; even if they were part of a crowd, turn-of-the-century cyclists were certainly not ‘unnoticed.’ Stephen Crane emphasises this in his lively portrait of a New York street in 1896, at the height of the bicycle boom in Britain, France and the US:

Once the Boulevard was a quiet avenue whose particular distinctions were its shade trees and its third foot-walk which extended in Parisian fashion down the middle of the street. Also it was noted for its billboards and its huge and slumberous apartment hotels. Now, however, it is the great thoroughfare for bicycles. On these gorgeous spring days they appear in thousands. All mankind is a-wheel apparently and a person on nothing but legs feels like a strange animal. A mighty army of wheels streams from the brick wilderness below Central Park and speeds over the asphalt. In the cool evening it returns with swaying and flashing of myriad lamps.

The bicycle crowd has completely subjugated the street. The glittering wheels dominate it from end to end. The cafés and dining rooms of the apartment hotels are occupied mainly by people in bicycle clothes. Even the billboards have surrendered. They advertise wheels and lamps and tires and patent saddles with all the flaming vehemence of circus art. [...] Everything is

222 Rosny, *Le Roman d’un cycliste*, 112. ‘There is also pleasure in going slowly, in this world where speed has become enormous – trains, cars, steamers – where a man’s voice crosses the ocean in a flash.’

223 Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 138.

bicycle.²²⁴

This portrait of a metamorphosing city explicitly invokes the image of bygone *flânerie* in its description of a now-empty 'Parisian' foot-walk. Cyclists arrive boisterously on the urban scene, making the 'slumberous' hotels and billboards seem suddenly out of date, whereas only a few years before they had been viewed as the most modern elements in the cityscape. A pedestrian no longer feels like a privileged ambulant observer, but rather like a 'strange animal', having only legs and no wheels. The military lexicon of 'subjugation', 'domination' and 'occupation', as well as the army-style uniform of the cyclists, all suggest that the arrival of this figure in the urban environment has been brutal and sudden. Cyclists have taken over a space conceived for and by the now impotent urban walkers. Yet Crane also conveys a sense of continuation with the mid-century walker; these cyclists are part of a fashionable crowd that patronises cafés in the manner of their *flâneur* forefathers, and the neglected apartment hotels are revived by this new urban animal.

Crane's description vividly portrays how noticeable early cyclists were in urban environments. In contrast to the *flâneur*, cyclists' novel machines made them a highly visible spectacle. Certainly, cyclists could achieve a certain anonymity thanks to their autonomous mobility that allowed them to reach far-off places where, even if they were remarkable, they were strangers. Yet their means of locomotion remained a curious sight, and early cyclists could not avoid becoming a spectacle in both urban and rural settings. Nicholas Oddy argues that this conspicuousness in the days of the bicycle boom effectively negated any real possibility of emulating the *flâneur*, who was an anonymous observer amongst the crowd. Oddy claims that it was only by the first part of the twentieth century, when the bicycle had

224 Stephen Crane, *The New York City Sketches of Stephen Crane, and Related Pieces*, ed. R. W. Stallman and E. R. Hagemann (New York: New York University Press, 1966), 149.

become an unremarkable part of everyday life, that ‘the painter of modern life [could] mount a diamond frame roadster and cruise the boulevards and streets of the urban environment without being glanced at by others’,²²⁵ in emulation of his *flâneur* forefather. The cyclist’s observant, critical outlook was inherited from – or perhaps invented simultaneously with – the *flâneur*, but I agree with Oddy’s conclusion that it was only when the technology lost its newness that cyclists were able to truly emulate the *flâneur* by dissolving into the crowd. What is more, the multiplication of ever faster transport and communication technologies in the early twentieth century functioned to place cyclists in the position of marginal, outside observers of a rapidly accelerating reality.

The status of cyclists within the turn-of-the-century urban environment was therefore ambivalent; they both participated in the acceleration of traffic and became observers and victims of the concurrent mechanisation of road transport, as motor cars, buses and trams began to criss-cross the city at speed. Yet in contrast to the *flâneur*, cyclists were not limited to one environment; their machine allowed them to explore both rural and urban spaces. Glen Norcliffe argues that while the Baudelairean *flâneur* sought out traces of the past in the modern city, ‘the cycling *flâneur* was able to rediscover these contrasts of new and old, not by strolling through urban quarters of different ages, but by pedalling from the modern city to the countryside and parks where tradition, bygone ways and nature were still in evidence.’²²⁶ By allowing access to the countryside and the in-between spaces forgotten by the railways, the bicycle allowed a spontaneous encounter with traces of the past, an element which was central to the *flâneur*’s aesthetic. In *Wheel Magic*, J. W. Allen describes the cyclist’s visceral engagement with the past in the following terms:

225 Nicolas Oddy, ‘The Flâneur on Wheels?’ in *Cycling and Society*, ed. Paul Rosen, Dave Horton, and Peter Cox (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 108.

226 Glen Norcliffe, ‘Out for a Spin: The Flâneur on Wheels’, *Cycle History* 8, 1997, 96.

To set out to visit, aforethought, some object of interest discovered in a guidebook or gazetter, is quite a different matter [...] But to come upon the thing unawares may be to come suddenly to a point where present and past are one. The whole fabric of the medieval church rises before us as we stand by the old font or broken canopy.²²⁷

Allen's description here brings to mind de Certeau's definition of spaces as localities in which layers of the past overlap and persist: 'les lieux vécus sont comme des présences d'absences [...] c'est la définition même du lieu, en effet, que d'être ces séries de déplacements et d'effets entre les strates morcelées qui le composent et de jouer sur ces mouvantes épaisseurs.'²²⁸ The unexpected discovery of the multi-layered history of places characterised by Allen was favoured by a technology such as the bicycle, which permitted spontaneous, individual mobility. Such encounters with the past became a privileged object of the modern tourist gaze, while simultaneously functioning as a rejection of the excessive speed and mechanism of modern life. The slow-paced, meandering exploration practised by cyclists suggested alternative means of engaging with localities.

The closing lines of Jerome K. Jerome's tale about a cycling tour, *Three Men on The Bummel* (1900), provide a means of conceptualising the turn-of-the century cycling *flâneur's* outlook.²²⁹ The narrator defines the eponymous German word in the following terms:

A Bummel [...] I should describe as a journey, long or short, without an end; the only thing regulating it being the necessity of getting back within a given time to the point from which one started. Sometimes it is through busy streets, and sometimes through the fields and lanes; sometimes we can be spared for a few hours, and sometimes for a few days. But long or short, but here or there, our thoughts are ever on the running of the sand. We nod and smile to many as we pass; with some we stop and talk awhile; and with a few we walk a little way. We have been much interested, and often a little tired. But on the whole

²²⁷ Allen, *Wheel Magic*, 10–11.

²²⁸ De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, 162. 'Lived places are like presences of absences [...] this is indeed the very definition of a place, to incarnate this series of movements and effects between the fragmented strata it contains and to play with these moving densities.'

²²⁹ Jerome's esoteric title was altered in the USA, where the work was published as *Three Men on Wheels* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1900).

we have had a pleasant time, and are sorry when 'tis over.²³⁰

The verb *Bummeln* means to walk in a leisurely fashion, stroll or dawdle, and the approach to cycling favoured by Jerome's narrator owes a debt to the meandering, slow-paced rhythm of the walker. Both these modes of transport clearly mirror Jerome's digressive narrative technique. The narrator's attitude towards time is equivocal. On the one hand, the duration of the journey is seen as immaterial: it may be long or short, lasting several hours or several days, and is 'without an end.' Yet on the other hand, the traveller's thoughts 'are ever on the running of the sand,' and he must return to his point of departure 'within a given time.' Yet during his journey the traveller experiences contrasting impressions from urban and rural environments, and interacts with those he meets along the way, unlike the enclosed train or car passenger. The cyclist's organic movement between rural and urban environments corresponds to what Raymond Williams pinpoints as a crucial element in the experience of modernity in *The Country and the City* (1973).²³¹ Bicycles were a technology that made possible a connected vision of city and countryside, facilitating subjective criss-crossings from one environment to the other. Much like the *flâneur*, cyclists used their progressive yet modest means of locomotion to navigate, understand or protest against the acceleration, anonymity and mechanisation of modern life.

4.2.5 Nature and nostalgia: literary cycle pilgrims

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Cycling [...] has brought nature and man together in a way that not even the arts of poetry and painting have hitherto succeeded in doing.²³²

230 Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men on the Bummel* (London: Penguin, 1994), 207.

231 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: OUP, 1973), 264.

232 Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks*, 6.

To close my reflection on turn-of-the-century cyclists' nostalgic, decelerated outlook, I now turn my attention to a number of travel writers who actively sought to draw closer to past authors by means of the interrelated activities of cycle touring and writing. Rather than insisting on the modernity of their approach to tourism, the 'cycle pilgrims' Joseph and Elizabeth Robins Pennell, F. W. Bockett and Edward Thomas emphasised the non-mechanised dimension to their chosen means of transport, identifying themselves constantly with the walkers or coach-travellers of the Romantic era.²³³ This opinion was not necessarily shared by certain cycle-sceptics. Ruskin, for example, famously railed in a letter to *Tit-Bits* in 1888:

I not only object, but am quite prepared to spend all my best 'bad language' in reprobation of bi-tri-and-4-5-6 or 7-cycles, and every other contrivance and invention for superseding human feet on God's ground. To walk, to run, to leap and to dance are the virtues of the human body, and neither to stride on stilts, wriggle on wheels or dangle on ropes, and nothing in the training of the human mind with the body will ever supersede the appointed God's ways of slow walking and hard working.²³⁴

The Pennells cite Ruskin's recent indictment of their favoured mode of transport in the preface to *Our Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1893) in order to contradict his opinion that it goes against the values of 'slow walking and hard working.' Indeed, the Pennells claim that cycling – a verb which they often replace with 'working' (for example, 'we can never work after eating heartily'²³⁵) – is the only means of transport that allows them to faithfully retrace Laurence Sterne's famous coach journey to Italy in the eighteenth century. This is partly a financial decision: the couple travel third class on a train out of London, struggle to pay the tax on their tricycle when arriving in France and consistently opt

233 The Pennells and Bockett described themselves as pilgrims, aligning their trips to sites of literary importance with the religious journeys made on foot, by boat or coach in the middle ages.

234 John Ruskin, *Tit-Bits*, 31 March 1888.

235 Pennell and Pennell, *Our Sentimental Journey*, 62.

for cheap hotels. Yet it is also a conscious aesthetic choice, and the Pennells dare to disagree with Ruskin's stated views on travel, claiming that:

In our simplicity we thought by publishing the story of our journey, we could show the world at large, and perhaps Mr. Ruskin in particular, that the oft-regretted delights of travelling in days of coach and post-chaise, destroyed on the coming of the railroad, were once more to be had by means of tricycle or bicycle.²³⁶

The couple's disdain for mechanised means of locomotion finds root in its lack of sentimental, aesthetic or artistic qualities. These cyclists oppose the progressive spirit of the age by turning back to pre-industrial modes of transport in order to find meaning in their journey as well as the inspiration to write. The Pennells remain convinced that the bicycle or tricycle, due to its moderate speed, its openness to its surroundings and its affordability, permits the traveller to rediscover 'the delights of travelling' as experienced in the eighteenth century, when even coaches and post-chaises rarely surpassed the average walking speed of 4 miles per hour.²³⁷ The Pennells' tandem tricycle provides them with the means to reincarnate Sterne's famous journey, establishing a privileged connection to the author, his text and the past in the process.

The Pennells claim to admire sentimental literature, which values feeling over practicality, impressions over facts. They ostensibly seek to emulate the tradition of travel writing established by Sterne by providing an account of their subjective experience of the journey, rather than penning a Baedeker-style travel guide, which would have been more in keeping with late-Victorian taste.²³⁸ Their slight alteration to the title of Sterne's work, from 'A' to 'Our' Sentimental Journey, stresses their desire to emulate the admired author while

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, v.

²³⁷ Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), 22.

²³⁸ Karl Baedeker published popular travel guides from the mid- nineteenth century, containing maps, information about routes and travel facilities, and descriptions of sights, attractions and museums.

underlining their will to provide a subjective, personal account. Just as sentimental novels and travel writing may be seen as a reaction to the rationalism and empiricism of eighteenth-century writing, these writers position themselves against the scientific, positivist outlook that had come to characterise the late Victorian age. Sentimental literature, rather than providing facts in a logical order, readily makes room for digression, a trope that had long been associated with travel on foot or by coach.

This meandering approach to writing and travel refuses the practical or utilitarian side to much travel writing of the late nineteenth century. However, the Pennells' account does reflect aspects of the efficient approach to travel they claim to reject. Although the couple start off vowing to respect the exact itinerary of Sterne's journey – for sentimental purposes, of course – they decide against retracing in his steps to Versailles since 'It was on business connected with his passport Mr. Sterne went to Versailles. We had no passport; therefore it would be absurd to follow him thither.'²³⁹ While vowing allegiance to the exploratory aesthetic of their sentimental and Romantic forefathers, therefore, the Pennells' account also betrays elements of the 'automobile' outlook examined above. They strive to cover greater distances, one day riding their tandem tricycle an impressive 120 km over hilly terrain, pushing themselves to 'keep going on and on. Rest seemed an evil to be shunned. For that afternoon at least we agreed with Mr. Tristram Shandy, that so much of motion was so much of life and so much of joy; – and that to stand still or go on but slowly is death and the devil.'²⁴⁰ Despite their eighteenth-century justification for their drive, their desire for constant movement and focus on their destination recalls a modern, time-focused approach to travel. The Pennells, it seems, are modern in spite of themselves. This is perhaps due to the fact that

²³⁹ Pennell and Pennell, *Our Sentimental Journey*, 117.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

at the time the Pennells were writing, in the early 1890s, the bicycle (or, in their case, the tricycle) was still an ‘ingenious machine of modern invention’²⁴¹ and had not yet adopted a counter-cultural position in relation to the motor car.

While aspects of the automobile subject’s perspective can be traced in the Pennells’ account, they turn to the bicycle and the pen as tools that allow them to look backwards, opposing contemporary practical, consumerist approaches to travel and text, and enacting a more reflective, personal, embodied and emotional response to their journeys. As Dave Buchanan has shown, these authors seek to revive the eighteenth-century picturesque aesthetic, founded on the combination of beautiful landscapes and traces of the past, such as ruined buildings, road dwellers, or wild spaces.²⁴² Buchanan examines F. W. Bockett’s text along with those of the Pennells to argue that these authors were part of a broader practice of literary tourism, promoting a nostalgic and picturesque approach to landscape and literature that drew on pictorial models.²⁴³

Elements of a picturesque outlook may also be traced in Edward Thomas’s *In Pursuit of Spring* (1914), where the narrator describes an encampment of gypsies in the following terms:

If they were not there, in fact, they would have to be invented. They are at home there. See them at nightfall, with their caravans drawn up facing the wind, and the men by the half-door at the back smoking, while the hobbled horses are grazing and the children playing near. The children play across the road, motor cars or no motor cars, laughing at whoever amuses them.²⁴⁴

This description of road dwellers corresponds to the picturesque; they appear to Thomas as a ‘natural’ part of the landscape, and his imperative ‘see’ summons the image vividly to the

241 *Ibid.*, x.

242 Buchanan, ‘Cycling and the Picturesque: Illustrated Cycle-Travel Writing of the 1880s.’

243 *Ibid.*

244 Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, 42.

reader's mind, resurrecting an idealised scene frequently represented in eighteenth-century paintings. The children's irreverent playfulness in spite of the presence of motor cars symbolises the backward looking nature of Thomas's perspective; these gypsies enshrine a persistent, nostalgic gaze that refuses to align itself with the symbols of modernity. Cyclists such as Thomas associate the bicycle and the books written by their best-loved authors with this imaginary, refusing the tenets of modern society based on speed, progress and technological development.

The draw of such a ramshackle aesthetic may also be traced in certain fictional accounts of cycle touring from the period, such as in Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men on the Bummel*. As the friends set out on their journey, Jerome's narrator warns his readers that: 'in this book there will be no scenery,' claiming that:

To a cockney who had never seen higher ground than the Hog's Back in Surrey, an account of Snowdon must have appeared exciting. But we, or rather the steam-engine and the camera for us, have changed all that. [...] To the average man, who has seen a dozen oil paintings, a hundred photographs, a thousand pictures in the illustrated journals, and a couple of panoramas of Niagara, the word-painting of a waterfall is tedious.²⁴⁵

Modern technologies appear to have engendered disillusionment with the description of natural beauty through the medium of print. Yet this tendency, encouraged by steam engines and cameras, is countered by the three friends' experience of riding bicycles through the Black Forest. The bulk of *Three Men on the Bummel* recounts the protagonists' impressions and mishaps in various German towns, which are generally admired for their modernising, progressive spirit. Yet once they begin their cycle tour, the narrator seems to forget his earlier promise, and provides a picturesque description of scenery in the Vosges, which focuses on its dilapidated aspect and the persistent traces of the past:

²⁴⁵ Jerome, *Three Men on the Bummel*, 74.

The Vosges peasant has not the unromantic air of contented prosperity that spoils his *vis-a-vis* across the Rhine. The villages and farms possess more the charm of decay. Another point wherein the Vosges district excels is its ruins. Many of its numerous castles are perched where you might think only eagles would care to build.²⁴⁶

Riding a bicycle rather than travelling by train between cities, the narrator is drawn to ‘the charm of decay’ over the ‘contented prosperity’ he had witnessed in many German cities. He is inspired to share a description of landscapes that, according to his earlier claim, had been made dull by cameras and railways. The bicycle, on the other hand, rekindles wonder and encourages him to adopt a nostalgic gaze that is inherited from pre-industrial, Romantic and picturesque registers.

Romantic walkers’ privileged association with nature is very clearly echoed by literary minded cyclists. As Dave Buchanan argues, attention to and depiction of wild elements in the landscape was another key element in the picturesque aesthetic.²⁴⁷ At the close of a century of intensive industrialisation, the need to maintain or re-establish contact with nature seemed both vital and urgent. Edward Thomas explicitly invokes the dual motivation for his journey, which he hopes will allow him to connect simultaneously with the change of season and with Coleridge’s poetry. He explains that:

I had a wish of a mildly imperative nature that Spring would be arriving among the Quantocks at the same time as myself, that “the one red leaf the last of its clan,” that danced on March 7, 1798, would have danced itself into the grave: that since my journey was to be in “a month before the month of May,” Spring would come fast, not slowly, up that way.²⁴⁸

The rich intertextuality of this passage, which liberally quotes from Coleridge’s poem ‘Christabel’, hints at the intimate connection the cyclist hopes to establish with the poet and his texts by travelling to the landscapes that inspired them, at the same season in which they

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

²⁴⁷ Buchanan, ‘Cycling and the Picturesque: Illustrated Cycle-Travel Writing of the 1880s’, 70.

²⁴⁸ Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, 14.

were written. Natural rhythms are crucial to Thomas; in his *Pursuit of Spring* he attempts to embody the change of season, closely observing the transforming landscape as he journeys, and using it as a basis for his powerful nature writing.

The industrial artefacts that were part of the early-twentieth century landscape are carefully woven into Thomas's narrative, as we saw in the peripheral description of motor cars in the portrait of the gypsy encampment. Yet generally, symbols of modernity such as motor cars and advertising hoardings are an oppressive, undesirable element in the environment. Thomas rejoices in witnessing nature overcome man-made developments, remarking: 'it was a pleasure to see on a wayside plot, where elms mingled with telegraph posts, a board advertising building sites, but leaning awry, mouldy, and almost illegible.'²⁴⁹ Thomas, along with Bockett, deplores urban sprawl,²⁵⁰ seeking a transcendental connection with the Wild by voyaging beyond the city's limits. Thomas condemns the drive to build over any leftover land, arguing that 'if any waste be left under the new order, it will be used for conspicuously depositing rubbish. Little or no wildness of form or arrangement can survive, and with no wildness a landscape cannot be beautiful.'²⁵¹ Bockett also rejoices in the connection with nature cycling affords him, taking comfort in the fact that: 'in the secret shady lanes you are a solitary explorer, face to face with Nature in her prettiest moods, and you realise what a thinly-peopled, wild, woodland country England is outside her great overgrown towns.'²⁵² These cyclists therefore use their machines to connect with wild spaces where traces of the industrialised society they inhabit cannot be detected. A connection to the organic world is at the heart of both Thomas's and Bockett's desire to write, and a rejection of

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁵⁰ The bicycle paradoxically helped to promote urban sprawl by allowing workers to live further out of polluted urban centres.

²⁵¹ Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, 22.

²⁵² Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks*, 64.

the emblems of industrial progress in favour of a reconnection with the past, 'nature' or 'the Wild' is central to their aesthetic.

At the beginning of a new century, these cycle pilgrims look warily to the future, notably in terms of the interaction between the environment, humans and the various machines spawned by the industrial age. The bicycle allows these authors access to a 'peripatetic', Romantic mobility, that retains an essential connection to the environment and the past. As Anne Wallace argues, the peripatetic as a literary mode and material practice persisted beyond the first half of the nineteenth century and 'remains a functional but unrecognized mediation of our continuing encounters with technology, speed, and change, contributing to the unwitting perpetuation of Romantic ideology.'²⁵³ Bombarded by technological change, cycle pilgrims used their bicycles to perpetuate a peripatetic engagement with landscape. Thomas pauses in his ride to observe the expanse of Salisbury Plain²⁵⁴ and 'feel(s) the age of the earth, the greatness of Time, Space and Nature; the littleness of man even in an aeroplane, the fact that earth does not belong to man, but man to the earth.'²⁵⁵ In contrast to the train, cars and aeroplanes, then, the bicycle encourages a humble awareness of the body's place within the landscape through which it moves. Like the pedestrian, the cyclist adopts an attentive, bodily, mindful approach to movement through both spaces and texts, and the layers of the past that constitute them.

253 Anne D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: the Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 9.

254 Anne Wallace points to the crucial role of the pedestrian narrator in Wordsworth's 'Salisbury Plain' poems. *Ibid.*, 1.

255 Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, 82.

4.2.6 A sense of balance: going ‘backwards to come on.’

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving.²⁵⁶

G. K. Chesterton’s essay ‘The Wheel’ opens with a description of a stained glass window dating from 1643 in a church in Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, which inexplicably depicts an angel sitting astride a two-wheeled machine resembling a draisine. The opening paragraph of this essay invokes the bicycle as a synonym of ‘the wheel,’ two words that were effectively interchangeable at the turn of the century. Chesterton reflects that what distinguishes man from animals are wheels, ‘things that are as old as mankind and yet are strictly peculiar to man, that are prehistoric but not pre-human.’ He goes on to observe that:

A wheel is the sublime paradox; one part of it is always going forward and the other part always going back. Now this, as it happens, is highly similar to the proper condition of any human soul or any political state. Every sane soul or state looks at once backwards and forwards; and even goes backwards to come on.²⁵⁷

As the above quote suggests, it is the capacity of the wheel to move both backwards and forwards in its rotation that makes it such a productive symbol of a ‘sane’ individual or social organisation. Indeed, the wheel has long been a productive image for the passage of time itself, suggesting perpetual death and renewal. Even at times of rapid progress or violent revolution, Chesterton argues, people, like wheels, should look backwards in order to determine the best route to the future.

Chesterton’s contemporary H. G. Wells provides a cautionary tale about the dangers of abandoning a connection to the earth and our shared past in favour of a headlong rush

256 Albert Einstein, letter to his son Eduard (5 February 1930), quoted in Walter Isaacson, *Einstein: His Life and Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 367.

257 ‘The Wheel’ in G. K. Chesterton, *Delphi Complete Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 2 (Hastings: Delphi Classics, 2013), 260–65.

towards progress in *The War in the Air* (1908). In this uncannily prescient novel set in a near future, the world's leading powers attack each other with deadly flying machines, resulting in mutual destruction and a return to a primitive, thinly peopled world. As Jeremy Withers shows, in this novel the bicycle represents a sober vision of rational technological progress, 'an ideal piece of technology that stalwartly outlasts all of the others.'²⁵⁸ The bicycle adopts a middle ground between progress and a sense of history, in contrast to the dazzlingly modern flying machines that provoke total war and planetary destruction. The hero of *The War in the Air*, Bert Smallways, is enthusiastic about new technologies in the days before the war, when he works as a bicycle mechanic. As Withers observes, 'he is a character who straddles (literally and figuratively) both the newer and the older forms of technology.'²⁵⁹ He first takes to cycling and then to motorcycling, modes of transport that seem startlingly modern to his well-named father and elder brother (the Smallways grow vegetables, run a small grocery shop and resent the advertising boards and overhead railways that encroach on their small patch). However, in the course of the narrative the bicycle emerges as a technology that goes counter to the general thrust of destructive technological progress.

At the start of the war Bert is an accidental passenger in a German Zeppelin, and as he witnesses the destruction of New York from the air the narrator reflects:

It was the dissolution of an age; it was the collapse of the civilization that had trusted to machinery, and the instruments of its destruction were machines. But while the collapse of the previous great civilization, that of Rome, had been a matter of centuries, had been a thing of phase and phase like the ageing and dying of a man, this, like his killing by railway or motor-car, was one swift, conclusive smashing and an end.²⁶⁰

The mechanised transport metaphors the narrator selects in order to convey the rapid

²⁵⁸ Jeremy Withers, 'Bicycles and Warfare: The Effects of Excessive Mobility in H. G. Wells's *The War in the Air*', in *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film*, ed. Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 80.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁶⁰ Wells, *The War in the Air*, 179–80.

obliteration of twentieth-century Western civilization emphasise the role of industrial technologies in bringing about this very destruction. When Bert finally manages to return to earth, it is thanks to a pair of bicycles that he and an American man manage to bring the plans of the German airships, which happened to be in Bert's possession, to the country's president. Bert crosses the Atlantic by boat, and walks for weeks through England to reach his home, meeting only walkers, cyclists and occasional motor cyclists. Nearly all traces of the past civilization have been wiped out, and the few survivors of the war have returned to the land and lead a hand-to-mouth existence. The epilogue that closes the novel jumps forward a number of years and depicts Bert's son's amazement on beholding a bicycle for the first time. Now a rare sight, a few bicycles persist in this post-Apocalyptic, newly primitive world. Other technologies have pushed humanity to mutual destruction, yet the bicycle stands the test of time as a mode of transport that brings people together without engendering the ominous potential for mutual destruction.

A return to pre-industrial paradigms of transport does not necessarily imply a conservative or pastoral outlook, a fact that is stressed by the Deleuze and Guattari quote that opens this chapter. The bicycle stands for a version of progress that retains a keen awareness of the history of humanity, which Chesterton and others argue must be constantly present in visions of social change. Wells shared this outlook with his contemporary, and integrated bicycles into his vision of a future that would be defined by a sense of (pre)history. In his cycling romance *The Wheels of Chance*, the hero and villain cyclists Hoopdriver and Bechamel are both described as 'primordial'²⁶¹ or 'Palaeolithic creature[s]',²⁶² in spite of the modern means of locomotion with which they are constantly associated. As Richard Pearson

²⁶¹ Wells, *The Wheels of Chance*, 23.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 83.

observes, 'Wells's cultural-anthropological thinking in the 1890s was part of a cultural formation that says much about the transition from Victorian to modern(ist) society.'²⁶³ Pearson goes on to argue that 'modernity for Wells is the recognition of the primitive fundamental nature of man, and the feeble artificial character of his civilization [...] Wells's modern man must understand his primitivism, or perish.'²⁶⁴ The bicycle's reliance on human energy provided a means for reconnecting with the 'primitive' human body, and with simpler styles of living that challenged complex, industrial, capitalist systems.

Grant Allen also belonged to this group of authors who, heavily influenced by Darwinism, stressed the importance of reconnecting to our primitive past in order to develop a healthy future society. Like Wells, Allen was a trained biologist, and in addition to various scientific works he penned an account of Darwin's life and work in 1888.²⁶⁵ In Allen's novels, the bicycle emerges as a technology that seems capable of reminding us of our distant origins. When the heroine of *Miss Cayley's Adventures* tries out a new bicycle, for instance, her affinity with it leads her to reflect that 'We ran together like parts of one mechanism. I was always famed for my circular ankle-action [...] I have prehistoric feet; my remote progenitors must certainly have been tree-hunting monkeys.'²⁶⁶ Here the cyclist's movements on a modern machine recall a previous stage in human evolution. F. W. Bockett also portrayed the bicycle as a means to reconnect with pre-industrial modes, writing that:

The philosophers of the future will write many learned treatises on the influences of the bicycle in that reversion to fetishism which is one of the queer characteristics of the present day. They will point out how the daily lubricating of the bearings developed into a sacred offering accompanied by mystic rites, and they will draw fancy pictures of men and maidens decorating their 'wheels' with flowers with a view to persuading the tyres not to indulge

263 Richard Pearson, 'Primitive Modernity: H. G. Wells and the Prehistoric Man of the 1890s', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007): 58.

264 *Ibid.*, 74.

265 Grant Allen, *Charles Darwin* (London: Longmans, Green, 1888).

266 Grant Allen, *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2008), 51.

in punctures.²⁶⁷

Bockett terms this a “reversion to a primitive type”, as the scientists put it,²⁶⁸ yet it is paradoxically predicated on an intimate connection with an industrial artefact, which I examined in Chapter 3. In Bockett’s description, machinery acts as the means for reconnecting with a primitive, pastoral space in the context of a highly industrialised reality. Re-familiarising its users with their bodies and senses by means of mechanism, the bicycle encouraged a perspective that took stock of the ‘primitive’ heritage of humanity and invited a healthy questioning of contemporary, industrialised, capitalist civilization. It is perhaps for this reason that Grant Allen placed the hero of his apocalyptic tale, ‘The Thames Valley Catastrophe’ (1901) upon a bicycle.²⁶⁹ While London is destroyed by a flood of lava resulting from a sudden split in a tectonic plate, the cyclist narrator is able to survive by taking to the hills. The great city cannot withstand the force of nature, yet like in *The War in the Air*, the bicycle emerges from the story as an adaptable technology on a human scale; a modern cultural achievement that manages to survive a natural catastrophe while pointing an optimistic route to the future.

The bicycle thus had an equivocal position in relation to modernity, and one that rapidly evolved over the period under study. In the late nineteenth century it was a strikingly modern instrument, and therefore associated with various utopian visions of the future. Moreover, the rapid, individual form of mobility it inaugurated helped found certain elements of the automobile paradigm theorised by Urry and Furness. Yet after the appearance of the motor car and the airplane, the bicycle was no longer a novelty, and its tarnished modernity

267 Bockett, *Some Literary Landmarks*, 95.

268 *Ibid.*, 96.

269 Grant Allen, ‘The Thames Valley Catastrophe’ [1901] in *Science Fiction by Gaslight*, ed. Sam Moskowitz (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1968). 20-42.

allowed it to propose a perspective that looked backwards as well as forwards, condemning the destructive drive of emerging technologies and inviting its users to adopt a more sober, mindful, revolutionary vision of progress. The bicycle – a thoroughly modern instrument that was nonetheless noted for its ‘primitivism’ from its very beginnings – is a striking symbol of the dual need for a connection to the past in the context of ever faster and potentially destructive movement into the future.

Conclusion

The seed for this research was planted during a hiatus from study when I worked in Paris as a bicycle courier. My journeys through the city led me to reflect on the many connections between this specific form of mobility and the act of weaving texts. Like reading or writing, cycling is a solitary activity, yet one that generates its own geographies, sensory experiences and forms of interaction with others. My first, tentative explorations into the universe of early cycling literature revealed an unexpected treasure trove of sources, of which I have been privileged to study a small part over the course of this research. Alongside its literary dimension, being a cyclist in Paris made me aware of the political significance of the bicycle. When I arrived alone in this unknown city, I quickly discovered the city's cyclists and activists, who warmly welcomed me into their vibrant community. I discovered that cycling engenders solidarity, where motorised modes of transport more often foster conflict, individualism and anonymity. I forged deep links with fellow cyclists, and with my bicycle, which I maintained, cleaned, pulled apart and put back together again. The world of DIY bicycle workshops in which I became involved provides a microcosm of the network of cooperation among cyclists, who continue to create their own utopian communities in a world of increasing inequality and violence.

My research is part of an emerging body of criticism seeking to address the overlooked literary and cultural significance of the bicycle. Despite long years of neglect, the current upsurge in interest in bicycles as literary and cultural objects has been exemplified by the recent publication of Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea's edited collection *Culture on*

Two Wheels.¹ The editors seek to inscribe this study in the wider ‘mobility turn’ which John Urry has theorised in the social sciences,² while aiming to fill the gap in research on the bicycle. I join with a small but growing group of scholars in writing the bicycle back into literary and cultural history. Cycling has too long been a blind spot in studies that focus on the interface between literature and modes of transport.³ Unlike many critics who occult or sideline cycling, I place the bicycle at the centre of my research in order to engage with it as an object which, like walking, the train and the motor car, is singularly worthy of the attention of literary and cultural critics. This thesis has demonstrated that the bicycle accompanied many of the cultural changes that defined modernity at the turn of the twentieth century, while suggesting alternatives to the mechanised, commodified, accelerated, polluting, violent nature of life in the high industrial era. I have shown that the bicycle played this counter-cultural role from its earliest days, at first positioning itself as an alternative to the railways before coming to enshrine resistance to the motor car. While Zack Furness, Glen Norcliffe and John Urry have argued that the bicycle laid the basis for ‘automobile’ modernity in the twentieth century, I contend that cyclists, far from being embryonic car drivers, envisioned and performed an alternative vision of progress from the first.

Tom Gunning defines the decades from the 1870s to First World War as a ‘period of wonder’, employing the term John Onians coined to describe the early modern period, when

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- 1 Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea, eds., *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); Other recent studies include Paul Smethurst, *The Bicycle: Towards a Global History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Steven E. Alford and Suzanne Ferriss, *An Alternative History of Bicycles and Motorcycles: Two-Wheeled Transportation and Material Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).
 - 2 John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).
 - 3 See for instance Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th century* [1979], trans. Anslem Hollo (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986); Adrienne E Gavin and Andrew F Humphries, eds., *Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). More examples of this gap in research are included in the Introduction.

a host of amazing novelties flooded Western societies due to innovation and new trade routes.⁴ The bicycle was one of many wondrous objects, along with inventions such as the telephone, cinematograph, motor car and airplane, that transformed everyday life at the start of the twentieth century. I agree with Gunning that each new technology suggests an uncanny future direction of society at the moment of its first appearance. This vision rapidly becomes obscured as the object becomes familiar and unremarkable, yet Gunning claims that the initial meanings of technologies may return to the surface at any moment, if we simply pay attention:

Herein lies the importance of the cultural archaeology of technology, the grasping again of the newness of old technologies [...] Even in the midst of familiarity, within the practices of everyday life, fissures open and the forgotten future reemerges, with uncanny effect. The question is, simply, is anyone watching or listening?⁵

This study's attentiveness to literature written at the time of the bicycle's appearance has allowed us to reconnect with the uncanny future embedded in this new technology. The utopian visions the bicycle embodied over a hundred years ago continue to open fissures in the structure of twenty-first century society. Numerous cycling movements are testimony to the continuing counter-cultural role of this technology. From Critical Mass bicycle rides that take place in cities across the globe each month in order to reclaim the roads from the motor car, to cooperative bike workshops, to the many and varied subcultures that have emerged among bike couriers or fixed-gear riders, the bicycle continues to provide alternative means of organising society beyond or at least within the interstices of capitalism.⁶ These

4 John Onians, "'I Wonder ...': A Short History of Amazement", in *Sight and Insight* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 10–33; Tom Gunning, 'Re-newng Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn of the Century', in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 42.

5 Gunning, 'Re-newng Old Technologies', 56.

6 For a discussion of cycling and various current-day subcultures, see Chapter 6 in Zack Furness, *One Less Car: Bicycling and the Politics of Automobility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 140–69.

movements take the bicycle far past its primary locomotive role in order to imagine a more just and equal society and begin to put it into practice.

As Withers and Shea observe, ‘we are living during a bicycling revolution. Not since the fervor that took hold for all things cycling related in the last few decades of the nineteenth century [...] have we seen the intense interest in cycling that we do now.’⁷ Although the twentieth century was characterised by the adoption of the motor car, it also witnessed several cycling comebacks. Notably, the 1930s saw the rise of cycle touring (connected, in France, to the beginning of paid leave),⁸ while in the 1970s new utilitarian and leisure cyclists as well as mountain bikers rejuvenated the technology.⁹ Clear parallels can be established between these periods and the present day. The shock waves of a financial crisis have been running through world economies since 2007, while the 1930s and 1970s also suffered the consequences from the boom-and-bust nature of capitalism. In the 1970s, the petrol crisis drew attention to the problems inherent in growing car dependency, and cyclists pointed to alternative means of organising urban spaces and society in response.¹⁰ Current austerity measures, continuing war in the petrol-producing Middle East and growing awareness of the looming menace of climate change are forcing people to take stock of the impact of their transport and lifestyle choices. The bicycle provides one practical means to perform an alternative social organisation. It allows us to ‘act locally and think globally’, encouraging a more responsible outlook that moves towards a more just, equal and peaceful world.

While drawing attention to its political importance, this thesis uncovers the potency of

7 Withers and Shea, *Culture on Two Wheels*, 1.

8 See Catherine Bertho-Lavenir, *La roue et le stylo: comment nous sommes devenus touristes* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1999).

9 See Frédéric Héran, *Le retour de la bicyclette: une histoire des déplacements urbains en Europe, de 1817 à 2050* (Paris: la Découverte, 2014).

10 Examples include the Provos in the Netherlands and the Situationists in France, as discussed in Chapter 4.

the bicycle as an aesthetic and literary object. Chapter 1 showed how the bicycle was mobilised by many authors as a narrative device that reflected the contingency and spontaneity of modern experience while providing a means of structuring stories around the bodily rhythms of the cycle journey. Moreover, I showed how cycling participated in a shift in mentalities and reading practices that led to a more mobile relationship to print. The growing desire among ‘the masses’ to gain access to a wealth of knowledge that had previously been denied them was accompanied by their late-century discovery of mobility, a domain which had long been the preserve of the wealthiest in society, thanks to the bicycle and new means of public transport. Chapter 2 illustrated how, in the novels of H. G. Wells, the bicycle provided a means for workers to access the countryside and find release from their subservient urban existence. Cycling also made important changes in the lives of women, providing them with the opportunity to dress more ‘rationally’ and become autonomously mobile. I showed how strenuous attempts were made to codify the image of emancipated women and workers within reductive stereotypes, yet finally the bicycle in literature became a symbol of the transgression of social boundaries and the formulation of subversive identities.

Chapter 3 demonstrated how the subordinate groups who formed these daring identities were able to do so partly as a result of a renewed relationship with their bodies and the machine. The bicycle paradoxically reconnected its users to their senses, instincts and physical strength in a highly industrialised reality, while also mechanising the human body to a certain extent. The result of this meeting of humans and machines was an uncanny hybrid between the two registers, which challenged the long-standing Victorian duality between the organic and the mechanical. This provided rich opportunities for new forms of literary

expression, notably offering a means to aestheticise technology and reconnect with the body. These were central concerns for modernist authors, and as literary imaginings of cycling show, the bicycle provided its users with a privileged connection to both the body and the machine, suggesting a means to overcome the binary opposition between humans and technology. Chapter 4 illustrated how this reconnection to the moving body and human-powered technology allowed a renewed relationship to space. Hegemonic, bourgeois uses of urban and rural spaces were undermined by a technology that offered the means to enact peripatetic, embodied, social movement. Correspondingly, turn-of-the-century authors used the figure of the cyclist to rethink their relationship to time. Cyclists in literature looked both backwards and forwards, interacting with a longer, more contingent and subjective time. This went counter to the highly regulated time of industrialisation and capitalism, or the objective, rational time of science. Through this renewed relationship to space and time, the bicycle in literature pointed to a more sober and humane route to progress than that which was suggested by technologies such as the motor car and the airplane. The destructive potentialities of these and other mechanised technologies were tragically illustrated in the First World War and throughout the twentieth century.

As Zack Furness observes, ‘we are still immersed in an ongoing process of defining and debating the meaning of bicycling through the stories we write, the images we capture, the films we watch, and the various digital media we use to interact.’¹¹ In the technology-saturated reality of the twenty-first century, the bicycle remains a means of constructing an alternative relationship to our bodies, machines, localities and communities. Creative interpretations of the bicycle persist in contemporary culture and arts, from Ai Wei-Wei’s

11 Zack Furness, ‘Foreward’, in *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film*, ed. Daniel P. Shea and Jeremy Withers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), x–xi.

sculpture *Forever Bicycles* (2015) to the first film made by a female Saudi director, Haifaa al-Mansour's *Wadjda* (2012). The bicycle's long-standing role in literature, film and art merits sustained critical attention; examples of further areas of research that invite exploration include the use of the bicycle in early cinematography – particularly fascinating due to the fact that the two technologies emerged in tandem – and the rich symbolism of the bicycle in the novels of the Irish authors Flann O'Brien and Samuel Beckett, as well as in the works of other twentieth-century writers.¹² The bicycle continues to offer a compelling narrative mode, uniting corporeal and mechanical registers in order to generate an aesthetic that participates in an alternative vision of modernity.

12 Important work on these authors has been begun by a small number of critics, including Amanda Duncan, 'Communing with Machines: The Bicycle as a Figure of Symbolic Transgression in the Posthumanist Novels of Samuel Beckett and Flann O'Brien', in *Culture on Two Wheels: The Bicycle in Literature and Film*, ed. Jeremy Withers and Daniel P. Shea (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 152–70.

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