

LITTLE SOCIAL COMMONWEALTHS TO SMALL VIRTUAL WORLDS:  
200 Years of Reading the Novel of Manners

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She acknowledged it to be very fitting, that every little social commonwealth should dictate its own matters of discourse; and hoped, ere long, to become a not unworthy member of the one she was now transplanted into.

—Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

In 1989, when my then best friend's marriage was spectacularly breaking up, I was subpoenaed by her estranged husband, who was acting as his own attorney, to give a deposition in their divorce case. It was really just an excuse for an abusive man to harass and intimidate anyone whom he thought had helped his wife get free of him, but being shut up for hours in a small room with a person whom I had once considered a friend and who was now radiating hatred toward me was one of the most demoralizing experiences I've ever been through. After it was over, I struggled to find ways to restore a sense of security and normalcy to my life. I still remember the moment of epiphany I had in my car (I even remember the road I was on) when I thought, "I will reread *Pride and Prejudice*—that will help me feel better."

Why did I choose *Pride and Prejudice*? When life seems too messy and chaotic, and everything including the current economic crisis feels too unmanageable or too virtual, in moments like these I crave the lingering attention to detail and the cozy immediacy of a novel of manners and, given the number of recent movies made of Jane Austen's novels and the steady stream of reprints of her books, I am certain that I am not alone.

Within Austen's intimately detailed and boundaried world, I am able to reconnect with life on a human scale. Time unspools at a different pace; I seem to "have time" to

notice and savor the particulars of fictional lives, which carries over to having time to notice and savor the real details of my own life. Spending time with a group of people talking and drinking tea in the drawing room of an English country house relieves me, for the moment, of grappling with problems that often appear beyond my ability to solve. The “little social commonwealth” of the novel of manners is a life-giving world of incident and humor that offers the cheering reminder that people in other times have survived their own difficulties—and not only survived them, but gone on to thrive and even to be happy.

Ironically, given the many ways technology has made it possible for us to be “connected” in the twenty-first century, I think we may be in danger of forgetting how sustaining our own little social commonwealths of “real,” nonvirtual communities and concerns can be. Since we can be on close terms with hundreds of Facebook “friends,” and since, as contemporary novelist Stephen McCauley points out, we now carry our “small virtual worlds” with us everywhere we go, we need never be out of touch or alone—even when we *are* alone (139). As well as the subtle dangers of being constantly online, which include fractured attention spans, the decline of reasoned thoughtfulness, and feeling overwhelmed by too much information, our increasing immersion in the “virtual” is making us vulnerable in larger ways we are just beginning to understand. Because they give us the opportunity to create idealized images of ourselves, virtual connections like email, texting, and Facebook offer us as many options to conceal how—and who—we are as they do to reveal it. But the novel of manners reminds us that there is no substitute for actually talking to another human being face-to-face, which is why I believe we need those novels more now than perhaps at any other time in history.

A close look at the novel of manners genre will help us discover why these novels can function as an antidote to this twenty-first-century sense of distraction and disconnectedness. The novel of manners usually focuses on the interrelationships of a small group of people and the ways in which new experiences and acquaintances impact or alter these relationships. Typically we are introduced to a particular little social commonwealth in a state of status quo. The relationships of the characters to one another are clarified for us before the process of destabilizing this order and the accompanying comic misunderstandings begin. Chaos is usually caused by fairly minor things. New people come to town. Characters journey to new places. They take tea, write and receive letters, and pay calls. They make risotto, give dinner parties, go to the opera, play tennis or the piano, and garden. They listen to gossip, wait days or weeks for news, and make erroneous judgments. They expect events that never come to be and are surprised and even dazzled by the things that do happen. Men and women especially—though not exclusively, as we will see—meet, dance, converse, misinterpret one another, separate, and reunite.

They behave, in short, as all of us do every day of our lives.

Most charming of all, as readers of the novel of manners, we are privy to not only the moments when the characters feel things but also the reasons why and the effects of these delicate inner shifts on the people around them. And after all the dithering and delays, frustrations and misunderstandings, the novel of manners restores its characters—and us—to a new state of order at the end, sometimes wiser, and almost always with a fresh appreciation of the opportunities for change, like Belinda Bede's moment of "thankfulness and wonder" that God does indeed "move in a mysterious way"

at the end of Barbara Pym's *Some Tame Gazelle* (239). Often this new state comes about through a union of two people in marriage, but not always: as we will see, sometimes even the rejection of a marriage proposal can bring a renewed sense of possibility.

As a genre, the novel of manners has its beginnings in the seventeenth century stage plays known as comedies of manners by authors such as Molière and Ben Jonson. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams characterizes the “comedy of manners” as a drama that “deals with the relations and intrigues of men and women living in a sophisticated upper-class society, and relies for comic effect in large part on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue . . . as well as on the violations of social standards and decorum by would-be wits, jealous husbands, conniving rivals, and foppish dandies” (49–50). The Oxford English Dictionary definition includes this key quotation from Jonson: “Persons, such as Comoedie would chuse, When she would show an Image of the times, And sport with humane follies, not with crimes” (“Comedy”). As Jonson notes, the emphasis in the novel of manners is almost always on human “follies,” i.e., misguided or reckless undertakings or, as Austen puts it in *Pride and Prejudice*, “follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies”—rather than crimes, including actual breaches of the law or assaults against persons (56). For the purposes of this paper, I intend to use the terms *comedy of manners* and *novel of manners* interchangeably.

*eNotes* further sharpens our definition:

Although the focus of the novel of manners—domestic life, matrimony, and social behavior—tends to be narrow, the “manners” being studied very often have far wider implications beyond the pouring of tea and the search for the proper mate. *Adherence to good manners in these texts is not only a reliable*

*indicator of one's social standing, but is intended to serve as an indicator of good morals as well.* (emphasis added; Evans and Onorato)

Especially in the nineteenth century, when a woman's options for earning her own money or pursuing any kind of independent life were so limited, having some way to discern the essential character of another person, particularly the man she may spend her life with, is crucial. Besides hearsay, including questioning the people with whom the potential husband is connected, the woman may have no way to gain information on this critical point other than through what she can observe—the ways of speaking, behaving, and interacting known as “manners.” For the reader of the novel of manners, much of the enjoyment lies in discerning the ways in which the small gestures of life—how one pours one's tea or behaves at a party or takes leave of other people—serve as “an indicator of good morals,” and what exactly these apparently trivial gestures can reveal about the character of the person who performs them. The ways in which these small moments open into revelations of something larger about human nature is also part of the pleasure.

I would like to make my case for the continuing relevance of the novel of manners by looking closely at six novels of the genre: Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, E.M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*, Pym's *Some Tame Gazelle*, and Stephen McCauley's *Insignificant Others*. Looking at the repeating motifs Austen, Forster, and Pym employ to draw us as readers into the moods and emotions of their characters will illustrate some of the distinguishing characteristics of the genre. Looking at McCauley's 2010 novel will lead us into a consideration of the vitality, adaptability, and significance of the novel of manners for the twenty-first century.

Why these particular novels? Out of the dozens I could have chosen, I am drawn to these six because they offer a rich perspective on the genre over 200 years of development and because the characters in these books confront issues I feel are still very relevant to the world we live in today. *Northanger Abbey* shows us a young woman coming of age and learning to evaluate the character of the people she meets as she finds her place in the world. *Persuasion* gives us the story of a young woman persevering through difficult times and the vicissitudes of life to win back her first love. Forster's novels highlight the difficulties of both women and men trying to traverse a radical social shift that feels similar to the shift we are navigating now as we move from traditional ways of interacting and receiving information to this new technological age of instant communication. Pym uses the novel of manners genre to reinvent a coherent postwar England for the survivors of two devastating world wars, which feels akin to our recent economic crisis. Finally, though technology may have changed the ways we connect in the twenty-first century, McCauley's book shows that the challenges of making genuine human connections with other people remain the same.

In any discussion of the novel of manners, Austen's name is bound to come up before any other. As a novelist, she comes on the literary scene when, as Edith Wharton describes it in *The Writing of Fiction*, "'plot,' in the old-fashioned sense of a coil of outward happenings, was giving way to the discovery that real drama is soul-drama" (93). Though *Northanger Abbey*, published in 1818 after Austen's death, is filled with exciting events, the most important drama is the development of Catherine Morland's soul. Catherine, a young woman raised in a country parsonage, is invited to visit Bath with family friends, where she meets and falls in love with Henry Tilney, a young

clergyman from Gloucestershire with “a pleasing countenance, [and] a very intelligent and lively eye” (19). Catherine is a devoted reader of Gothic romances, and when Henry and his sister invite her to stay at their family estate, Northanger Abbey, Catherine’s active imagination quickly leads her into terrible suspicions regarding Henry’s father and his possible role in the death of his wife.

Austen began *Northanger Abbey* as a parody of Gothic novels such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, which were especially popular with young women readers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But *Northanger Abbey* moves beyond its origins as parody to become a study of manners as we watch Catherine come to the realization that “charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe’s works . . . it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for” (188).

When Catherine first ventures into Bath in the company of her friends, the Allens, the narrator tells us that “her heart was affectionate, her disposition cheerful and open, without conceit or affectation of any kind—her manners just removed from the awkwardness and shyness of a girl; her person pleasing . . . and her mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is” (12). With no real guidance, since Mrs. Allen is too preoccupied with matters of dress, Catherine has only her own “ignorant and uninformed” common sense to consult when evaluating the manners of the various people she meets. Innocent as she is, it’s a mark of her good sense that Catherine fears, as she listens to Henry Tilney’s playful discussion of “muslins” with Mrs. Allen, “that he indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others” (23).

Catherine's new friend, Isabella Thorpe, poses another challenge for her. From the beginning of their acquaintance in Bath, Isabella's contradictory manner and her self-promoting tendency to exaggerate are shown in her dialogue. One moment, Isabella is telling Catherine how much she would adore her friend, Miss Andrews, who is "as beautiful as an angel and I am so vexed with the men for not admiring her!" while in the next paragraph she confides that Miss Andrews lacks Catherine's animation, "for . . . there is something amazingly insipid about her" (34-35). Catherine must learn to see past Isabella's "easy gaiety . . . [and] frequent expressions of delight" and her "fashionable air of . . . figure and dress" to trust her own instincts and gain a truer picture of Isabella's character—a sharp-eyed flirt on the hunt for a wealthy husband (28).

The arrival of Isabella's brother, John, in Bath together with Catherine's brother, James, gives Catherine further opportunities to test the correctness of her own instincts against the "idle assertions" and "endless conceit" of John Thorpe, whose behavior puzzles Catherine even more than Henry Tilney's (60, 61). She listens to him "with astonishment; she knew not how to reconcile two such very different accounts of the same thing" (60). But again, we see how good the "ignorant and uninformed" Catherine's natural instincts are, for "little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt . . . of his being altogether completely agreeable. It was a bold surmise, for he was Isabella's brother . . ." (61).

It may be a "bold surmise," but it proves absolutely true, as does her uneasiness regarding the overly attentive courtesy of Henry's father, General Tilney. "To such anxious attention was the General's civility carried" when Catherine first meets him that

he almost dismisses his servant for failing to open the door for her, before she can explain that the fault was hers (95). When it dawns on her that “in spite of their father’s great civilities to her—in spite of his thanks, invitations, and compliments—it had been a release to get away from him,” Catherine is even more puzzled (121). Influenced by Mrs. Radcliffe’s “horrid” Gothic novels and the “long, damp passages . . . narrow cells and ruined chapel” she imagines Northanger Abbey must contain, it is a short step for Catherine to picture the General capable of having murdered his wife (132).

Catherine’s wild imaginings regarding General Tilney are finally exposed when Henry discovers her in his mother’s room, searching for proofs of the General’s culpability in his wife’s death. After Henry gives her a factual account of his mother’s last illness, Catherine is horrified for a completely different reason: “her folly, which now seemed even criminal, was all exposed to him. . . . The liberty which her imagination had dared to take with the character of his father, could he ever forgive it? The absurdity of her curiosity and her fears, could they ever be forgotten?” (187). But, as embarrassing as this misperception is, and as much as she fears it may cost her Henry’s love, this is Catherine’s only real error. Despite her youth and inexperience, Catherine’s instincts about the General’s character are ultimately proved sound. The General is not a murderer, but he has committed “crimes” of arrogance, cruelty, and misperception. And when Isabella all but throws over Catherine’s brother, James, in favor of the rakish Captain Tilney, then adopts an air of injured puzzlement in a letter to Catherine about why James has left her, “such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine,” the narrator tells us (205). Catherine’s ability to evaluate the true character of the people she

meets and the differences between romance and reality has evolved into a new, more grown-up awareness of herself and other people.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen shows her heroine coming into conflict with not only the conventions of fashionable Bath society but also the essential contradictions of human nature. By the end, Catherine is able to set aside her comically improbable ideas about life and society and come to a deeper understanding of “the follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies” inherent in not only the character of the people she meets but herself, one of the essential concerns of the novel of manners.

Virginia Woolf makes a crucial point about Austen’s perceptiveness that sums up the best of what the novel of manners has to offer us as readers. “Jane Austen,” writes Woolf, “is a mistress of much deeper emotion than appears upon the surface. She stimulates us to supply what is not there. What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, yet it is composed of something that expands in the reader’s mind and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes which are outwardly trivial.” In *Persuasion*, Austen’s last completed novel, not only is her ability to capture these “trivial” moments of life in their “most enduring form” at its height, but she achieves an emotional depth that I believe is even more complex and profound than that of her earlier novels.

Eight years before *Persuasion* opens Anne Elliot had been engaged to Captain Wentworth, an unknown naval officer. But Anne was “persuaded” by her friend and confidant, Lady Russell, “to believe the engagement a wrong thing—indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it” (27). Because Anne is the daughter of a baronet, and Wentworth, at the time, was “a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him . . . no hopes of attaining affluence . . . [in his] most

uncertain profession . . . and no connexions,” their engagement was deemed unsuitable (26-27). Though Anne had been persuaded to give up Wentworth, she has never forgotten him. Now, because her vain, self-important father is “growing distressed for money,” their home, Kellynch-hall, must be rented out, and the family, Sir Walter, Anne, and her unsympathetic older sister Elizabeth, must remove to lodgings in Bath, a place where Sir Walter “might . . . be important at comparatively little expense” (10, 15). When Kellynch-hall is let to an admiral whose wife is Captain Wentworth’s sister, Wentworth himself returns to Anne’s circle of acquaintance. But circumstances have changed. Due to her father’s inability to live within his means, Anne’s family has fallen in status, while Wentworth’s status has risen: he has made his fortune in prize money. Anne has to cope with her emotions at seeing Wentworth again, while her sister Mary’s vivacious young sisters-in-law, Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove, show every sign of falling in love with him.

Following the brilliantly shifting contexts and situations in which Austen uses the word “persuasion” throughout the course of the novel sheds light on one of its central conflicts: whether it is more desirable for a person to have a persuadable or an unpersuadable temperament, and what exactly having a persuadable temperament means. Before this reading, I had not fully grasped the ways in which Austen sets Anne’s gentle, persuadable nature in direct contrast, to not only Wentworth’s “own decided, confident temper” (57) but Louisa Musgrove’s “character of decision and firmness” (81). Though almost all the book is filtered through Anne’s consciousness, Austen gives us a tantalizing glimpse of what is going on in Wentworth’s mind: “He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill. . . . She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the

effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity” (57). Still, he has never been able to forget Anne.

When Anne overhears Louisa declare to Wentworth that she would never “be turned back from doing a thing that I had determined to do and that I knew to be right. . . . I have no idea of being so easily persuaded,” she also hears his admiring response, “My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm. If Louisa Musgrove would be beautiful and happy . . . she will cherish all her present powers of mind” (81–82). Anne can only conclude that “every thing now marked out Louisa for Captain Wentworth” and that he is lost to her (83). But when Louisa’s headstrong nature leads her to insist he jump her down the stairs at Lyme and she falls “on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and [is] taken up lifeless!” things start to shift (102). Anne, with some justification, can’t help wondering,

whether it ever occurred to him now, to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character; and whether it might not strike him, that, like all other qualities of the mind, it should have its proportions and limits. She thought it could scarcely escape him to feel, that a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness, as a very resolute character. (108)

While recovering from her fall at Lyme, Louisa Musgrove becomes engaged to Wentworth’s friend, Captain Benwick, leaving Wentworth to acknowledge his feelings for Anne and consider whether they might still have a future together. When he comes to Bath to seek her out, he is taken aback to find Mr. Elliot, the heir to Kellynch-hall, already there, paying court to Anne. Wentworth’s observation of the “rational, discreet,

and polished” Mr. Elliot’s attentiveness to Anne at a concert causes him to leave abruptly, making Anne wonder if he might still care for her (151). When she sees Wentworth the next day Anne realizes that “the same unfortunate persuasion [that she is in love with Mr. Elliot] which had hastened him away from the concert room, still governed” (207). Now we see that Wentworth can be falsely persuaded of the truth of a situation as well as Anne. Watching Austen, at the top of her game, delicately play with the shifting meanings of “persuasion” and the value of having a “persuadable temper” in the context of “the indelible, immoveable impression of what persuasion had once done” in the lives of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth is one of the great pleasures of the novel (229).

Like Miss Bates in *Emma*—indeed, like Austen herself—Anne Elliot faces the real possibility of a life in which she will continue to sink “from the comforts she was born to,” with the accompanying decline in wealth and position (*Emma* 351). Part of what makes *Persuasion* such a life-affirming novel of manners is watching as Anne struggles to remain hopeful—all while leaving her home, trying to navigate the different little social commonwealths in which she finds herself, and being in daily company with the man she loves while he appears to be falling in love with someone else. It is deeply satisfying therefore, to watch as Anne’s quietly passionate declaration of her belief in women’s gift for loving “longest, when existence or when hope is gone” finally restores Wentworth to her (221). I think *Persuasion* continues to resonate in the twenty-first century because it is about second chances and the possibility of reinventing oneself after surviving difficult times. In our impatient modern age, *Persuasion* reminds us of the value of persevering even “when hope is gone.”

Though Northanger Abbey, Bath, Uppercross, and Lyme affect Catherine Morland and Anne Elliot as though they were foreign places, the action takes place in their home country of England. The possibilities for self-discovery and change are even greater when characters journey to a foreign land, as Forster, the early twentieth-century master of the novel of manners, shows us in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*. Forster is unique in the novel of manners genre since he has one foot in the restrained drawing rooms of the great Edwardian country houses and the other in the modern world of equal opportunity for men and women regardless of birth or fortune. His clear-eyed awareness that the status quo of the England of his time is not sustainable always astonishes me. At the same time, he is cannily conscious that giving his characters opportunities to travel outside their home country will help them realize not only how nurturing their own little social commonwealths can be but also how restrictive. His famous admonition in *Howards End*, “Only connect!” acknowledges both the difficulties of genuine human connection and Forster’s belief that making these connections is imperative for the survival of civilized society.

In both novels, Forster uses Italy, “a country . . . that’s upset people from the beginning of the world,” to illustrate the ways in which traveling to an unfamiliar place can challenge his characters’ expectations and open them up to new ideas and possibilities (*Angels* 91). In his 1905 novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster raises the stakes in the novel of manners: the “follies” committed in Italy by Philip Herriton, his sister, Harriet, and their friend, Caroline Abbott, actually do lead to a crime. The ability—or willingness—of these English people to understand and enter into Italy’s

foreign ways not only affects their relationships but literally has life and death consequences.

The widowed Lilia Herriton is a woman who is out of place in her little social commonwealth. Her in-laws see her high spirits and lack of seriousness as vulgar, especially since Lilia keeps flirting inappropriately with every unattached man she meets. Since she will “not settle down in her place among Sawston matrons,” Philip Herriton’s idea to send his sister-in-law to Italy with Miss Abbott as chaperone initially seems like a deliverance to the rest of his family (9). But things quickly go awry when Lilia meets and marries an Italian in Monteriano. I love the way Forster doesn’t have to work to invent problems for his characters—all he has to do is land them in Italy and let Italy and Italians be themselves. Tracking the subtle ways in which Forster uses the non-Englishness of Italy to destabilize his characters is a revelation. When Philip is sent to Monteriano by his mother to prevent Lilia’s marriage, he quickly realizes that “He was in the enemy’s country, and everything—the hot sun, the cold air behind the heat, the endless rows of olive trees, regular yet mysterious—seemed hostile to the placid atmosphere of Sawston in which his thoughts took birth” (22). Though Philip loves Italy—or at least his received idea of Italy: “whole olive-trees, blue sky, frescoes, country inns, saints, peasants, mosaics, statues, beggars”—this is the beginning of his realization that he is out of his element (69). Italy’s voluptuous natural beauty starts to overwhelm Philip, pushing past his defenses, undoing the chilly narrowness of his “good” intentions.

Later, after Lilia dies in childbirth, Philip, his sister Harriet, and their friend Miss Abbott go to Italy on a mission to buy back Lilia’s baby from his Italian father, Gino, so that he can be raised “in the holy life of an English home” (122). When their “strenuous

day of resolutions, plans, alarms, battles, victories, defeats, truces” (114–15) ends unexpectedly at the opera, Philip and Miss Abbot find themselves swept away by the Italians’ “universal joy” in the music and “the existence of beauty” (117–18). Something magical happens to Philip: he is able to shed his soul-confining English ways and become Italian: “he forgot himself as well as his mission. . . . For he had been in this place always. It was his home” (118). The opera has a similar effect on Miss Abbott, who must force herself to shut the window of her Italian hotel room “as if there was magic in the encircling air. But . . . all night long she was troubled by torrents of music . . .” (122).

Although the magic air of Italy begins to soften Philip and Miss Abbott, Harriet, “acrid, indissoluble, large; the same in Italy as in England—changing her disposition never, and her atmosphere under protest,” refuses absolutely to surrender herself to it (112). She remains a sovereign nation, her own impervious England. In her “burly obtuseness,” she is never able to see the baby as anything but an object or a prize (133). Though Philip and Miss Abbott eventually realize that “out of this wreck there was revealed . . . something indestructible,” Harriet’s status as the “fool” who rushes in “where angels fear to tread” has not changed by the end of the novel (180). There is no marriage that can bring about a happy ending in this novel of manners. Harriet’s merciless self-righteousness has led her and the others into a kind of folly that proves deadly: the resulting accident is directly responsible for taking the life of the baby they have come to Italy to save.

The lush sensuality of Italy continues to destabilize Forster’s buttoned-up English characters in his 1908 novel, *A Room with a View*, creating “soul-drama” of the richest kind as it compels them to see themselves and the world in fresh ways. But with a twist:

this time it is not only the licentious ways of the Italians that undermine the English certainties of Lucy Honeychurch and her companion, Charlotte Bartlett, but also the alien and possibly “Socialist” views of their fellow English travelers, Mr. Emerson and his son, George. Forster is a master at highlighting the subtle ways in which the restrictiveness of Edwardian society has created the early modern equivalent of a “virtual” world in which people without proper opinions or social connections, like the Emersons, essentially do not exist to people like Lucy and Charlotte. When Mr. Emerson overhears them expressing their disappointment over not having been given rooms with a view at the Pension Bertolini in Florence, he breaks into their conversation: “I have a view, I have a view” (4). George Emerson immediately supports his father’s offer to trade their “rooms with a view” with Lucy and Charlotte: “It’s so obvious they should have the rooms . . . there’s nothing else to say” (5).

From the start, George’s words begin to rearrange the world for Lucy, foreshadowing bigger changes to come: “she had an odd feeling that whenever these ill-bred tourists spoke the contest widened and deepened till it dealt, not with rooms and views, but with—well, with something quite different, whose existence she had not realized before” (5). The fuss Charlotte makes over the possibility of being put “under an obligation to people of whom we know nothing” causes Lucy to feel “the sensation of a fog,” which only opening the window of her newly acquired room with a view to “the clean night air . . . and the lights dancing in the Arno and the cypresses of San Miniato” helps alleviate (9, 15). The novel of manners is especially apt at showing how the human longing to escape social restrictions can occur simultaneously with the craving for human company and social interaction. Forster’s characters live so narrowly that the simple act

of opening a window in a foreign country can feel like an opening, however small, into their souls.

No one writes better than Forster on the conflict between natural human instincts and the artificial constraints imposed on people's behavior by social expectations. He makes wonderful use of several repeating motifs throughout the novel—as well as rooms with and without views, he also uses images of light and shadows, and truth and lying. But I believe what he does especially brilliantly in *Room* is to put his characters in places of such deep natural beauty that they are surprised into dropping their preoccupation with questions of appropriate behavior, class distinctions, or any of the other artificial politenesses of society and are forced to act naturally themselves. When Miss Lavish takes Lucy's Baedeker guidebook and abandons her on their way to view the church of Santa Croce, Lucy's first reaction is to shed "tears of indignation" because she won't know which frescoes are by Giotto or which "of all the sepulchral slabs" was "the one that had been praised by Mr. Ruskin" (23). But then, as with Philip Herriton in *Angels*, something wonderful happens: "the pernicious charm of Italy worked on her, and instead of acquiring information, she began to be happy" (23). "I had to come in by myself," she says of entering Santa Croce (25). Such a simple, understated sentence, yet it is literally true: if Lucy does not come in by herself, she won't be able to begin the process of allowing the foreignness of Italy to enter her and challenge her narrow accepted notions of life.

One of the most exquisite "natural" moments in the book occurs when Lucy drives out to see the view from Fiesole with a party that includes Charlotte and the Emersons. She becomes separated from them and falls onto "a little open terrace" where

“violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hillside with blue,” a terrace that is “the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth” (78). George Emerson, coming upon Lucy with “radiant joy in her face” and “the flowers beat[ing] against her dress in blue waves,” gives into his natural impulse and kisses her (78). But Lucy isn’t ready for this uninhibited kind of behavior—yet. She flees with Charlotte to Rome, and thence, back to England.

Having fled Italy and the upsetting attentions of the “modern” George Emerson, Lucy becomes engaged to Cecil Vyse, a traditional Edwardian who feels that “he must lead women, though he knew not whither, and protect them, though he knew not against what” (151). Another encounter with the disturbing Emersons and a second unexpected kiss from George shatter all of Lucy’s attempts to be happy with Cecil in the constricted ways English society allows. She breaks off her engagement, which shocks Cecil into realizing that he was “bound up in the old vicious notions, and all the time you were splendid and new” (200). Though Lucy decides to leave England for Greece, a chance encounter with Mr. Emerson changes her plans; he admonishes her to “remember the mountains over Florence and the view” and to summon the courage to go “out into the muddle that you have made yourself” and acknowledge her love for George (236). The novel ends with Lucy and George back in Italy “where any one who chooses may warm himself in equality, as in the sun,” together, in the room with a view (127). The English obsession with birth and social class has proved too confining. Only in Italy, the foreign place, can they find refuge; only Italy has “room” for Lucy and George together.

Though Forster’s novels are as character-driven as Austen’s, his characters can be overpowered by romance in a deep way that Austen’s characters rarely are. The yearning

for “natural” freedom in Forster’s work is also present in Austen’s novels, though in Austen it is almost always women who are struggling for the freedom to create their own lives. By Forster’s time, the pressure of social conventions seems ready to crush the natural life out of both women *and* men, and the reader can sense Forster’s awareness that this state of affairs is not sustainable. Lilia and Philip Herriton, Caroline Abbott, Lucy Honeychurch, and George Emerson are all engaged in a struggle to find something they can’t find in England: freedom, and a new sense of possibility for themselves. The fact that Forster’s novels don’t always end with a marriage feels very modern to me. His work marks a shift in the novel of manners from the confined drawing rooms of the wealthy or well-born to the social mobility of the contemporary world, a world that is much less about who you are than what you can do. I believe Forster’s novels continue to resonate in the twenty-first century because without the social connections and rituals of the past, the essential questions of how to evaluate other people and find one’s place in the broader world have become more important—and more complicated—than ever.

In Pym’s 1950 comedy of manners, *Some Tame Gazelle*, we return to England, to an unnamed English village in the years just after World War II. Whereas Austen’s and Forster’s protagonists are usually young women, Pym claims the world of middle-aged unmarried Englishwomen as her novel of manners territory. Though the sisters Belinda and Harriet Bede never travel outside their small village, Pym shows us how the comic possibilities of change can wreak havoc or give hope even in the outwardly uneventful lives of these middle-aged characters. Now that I’ve reached middle age myself, I especially appreciate the ways Pym shows that even in quiet lives, it’s not too late for

change. And I love her for knowing—and reminding me—that even something as ordinary as a sock can have both comic and cosmic impact.

With the attention being paid to socks, food, what to wear, and what the neighbors might think, we find ourselves in familiar comedy of manners territory. Pym is wickedly good at using these homely domestic details in service of what they can reveal about her characters. While Harriet, who enjoys “cherishing” young curates, serves the curate all the best white meat, Belinda reflects on the “established ritual” of serving boiled chicken to curates the first time they come to dinner: “it seemed somehow right for a new curate. The coldness, the whiteness, the muffling with sauce, perhaps even the sharpness added by the slices of lemon, there was something appropriate here, even if Belinda could not see exactly what it was” (13). Belinda’s decision that her “blue marocain, a rather dim dress of the kind known as ‘semi-evening’ [would be] quite good enough for the curate . . . even though if the Archdeacon had been coming as well she would probably have worn her velvet” is the kind of intimate, internal detail that lets us know, early in the novel, just how high the Archdeacon ranks in Belinda’s hierarchy of social relationships (10).

The quietly comic way Pym uses such ordinary details to illustrate how differently the same experience of apparently “trifling matters” affects women and men is another of her great strengths (77). Belinda has been in love with the vain, pompous Archdeacon Henry Hoccleve for thirty years, since their student days at Oxford, and the trials of her continuing affection for him, despite his marriage to the superior Agatha, make up much of the book. With Agatha gone on a short holiday, the Archdeacon stops by the Bedes’ home for a visit. When Harriet notices that he has a hole in his sock, Belinda quickly offers to mend it. ““What a fuss it all is over such a trifling matter,”” the

Archdeacon exclaims (77). Later, after the sock has been mended and the Archdeacon is gone, Belinda goes out to the kitchen to make risotto for lunch. But the “trifling matter” of the sock has had a different effect on her than it has on Henry: “Somehow it was difficult to concentrate. The mending of the sock had been an upsetting and unnerving experience” (79).

To her great surprise, Belinda eventually receives an offer of marriage from the visiting Bishop Grote, Theodore Mbawawa. But it is a proposal almost as insulting as the one St. John Rivers offers Jane Eyre, or Mr. Collins’s proposal to Elizabeth Bennet, and Belinda finds it easy to refuse him. When Harriet receives her own proposal of marriage from “deputy Librarian” Nathaniel Mold, she knows immediately that she is not willing to “change a comfortable life of spinsterhood in a country parish, which always had its pale curate to be cherished, for the unknown trials of matrimony” (136). The joy Belinda feels when she realizes Harriet has refused this proposal and her own realization that, even with her unrequited love for the Archdeacon, her life as it’s currently constituted is preferable to being the wife of a self-absorbed man who doesn’t love her is life-affirming. Unlike Catherine Morland and Anne Elliot, the Misses Bede clearly have the money to live as they choose: they need not be dependent on men. But Pym has a deeper purpose as well: as a postwar novelist, she is engaged in recreating a logical, comprehensible England for the women whose husbands and potential husbands were killed in two world wars.

I believe Pym’s quick eye for the absurdity that is always lurking just under the surface in relations between the sexes makes her one of the best, most underrated writers in the novel of manners genre. I also appreciate her fresh twist on the novel of manners’

preoccupation with marriage. Though *Some Tame Gazelle* does end with a marriage, it is not Belinda's or Harriet's. The sense of freedom and new beginnings for these two characters at the end of the novel come from the marriage proposals they turn down. Pym wants us to see that Belinda and Harriet Bede do not need men to be companioned. Firmly ensconced in their little social commonwealth, these are women who have chosen to be sufficient unto themselves.

Though Austen, Forster, and Pym all share a similar tone of gentle irony, it is a tone that contains a lot of awareness; the feeling of a clear-eyed gaze being cast over human beings and their untidy lives. We're shown the vanities and absurdities of characters like John and Isabella Thorpe, Sir Walter Elliot, Harriet Herriton, Cecil Vyse, and Archdeacon Hoccleve, but the picture is always moderated by a lack of authorial judgment, sometimes even by love. This compassion for human foibles is the main quality that differentiates the novel of manners from satire. Though Pym casts a particularly unsparring eye over Archdeacon Hoccleve's vanities—his habit of quoting the same bits of classic poetry to different people to impress them, his childish jealousies and dislike of other clergymen, his delight in preaching sermons with so many obscure literary references that his congregants can't understand them—our view of him is always tempered by the knowledge that to Belinda he is still “dear Henry.” Thirty years later, despite his marriage and his narcissism, she still loves him. Why? Because she just does, because it's become a habit with her, because it's comfortable—like an old sock. Her passion for him, rather than being the tragedy of her life, evolves into something that sustains her. We are shown the “comedy” of a sturdy unmarried woman who can spend her life living near the man she's loved for thirty years and his wife and still be able to

enjoy the small pleasures that might be part of any life: the comings and goings of her neighbors, dinner parties, knitting, tea by the fire, the eternally absorbing question of what to wear, working in the garden, the changing of the seasons. The focus on domestic comfort and companionship in Pym's novels is even greater than in Austen's work; it comes with the wry modern awareness that this coziness is hard won.

And I believe the lines of poetry Pym chooses for the epigraph and title of her book sum up the novel of manners perfectly: "Some tame gazelle, or some gentle dove; / Something to love, oh, something to love!" No matter how absurd and ridiculous they—or we—are. For most of us, the world will never be bigger than finding someone to love, or someone to love us.

The sixty years that passed between the publication of *Some Tame Gazelle* and Stephen McCauley's 2010 novel, *Insignificant Others*, have seen such major world events and revolutionary transformations in the ways we live that they feel more like a century. But, though times have changed and we are in another country, we still find ourselves in recognizable novel of manners territory. McCauley's word choice and imagery often subtly evoke his predecessors, especially Pym and Austen. "Even though it's usually not acknowledged, at a certain point in most relationships discretion supplants fidelity as a guiding virtue," Richard Rossi, the fifty-something protagonist of *Insignificant Others*, tells us on the first page of the novel, evoking Austen's famous "truth universally acknowledged" in *Pride and Prejudice* (1). But the subtle shift here, from truths "universally acknowledged" to those which are "usually not acknowledged," serves McCauley well as he sets up his comedy of manners in this modern unmannerly era. With his sharp eye for the absurdities the intrusion of modern technology has

brought into human relationships, McCauley puts his own distinctive mark on the novel of manners. Richard's discovery that Conrad, his partner of eight years, is seeing someone on the side gives personal significance to the feeling that the universally acknowledged truths and moral certainties of the past have slipped away or been compromised in post 9/11 Boston. Still, the Pym-like description of a "particularly flavorful baked chicken dish we used to make . . . spiced with cumin and ground caraway seeds, preserved lemons, and a handful of musky herbs I'd picked up at a Lebanese grocery store" and its evocative association with "the slow, silent fade of monogamy in our lives" helps situate us in familiar novel of manners territory (1). In McCauley's world, we can see how the traditional nurturance offered by little social commonwealths has gradually given way to the disconnection of "small virtual worlds" (139). But the basic human need to "only connect" remains as vitally necessary as ever.

McCauley tells the story of Richard Rossi through his relationships with his partner, Conrad, his "insignificant other," Benjamin (a married man with two children), his coworkers at the wonderfully named Connectrix, his friends at the gyms where he works out, and his sister who lives in Buffalo. McCauley's choice to filter the story through a first person narrator rather than telling it in the third person as the other novels we've looked at do serves to further underline the erosion of belief in the possibility of universally acknowledged truths. Unlike the worlds of Catherine Morland, Anne Elliot, Lucy Honeychurch, or Belinda Bede, in Richard's world, there is only the self as reference point. His mental "At Least List" helps him rationalize his sometimes morally ambiguous behavior: "At least I used a condom. At least no one else knows. At least it's an organic chicken" (49).

At the same time, McCauley is unsparing on the incongruous moments that make up modern American life, especially the ways in which all of our techy modern communication devices are actually making it harder than ever to form genuine human connections. Richard discovers Conrad's infidelity via a text message he intercepts, and McCauley is brilliant at pointing out the ways in which our addiction to handheld electronic devices is turning traditional concepts of manners completely upside down:

It had once seemed rude to talk on a phone in public as I was about to do, but increasingly it seemed rude not to. Sitting quietly, reading the newspaper or a book as I'd done in the past, now looked suspicious and slightly pathetic. A friend of mine claimed that it was "unfair" to other people, since it made them worry about you—a solo diner tragically without friends or family with whom you could loudly discuss the details of your personal life in public. (36)

Customs or behaviors that were once associated with good manners are now used to manipulate or to create a false sense of intimacy. One of the ongoing issues Richard deals with in the course of the novel is a mentoring relationship with a young Connectrix employee, Brandon Miller. As he considers asking Brandon to go to lunch with him, Richard acknowledges that "although Brandon's office was about fifty feet from my own, I knew better than to try face-to-face communication, something that was increasingly regarded as invasive. Instead, I sent him an e-mail telling him I'd like to have lunch the following week" (31). It's another subtle reminder of how technological advances in communication are causing basic notions of human interaction like face-to-face communication to feel old-fashioned, even "invasive."

Among the imaginary scenarios of our increasingly virtual world, what is real and lasting? One of the greatest strengths of McCauley's novel of manners is the way he uses images of reality and unreality to call into question the authenticity of modern life and his characters' experiences. The apartment that they call "The Club," where Richard and Benjamin meet for sexual trysts, features a view of a building at MIT that "glowed like a mad, marvelous Tuscan village as imagined by a Cubist sculptor . . . the perfect view for two people who were in a relationship that was intimate and yet unworkable, ill-advised, and surreal" (14).

One night, at a spinning class in his "dank basement" gym, Richard's real and imaginary worlds collide, and he finally has to admit the truth about his "tribe": they are "twenty-five people sweating and pumping, bobbing up and down, not in unison, not with any particular destination in mind or even a clear purpose . . . one of the most joyless groups of people I'd ever seen" (183). When he attempts to console himself by comparing his own athletic superiority to "the ubiquitous fanatic" he calls "The Intensifier," who is "gasping, despite the vast amounts of time he invested in fitness . . . the least pretty sight in a sea of desperation," he gets an even bigger jolt (184). In the mirror, which reflects images of Richard and The Intensifier, Richard can finally see that they "could have been twins, except for the fact that I was undoubtedly older" (184). This revelation shocks Richard so much that he freezes his membership in the gym and takes refuge with his favorite Trollope novels, where he discovers that not only are "the chair and the book" as effective at calming him down as the gym but that he actually feels better, "freer . . . of the aches, pulls, and pains I'd grown accustomed to, and had associated with fitness and good health" (186). Like me, Richard's existential depression

drives him to fiction; he finds solace and renewal in the absorbing concrete details of the novel of manners.

In one of the book's climactic scenes, Richard goes with Brandon Miller to a "golf temple" that features screens in front of the driving range pods so that you can hit golf balls with vistas of famous golf courses from all over the world in the background (202). "You could change course midstream, an unlimited number of times if the mood struck you" (204). Richard's impatience with the seriousness with which the other players take their practice golfing on these fake virtual golf courses causes him to question whether "maybe my notions of the difference between what was real and what was pretend were skewed and out of date; increasingly, this *was* the real world, these images projected onto a screen" (204). This questioning of what is real and what is imaginary goes along with Richard's earlier realization that for the twenty-something Brandon and his peers:

The most important space they inhabited was defined by their gadgets – laptops, phones, iPods, and tiny, ill-defined electronic devices they were always peering into. These small virtual worlds were where they held conversations, played games, read the news, and made social connections. The three-dimensional rooms that I considered reality were of less importance to them and were filled with inconveniences like traffic and weather. (138–39)

When Richard spots his "insignificant other," Benjamin, golfing with a group of his friends, his awareness of how difficult it is in modern America to tell the real from the pretend becomes even more personal: "I was playing an imaginary game in an imaginary

place while my imaginary paramour was a few bays away playing with his imaginary friends, who imagined him to be someone completely other than who he was” (207–08).

I happened to be reading *Persuasion* and *Insignificant Others* at the same time, and initially, I struggled with McCauley’s novel. How could the stakes possibly be as high for Richard Rossi, a modern white American male, as they are for Anne Elliot? Richard has his own source of income and the freedom to go anywhere and do anything he chooses. But if Anne doesn’t marry Captain Wentworth, she is probably doomed to a life where she will continue to be “nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;—she was only Anne” (7). Though I’m still not completely convinced, McCauley makes a compelling case for the “soul-drama” inherent in navigating the “small virtual worlds” of Richard Rossi’s twenty-first-century Boston. By the very nature of their virtual-ness—appearing to be a certain thing in effect even if not in reality—these small virtual worlds may be even more difficult to deal with than the highly prescribed world of nineteenth-century English society. Certainly the moments in Richard Rossi’s life when “a strong, not entirely unfamiliar emptiness open[s] up around me” create a feeling of deeper, more existential loneliness than we have seen in the works of Austen, Forster, or Pym (56). A walk over the Longfellow Bridge when Richard feels “a current of mild air blowing in from a southerly direction and looked out along the river to see that all traces of ice had disappeared from the banks” leads him to realize that he’d “thrown all my energy in the wrong direction, onto the distractions, like Ben and insignificant others, instead of into the main event of my life. With the warm air blowing in a new weather system, it seemed possible that I could redirect my attention” (180, 181). Like Anne, Richard has issues in his life that are

holding him back. Though Richard may have more options for getting free, the things he feels trapped by are more internal—ways in which he is limited by his own view of himself and his capabilities, perhaps even by his identity as a gay man in America. The restrictions on Anne’s freedom to choose her own life are more external; they are imposed by the narrow social expectations for women in the nineteenth century. And though these nineteenth-century expectations seem more restrictive to me, who is to say which is more difficult to overcome?

Another thing that strikes me in McCauley’s novel is the way Richard’s deep self-loathing drives him to spinning classes in the purgatory-like “grimy basement” gym, where he “pedal[s] in the dark, getting nowhere” as though atoning for his morally ambiguous behavior (4). In McCauley’s world of 2010 Boston, none of the earlier certainties of Austen’s time—and even of Forster’s or Pym’s—regarding accepted standards of civilized social and moral behavior seems to have survived. The events of 9/11 have left Americans feeling vulnerable and uncertain, even unmoored. The social fabric of life is disintegrating; people have been left on their own to order their individual worlds and to find meaning and comfort in their lives. The gym has almost taken on the role of the church, a place to “work out” our feelings of unworthiness, guilt, fear, and self-loathing; a place where we can live as our own gods, in the center of our own small virtual worlds.

So, from the little social commonwealths of Anne Elliot’s early nineteenth-century world to the small virtual worlds of Richard Rossi, we have traveled far in 200 years. We have watched Catherine Morland try to negotiate the gap between Gothic fiction and real life while coming into conflict with the essential contradictions of human

nature, including her own. We have persevered with Anne Elliot to achieve a fresh chance at happiness when all hope appeared to be gone. We have bumped up against the narrow social constraints of early-twentieth-century England with Philip Herriton and Lucy Honeychurch and escaped to Italy in search of freedom and fresh possibilities. We have watched Belinda and Harriet Bede choose to create full lives for themselves without the men, lost in two world wars, who might have partnered them. And we have seen Richard Rossi trying to navigate a twenty-first-century America where all the old certainties seem to have disappeared and experience itself feels “virtual.”

So here in 2012, when having a social life feels like “a protracted unpaid performance in front of a small audience” for which we can write our own scripts daily, even hourly, on Facebook and all the authentic experiences feel like they’ve already been experienced, what does the novel of manners have to offer us (*Others* 215)?

My answer is, many things, and possibly more than we realize. In our technology-obsessed world, where we are confronted daily by headlines like “Mobile devices now outnumber population in U.S.” (*Seattle Times*), the novel of manners offers us the reassurance that individual human lives still matter. It reminds us of the nurturing wholeness—a kind of simple holiness—that comes from allowing ourselves to be thoroughly grounded in the tangible details of our own lives. One of the absurdities of modern life is that we live in a period with more time-saving electrical devices and appliances than at any other moment in history, yet we perceive ourselves as never having enough time, of constantly being “pressed for time.” The novel of manners reminds us to take our time, to savor the freshness and realness of our daily lives in the small, homely details like warm socks, flavorful baked chicken, and visits with friends

that make up our days. Woolf writes of Austen that “no romance, no adventure, no politics or intrigue could hold a candle to life in a country-house staircase as she saw it” (“Jane Austen”). Implicit in that statement is a recognition of the real strength of the novel of manners: reminding us that we can’t understand the big problems of the world until we understand—and engage with—the small ones, beginning with the things that are in front of us every day, such as work, relationships with family and friends, and managing our resources so that we can pay for the things we buy. The novel of manners reminds us that making mindful decisions daily about these small details will eventually add up to a “good” life. In its focus on the trivial, the novel of manners invites us to reclaim the fullness of our humanity from the soul-numbing effects of modern technology that seem ready to stifle it at times by being mindful to what is present before us.

In support of this assertion, I offer up two stories, one real and one fictional. As I was finishing a second draft of this paper in October 2011, I happened to go to lunch with an old friend I hadn’t seen in several months. In the interim, her husband had been seriously injured in a bicycle accident. As she was recounting the details of the multiple surgeries to repair his leg and the exhausting care he now requires at home, she surprised me by suddenly pulling out a well-worn library copy of *Some Tame Gazelle* from her bag, and saying, “*This* is what’s keeping me sane.” The quietly absurd details and life-giving comedy Pym creates in *Some Tame Gazelle* were giving comfort and sustenance to my friend in her own difficult times, just as rereading *Pride and Prejudice* had consoled me after the traumatic deposition I’d given in my other friend’s divorce.

Now for the fictional example. What does Richard Rossi do at the end of *Insignificant Others*, when even trying to ride away from himself in a spinning class can’t

comfort him or keep his anxieties about his relationships and growing older at bay? He drops his membership in the purgatorial gym and goes back to his books, “the items I had once valued most highly [which] had been judged by their covers [by his decorator partner, Conrad] and put into storage” (56). And not just any books, but the thick, detailed novels of Trollope and Dickens and other Victorian authors, works teeming with human life and experience in every form—high, low, rich, poor, male, female; all set against a backdrop of social change that probably seemed as momentous and unsettling to them as the technological revolution we’re living through now feels to us. ““I thought I knew them,”” Richard says of his books, ““but it’s amazing how much more there is to learn from them than I realized”” (144). There are many things Richard might learn from his Victorian novels: that there is a kind of peace and grace that goes along with self-acceptance, and that other people have lived through unsettling times and found, not only ways to cope, but moments of enjoyment—even humor—in the midst of them.

Being able to lose ourselves in reading a novel of manners offers its own kind of authentic experience, a counterbalance to the many moments of our daily lives that feel so un-real. When human foibles and the vicissitudes of life tempt us to despair, the novel of manners reminds us that we don’t need to take ourselves quite so seriously: we can laugh instead. When we feel most bereft and disconnected from ourselves, the novel of manners reminds us that we are not without resources; even in this technological age, the means of nurturing our spirits still lies within our grasp.

As a genre that helps us grapple with the realities—and virtual realities—of who people are, I believe the novel of manners is crucial for the twenty-first century. The novel of manners reminds us of what to value when we forget: that being part of real (as

opposed to virtual) human communities is sustaining and that small virtual worlds will never replace little social commonwealths. We have never been more in need of the kind of literary experience that helps us focus on the value of the “sudden moments of joy that sometimes come to us in the middle of an ordinary day” (*Gazelle* 52). And if I may make my own “bold surmise,” I will assert that we need classic novels of manners like those we’ve just looked at, as well as the novels of manners yet to be written, more than we have ever needed them before.

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The Commonwealth is active in a huge number of areas, including ecology, health and economics, providing and sharing information, training and expertise to further the aims of the organisation. The Heads of Government Meeting is held every two years, where the leaders of the member states get together to discuss current issues. Commonwealth Day is held in the second week of March every year, where Commonwealth citizens, particularly children, have a chance to celebrate their friendship. The Commonwealth also hosts sporting and arts events. There is an annual writers prize, which has been won i