

Rescues in Jane Austen Novels Reading Group Preparation

When this topic was first raised, we considered both a discussion on gentlemen in Austen and a discussion on “rescues” in Austen. For this discussion, we will focus on the latter, but I do want to connect a character’s ability to rescue or be rescued to that character’s station -- in the case of the men, their rank as gentlemen. Consider, for example, the exploration of “gallantry” in Tiffany Schubert’s essay:

“Fair Lady and Humble Knight: Chivalric Education in *Emma*.” (Available online via the *Persuasions* archives; direct link is here: <http://www.jasna.org/essaycontest/2016/graduate-2.html>) **We will be considering examples in all of Austen’s novels.**

Some questions to think about:

- When we think of “rescue,” we imagine acts of heroism, a snatching back from some immediate physical danger. But what *figurative* rescues can you recall? Consider, for example, in *Emma*, where Frank Churchill physically rescues Harriet from gypsies, whereas Mr. Knightley figuratively rescues Harriet on the dance floor.
- How does a man’s position/station in society enable (or inhibit) his means of performing a rescue? Consider, for example, in *Pride and Prejudice*:

Mr. Darcy’s means of procuring Wickham’s commission (and his ability to bribe Wickham into accepting it) as he rescued both Lydia and Elizabeth.

- What examples can you recall of women performing (or seeming to perform) rescues?
- What examples can you recall of a character, man or woman, seemingly rescuing him- or herself? And how does one’s social station enable or inhibit one’s ability to do “self-rescue?”