

## Author



# “Do What Pleases You”: An Emblematic Account of the Dangers of Erotic Verse in Tasso’s *Aminta* (1573)

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With goals such as mastering the Italian language, completing a double major in Comparative Literature and European Studies, and attending graduate school, Alana Shilling demonstrates that she is committed to excellence. Her undergraduate research experience has only motivated her further. She advises others to start early and to find a patient, inspiring mentor who will be encouraging as well as challenging. Alana credits her mentor, Dr. Jane O. Newman, with teaching her the virtues of assiduous research and the importance of never taking academic claims for granted. When not examining epic or pastoral verse, you can find Alana swimming, surfing, playing the piano, sipping coffee, and hanging out with friends.

## Key Terms

- ◆ Arcadia
- ◆ Emblem
- ◆ Epic
- ◆ *Imprese*
- ◆ Intertextuality
- ◆ *locus amoenus*
- ◆ Narcissus
- ◆ Pastoral

## Abstract

Reaching the height of their popularity in the 16th and 17th centuries, the genre of the emblems is largely overlooked today. This genre, which has often been dismissed as a mere curiosity juxtaposes an image with a verse to express a conceit. The mode of the emblem is comparison. The image and verse are not simply variations of an identical claim. Instead, their very juxtaposition implies a specific and novel thought. The emblem theorist Giovinetti imagined that the image formed the emblem’s attractive and absorbing “body,” while the accompanying verse constituted the emblem’s “soul.” The Giovinetti formulation was quite popular, and Torquato Tasso wrote a treatise on the subject. In this analysis, the central problem of Tasso’s pastoral drama the *Aminta* is formulated as one of emblematic completion. The *Aminta* is an idyllic pastoral confection in which morality is absent. The hedonistic tendencies of the drama set the pastoral at odds with Tasso’s other works, most notably *Jerusalem Delivered*, a stern and often moralizing epic. While erotic verse figures prominently in both texts, the *Aminta* allegorizes the Sirenic dangers of the pastoral tradition and figurative language precisely through their absence. The *Aminta* presents the erotic verse, the ‘body’ of the text, unaccompanied by a moralizing ‘soul,’ rejecting any implied necessity of linking such hedonism with moral redemption.

## Faculty Mentor



Alana Shilling and I delved into a relatively arcane, and yet increasingly prominent area of study, namely that of emblematics, which crosses the disciplinary boundaries of literature, history, art history, and philosophy in ways that are symptomatic of the most innovative of interdisciplinary approaches to the field of early modern studies. The present paper offers a meticulous reading of how the “confection” of Torquato Tasso’s pastoral play, the *Aminta*, figures the problem of an un glossed emblem and of uncontained poetic language in turn, a problem to which Tasso’s more well known text, the *Jerusalem Delivered*, then offered a rather more somber response. Alana is a remarkable young woman; a real scholar who, already as an undergraduate, has achieved a level of sophistication in her dealings with the literature of the Renaissance and Early Modern periods in Europe that I have not seen in any other student at the undergraduate level in my twenty-two years of teaching.

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## Introduction: Tasso's Oeuvre and the *Impresa*

One can hardly accuse academia of ignoring Torquato Tasso. Although the 16th-century poet and courtier has not been granted the same recognition as a canonical figure, such as Dante Alighieri, the pulse of Tasso studies remains strong. Yet the critical fortunes of the Tassian oeuvre are markedly uneven. Published in 1594 shortly before his death, Tasso's "Il Conte O Vero De *L'Imprese*" dialogue has been largely overlooked. In "Il Conte," Tasso discusses the purpose, function and formal characteristics marking *impresae*. He describes the *impresa* in luminous terms and styles the genre as "an expression of a significant thought of the soul" (*Il Dialoghi*, 1901; all subsequent references to Tasso's *dialogo* will be taken from this edition). Tasso thus endows the *impresa*, a genre that combines an image and a verse in order to express a particular idea, with explicitly transcendent underpinnings. For Tasso, the *impresa* endows ethereal thought with a mantle of materiality. He restricts his definition of the *impresa*, which he argues depicts "only those thoughts of noble souls" (*Il Dialoghi*, 384). Tasso thus imagines the *impresa* not simply as a thought embodied, but one of an expressly exemplary moral caliber. This is not to say that Tasso's *dialogo* is entirely concerned with the transcendent. Generally speaking, his text is more conventional than aberrant and is in many ways indistinguishable from his contemporaries' treatises on the *impresa* and its generic sibling, the emblem.<sup>1</sup>

### *Imprese* and Emblems: A Background

The critical neglect of the "Il Conte" dialogue synecdochically illustrates the emblem's own fortunes in academia. The emblem, which enjoyed a vogue most often in courtly and academic circles of the 16th and 17th centuries, juxtaposed two modes of representation, word and image, and was composed of a figure accompanied by a verse, or *lemma*, and a motto. (For a discussion of the problematic usage of emblem vocabulary, see Hessel Miedema's "The Term Emblema in Alciati.") While neither verse nor image expressed the same meaning, the juxtaposition of the two suggested an often-abstruse claim. The nature of this

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of such treatises, see Robert Klein's "Form and Meaning." Incidentally, although Tasso claims that "Io ho letto che son molte differenze fra l'impresa e i simboli e gli emblemi..." (377), this insistence that the *impresa* is distinct from the emblem is misplaced. Both emblem and *impresa* function similarly. Emblem theorists, such as Mario Praz, characterize the *impresa* as a "companion genre to the emblem" (*Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, 53). Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the generic barriers between the *impresa* and the emblem, if not entirely negotiable, will be considered at least quite fluid.

implied conceit was remarkably fluid and the range of emblematic themes extended from the martial and amorous to moral axioms or, in the case of Jesuit emblem books, to religious precepts.

Emblem theorist Mario Praz has eloquently argued that the genre is a gesture of an "imagination which tries to overreach itself," and thus implies a crucial transposition of the appetite and intellect (1964). Praz's characterization is quite apt since the emblem does attempt to endow seemingly ethereal thought with substance. This tension between sublimity and materiality, which is implicit in the emblem's very yoking of word and image, was captured in Giovio's (Paulus Iovius) influential *Dialogo dell'impresa militari e amorose* of 1550. (For a discussion of the *impresa* and a review of the treatises written on it, see Robert Klein's "The Theory of Figurative Expression in Italian Treatises on the *Impresa*"). This emblem preserves the crucial union between image and verse and was composed of a juxtaposition of the "body" of the piece and its "soul." While the image, or "body," provided the viewer with a moment of sensual delight, the "soul" was comprised of the verse glossing the image. This concept transported the viewer into the sublime realm of the intellect and thus transcended the transitory and particular delight offered by the image. The viewer's sensual and intellectual appetencies are thus satisfied. Yet, the Prazian account of emblematics is not wholly accepted. For instance, Klein rejects Praz's tendency to consider the emblem as a satiation of the intellect's appetite. Instead, Klein highlights the implicit neo-Platonism of the genre and claims that the *impresa* formed the "image of a concept," the materialization of an Idea (9). Both scholars, though, tacitly assert a lack of tension between the sensual and intellectual realms.

### An Emblematic Methodology for Tasso's *Aminta*

Significantly, the Giovian opposition of 'body' and 'soul' figures prominently in Tasso's own account of the *impresa*, and Tasso vociferously argues for the indispensability of the verse since "the motto, in the guise of the soul, gives life to the body" (*Il Dialoghi*, 377). In addition to highlighting the importance of the *impresa*'s soul, Tasso imagines a rather interesting temporality for the genre. According to him, the *impresa*, even when it illustrates past events, "always ... looks toward the future" (*Il Dialoghi*, 385). Although it occupies a seemingly minor position in the landscape of Tasso's larger project, this mostly ignored treatise is perhaps more significant than it might at first appear. Tasso's logic of emblematic thought functions as a necessary generic model for

another Tasso text that is largely underrated, the *Aminta*. In this spirit, attending to an overlooked treatise on an overlooked genre is essential to avoid overlooking Tasso's pastoral drama. When considered as an emblem, the *Aminta* functions not simply as an innocent pastoral drama, but also as a veiled allegory of the dangers of figurative language, a poetic imperative that surfaces in Tasso's later *Jerusalem Delivered*.

Although secondary literature on the rustic drama is hardly voluminous, *Aminta* is often received as a simple pastoral confection whose theme centers on C.P. Brand's notion of "the triumph of youthful love—natural, instinctive, passionate, unhindered by considerations of morals or honour or convenience—over indifference, egotism, disillusionment, lust"(41). While Brand is certainly not alone in styling the *Aminta* as an untroubled pastoral glorification of desire, the landscape of *Aminta* criticism is not completely populated with such straightforward readings. Criticism has not been entirely judicious, though, in its survey of the *Aminta* or in its assessment of the text's place in the matrix of Tasso's larger project.

*Aminta* scholarship in English condenses into four methodologies. Older scholars, including Domenico Vittorini (1948) and Richard Cody (1969), consider the drama an articulation of Renaissance neo-Platonism.<sup>2</sup> Even here, the problematic aspect of the *Aminta*'s reception is discernible. Neo-Platonism hardly seems compatible with desire "unhindered" by morality. More recent approaches to the text, such as Lisa Jepson's, underline the *Aminta*'s historicity, interpreting the play as a subversive commentary on the political constellations formed by the Este court (23-24). Other critics, for example, Maria Stampino, deem the *Aminta* exemplary of the epideicticism which Stampino claims is implicit in the sphere of performance on the Renaissance stage (1997).<sup>3</sup> Most commonly, however, scholars consider the *Aminta* intertextually and analyze the pas-

toral's appropriation by canonical British poets, such as Milton and Spenser. An allusive approach of this kind has been adopted by such scholars as David Shore (1980) and, more recently, Patrick Cook (2000).<sup>4</sup> Although English criticism has proved Protean in its assessment of the *Aminta*, its practitioners do share a tendency to see the text merely as refractive. Whether New Historical or New Critical, a significant number of scholars dismiss the *Aminta* too readily, turning to the play only with an air of quasi-reluctance, either as a symptom of Renaissance neo-Platonic thought or as a single point in the labyrinthine network of intertextual poetics. Moreover, scholars often fail to locate the play within Tasso's larger oeuvre, and when the *Aminta*'s place in Tasso's larger project is addressed, it is done only in passing. For instance, the *Aminta*'s relationship to the later *Jerusalem Delivered*, which is crucial to understanding the pastoral, is generally ignored.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps criticism's reluctance to focus exclusively on the *Aminta* is telling. The reader is lulled by the *Aminta*'s Tropes and emerges from the text far removed from it. Tasso's appropriation of the pastoral tradition is itself telling; by embracing the pastoral so fully, Tasso simultaneously and consciously condemns it.

There is in fact an odd congruence between the history, reception and interpretation of Tasso's text and the generic conventions of pastoral itself. Like *Aminta* criticism in general, the conventional pastoral relies on a paradoxical interplay of retreat and approach, and Arcadia often addresses a concern, whether courtly or poetic, most effectively by its own supposed distance from it. Thus, it would appear that critical proximity would indeed be misplaced when analyzing the *Aminta*. Instead, it seems strangely fitting to view the *Aminta* with a critical gesture of retreat though this 'retreat' must be tempered. The *Aminta* should not be viewed as exterior to Tasso's oeuvre or as anomalous. The emblem must be recognized as the paradigm for the *Aminta*. Otherwise, a criticism is in danger of passing an injudicious assessment of the play as so many preceding critics have.

The drama is, as Vittorini complains, a piece of erotic pastoral puff (1948). Yet, this is precisely the point and the rea-

<sup>2</sup> For a rather cursory example of the *Aminta*'s neo-Platonism, see Domenico Vittorini's "Realistic Elements in Tasso's *Aminta*: A Revision." For a more involved neo-Platonic reading, see Richard Cody's "The Landscape of the Mind: Pastoralism and Platonic Theory in Tasso's *Aminta* and Shakespeare's Early Comedies." While Vittorini condemns the *Aminta*'s supposed "pseudo-Platonism," Cody sees the *Aminta* as an example of "orthodox Italian pastoralism" that fuses a "psychology of human love" with elements of neo-Platonic theology, which ultimately celebrate the poet himself.

<sup>3</sup> Although methodologically unique, Stampino's analyses are blighted by a dearth of textual detail, which is in fact due to the fact that her interest in the *Aminta* is merely incidental as her main argument focuses on the fortunes of performance studies. For her analysis of the *Aminta* as a "text-based event," see Stampino's "Epideictic Pastoral: Rhetorical Tensions in the Staging of Torquato Tasso's *Aminta*."

<sup>4</sup> For Cook's examination of the *Aminta* as a source for Milton's *Comus*, see his "Eroticism and the Integral Self: Milton's Poems, 1645 and the Italian Pastoral Tradition." Shore, on the other hand, locates the *Aminta* through its Spenserian appropriations. See Shore's "The Shepherd and the Court: Pastoral Poetics in Spenser's Colin Clout and Tasso's *Aminta*."

<sup>5</sup> For instance, in an otherwise extensive discussion of the Renaissance pastoral, Cook's "Eroticism and the Integral Self" addresses the relationship between Tasso's epic and pastoral merely as a symptom of the poet's entry "onto the Virgilian generic itinerary," which is itself important only inasmuch as it relates to Milton's oeuvre.

son for adulation and not condemnation. In order to grasp the more serious implications of the *Aminta*, however, it should be read through the lens of Tasso's treatise on *impresae*, in which the tension between the sensual and intellectual realms figures prominently. The central problem of the *Aminta* is in fact one of emblematic completion. While *Jerusalem Delivered* presents its readers with a complete emblem, in which erotic verse is tempered by morality, the *Aminta* leaves the emblem incomplete, by presenting the sensuous 'body' of the text without its moralizing 'soul'. The *Aminta* constructs a heterocosmic Arcadia that, at first glance, hardly traverses the distance between sublimity and materiality. Yet, its inability to transcend the realm of base sensuality is itself significant. Emptied of its moralizing 'verse,' the specter of figurative language is all the more dangerous. The *Aminta* presents us with the prospect of eroticism unchecked by a moral imperative. The dangerous implications of the unbridled eroticism native to the *Aminta* become clearer when Tasso's sterner *Jerusalem Delivered* is analyzed. The *Aminta* is imported into the more severe epic landscape of Tasso's later text, yet the danger of erotic verse is neutralized in the epic with the presence of an explicit moral core.

### The Fortunes of Erotic Verse in the *Aminta*

The universe of the *Aminta* is permeated with the oft-cited injunction "do what pleases you," and the pastoral drama's endorsement of a *carpe diem* philosophy (a familiar trope in the Arcadian realm) is seemingly patent (*Aminta*, 2000; all subsequent references to the *Aminta* will be taken from this edition). Although not overtly problematic, this hedonism is troubling when contextualized by Tasso's later moral severity. The drama opens with *Aminta's* love-object Silvia being counseled by her would-be confidant, Dafne, who chastises the girl: "You would, then, really, Silvia, / waste all the passing youthful tears / far from the pleasures Venus offers us?" (*Aminta*, 1.1.1-3). This emphasis on the inevitable prospect of fleeting youth and the subsequent valorization of the capricious gratification of pleasure is omnipresent in the *Aminta*. One might argue that the aging Dafne functions as a crystallization of Time's inevitable movement, a materialization of the exigency of the "do what pleases you" dictum. The *Aminta's* tendency to place a strong accent upon hedonism becomes most apparent during the seemingly tragic climax of the drama. When she assumes that her lover is dead, Silvia's choice of punishment—to remain alive and alone—is a version of the very chastity she champions for much of the pastoral (*Aminta*, 4.2.176). Moreover, the actual resolution of the *Aminta*,

which concludes with Silvia and her eponymous lover happily joined, codifies this Arcadian celebration of sensuality. The closing lines of the pastoral assert this hedonistic attitude even more emphatically as the Chorus wryly asserts, "Let others be so blessed. / I'd rather win my nymph / with brief entreaties and with service brief" (*Aminta*, 5.1.149-150). Thus, the *Aminta* endorses with apparent limpidity the pursuit of Amore ungoverned by morality. Some might argue that this explicit celebration of sensual pleasure is provided simply as pastoral fodder for d'Este court or perhaps as a mere symptom of conventional pastoral eroticism. However, a closer reading reveals this overtly sybaritic philosophy as no more than a veil concealing weightier theoretical claims.

The text of the *Aminta* problematizes its own hedonism. This implicit self-censure reveals itself most explicitly through the Satyr who, like *Aminta*, desires Silvia. The Satyr ultimately decides, "I'll force, I'll rape, I'll take what she denies" (*Aminta*, 2.1.81-82). The Satyr's recourse to violence is a conventional solution in the pastoral world. Yet, *Aminta* bears a rather sinister resemblance to the Satyr when he is convinced by Tirsi's reprehensible logic: "And if she wants that your delight should be / your theft or taking her by force, and not her gift, who cares / what way you do the deed?" (*Aminta* 2.3.83-5). Although this episode appears to champion the use of brute force for the gratification of desire, this action contains within itself its own reproach. In the pastoral tradition, the figure of the Satyr is characteristically associated with coarse, brutish lust. Although the drama would seem to encourage such action blatantly, the troubling parallel between *Aminta* and the Satyr that ensues negates this unqualified glorification of sensual pleasure. By implicitly aligning *Aminta* with the Satyr, the eponymous hero is tacitly drawn downward, suspended between the human and the bestial realms. And yet, this implicit moral negation cannot be realized by the *Aminta* alone. An intertextual gloss must be supplied in order for the problematic dimensions of this episode to become apparent.

### A Somber Index: The Pastoral in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* and *Aminta*

Just as pastoral convention must be understood in order to make evident the grave implications of the sinister parallel between *Aminta* and the Satyr, so too must the pastoral drama be contextualized. Given Tasso's version of the *impresa* and its theoretical tendency to be inextricably tied to the future, even when retrospective, it is fitting to address the emblematic rhetoric linking the *Aminta* to its well-

known younger sibling *Jerusalem Delivered*. Completed in 1575 and surrounded by a flurry of debate, both contemporary and modern, Tasso's epic cannot boast the same critical neglect as the *Aminta*. Moreover, *Jerusalem Delivered*, with its emphasis on stern spirituality, seems at odds with the absent morality of the same poet's pastoral text. The poetic ramifications of the *Aminta* are nevertheless emblematically embedded in Tasso's epic poem. When thrust against the index of *Jerusalem Delivered*, Tasso's pastoral transcends the Arcadian realm and instead becomes an allegorical stage for Tasso's poetic theory, which plays a noticeable role in the poet's later epic. The *Aminta* exemplifies the necessity of joining attractive, sensual verse to an intellectual, 'moralizing' precept.

Before exploring the nature of the intratextual relationship between Tasso's epic and pastoral, it is crucial to note that verses steeped in the emblematic tradition are prevalent in the *Aminta*. In one of her numerous monologues, for instance, Dafne attempts to convince Silvia of the import of love by citing exemplars from nature: "See there that loving dove, / who softly calling, sweetly murmuring, / does kiss his loving mate" (*Aminta* 1.1.137-139). Dafne employs an emblematic paradigm of marital fidelity in order to demonstrate the virtue inherent in love. The emblem of the doves is utilized here as a rhetorical gesture and portrays an exemplar of marital, not virginal virtue. This is not to say that the *Aminta* explicitly endorses the institution of marriage—it does not. Rather, the doves merely encourage the overt devalorization of chastity that is present throughout the drama. This emblem, which seems to quite simply cast doubt upon the virtue of chastity, apparently bolsters the type of claim that Cook makes when he argues that while "Tasso neutralizes the pastoral potential for subversion, Milton insists upon it"(131).

Though to say that emblems function so simply throughout the *Aminta* is a glib assessment. As the monologue continues, Dafne proceeds to cull another exemplar from the emblem tradition: "How much affection can you see, / and with how many sweet embracing folds / the vine entwines about the one it loves" (*Aminta* 1.1.151-153). Although this emblem appears to operate in the same vein as its antecedent, providing a model of the boons of realizing erotic desire, the tacit message of this figure is less straightforward. The emblem also functions as an incipient allegory for the dangerous ease with which the pastoral can be misread. The emblem of the tree and the vine is in fact a figure of violence, signifying a dangerous, consumptive relationship. Thus, the emblem ironizes Dafne's speech and becomes a symbol of persuasion *in malo*. Indeed, the figure

of plants entwined in a disastrous embrace contains an implication that is self-reflexive, drawing attention to its own inaptness. By employing an image redolent with significance both amorous and violent, the emblem recalls Dafne's own Ovidian heritage. For the Dafne of the *Metamorphoses*, love is not a boon but rather a terrifying force that reifies the love-object, exiling the recipient quite literally to the natural world.

The very act of interpretation is itself rendered problematic throughout the drama, suggesting that it is just as easy to misread within pastoral as it is to misread the pastoral itself. Just as the emblem of the vine and the tree gloss Dafne's counsel ironically, so too does *Jerusalem Delivered* problematize a literal acceptance of the "do what pleases you" maxim of the *Aminta*. In a piece whose very resolution relies upon reading or, more precisely, misreading, the weight of interpretation is clearly felt. The play begins with a gesture of disguise and highlights the instability of signs: "Who would believe that clothed in human form / and so arrayed in shepherd's humble garb / a god could hide?" (*Aminta*, 1. 1-3). Indeed, the pastoral narrowly avoids a tragic conclusion, and it is misreading that allows the *Aminta*'s blissful resolution. Silvia becomes the willing recipient of Aminta's desire only after she supposes that he is dead. This assumption, in turn, is mistakenly supported by Ergasto who also assumes that Aminta has perished. Aminta, it must be remembered, attempts suicide only after having heard from Nerina that Silvia was consumed by wolves (*Aminta*, 3.2, 4.2). Thus, the pastoral world is protected from tragic repercussions only through several incidents predicated on misreading.

Significantly, these moments privileging flawed interpretation stem from a single flaw. Nerina, Ergasto, Silvia, and Aminta each crucially misread signs. They each assume a direct correlation between appearance and meaning. That is, Nerina misreads the significance of Silvia's veil while Ergasto misreads the outcome of Aminta's fall. These rustic characters might very well allegorize the implicit danger of reading pastoral literature, of confusing "seeming" with "being." Put in emblematic terms, these potentially tragic moments of misreading stem from incorrectly joining an 'image' created by the senses to its intellectual implication. In short, the characters continually supply 'images' with the wrong gloss, completing the emblem incorrectly. Silvia's veil, which initiates these microcosmic travesties of reading, might be considered a metaphor for the pastoral itself, a veil that simultaneously reveals and conceals.<sup>6</sup> Yet, in order to see the inherent danger of the pastoral tradition in Tasso's

<sup>6</sup> The correspondence between the veil and pastoral was suggested by Professor James T. Chiampì.

texts, we must turn to the figure of the *locus amoenus* and its versions in the *Jerusalem Delivered*.

Throughout Tasso's epic, the pastoral intervenes and is regularly yoked to misreading. The pastoral first appears in canto 7, when Erminia seeks refuge in the very bosom of an archetypically rustic setting: with a family of shepherds. Although one might be tempted to read this passage as an Edenic moment providing a bucolic retreat from the epic narrative, this claim is itself problematic. Even though this "solitary haunt of shepherds" appears to be a fount of rustic simplicity, the passage is tacitly rife with danger (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 1987; all subsequent references will be taken from this edition).

Erminia, we must not forget, arrives in this pastoral realm after a flight "without direction and without / guidance" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 8.1). Conventionally, figures of meandering are perilous and signify a moment of dangerous confusion (For a detailed treatment of this theme, see Patricia Parker's "Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode.") Moreover, in terms of the epic narrative itself, the very presence of a pastoral interlude is questionable since passages digressing from the completion of the epic task are themselves dangerous, and implicitly encourage a delay in the narrative.

The greater potential danger posed by the pastoral, which is only latent in Erminia's idyll, nevertheless emerges in the next canto when a "county lad" claims that a decapitated corpse with a severed hand is that of Rinaldo, the premier hero of the Christian army (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 8.53-54). This false narrative, whose veracity is implicitly attested to by its own pastoral simplicity, is a vehicle for further divisions within the already fractured Christian camp: "Now every slumbering rancor is renewed: they call the French people wicked and tyrannical; and the hatred that now can no longer be bottled up in them comes spilling forth in insolent threatenings" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 8.73). Although this connection between the rustic's account and the near-revolt might appear specious, it is learned later that the supposed shepherd was in fact a "shrewd manservant" of the Circean Armida and had indeed "sowed in them that / seed of suspicion that being nurtured thereafter bore fruit in rifts and discords..." (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 14.55). Pastoralism thus possesses a double function. The would-be shepherd encourages credulity, but this is a gesture of misdirection. The pastoral is not only shot through with an abundant potential for misreading, but even encourages it. The pastoral element undergoes a reverse generic alchemy in Tasso's epic and becomes a dangerous generic gesture

encouraging either delay or potentially disastrous moments of misreading.

While the generic connection between the two texts is telling, there is a more explicit intratextual connection between Tasso's works. As Silvia's would-be confidant, Dafne is one of the most vocal characters populating the pastoral landscape of the *Aminta*. The older nymph consistently insists that "all the earth / is now infused with love" (*Aminta*, 1.1, 134-136). Although Dafne's metaphorical paradigms are admittedly common literary topoi, this vision of nature rendered lustful becomes tacitly germane when we turn to the *Jerusalem Delivered*. In Tasso's epic, the image of nature infused with desire figures prominently in the description of Armida's Bower of Bliss: "The doves redouble their kisses; each animal takes / thought again of love; it seems that the durable oak, and the laurel chaste...conceive / and breath love's sweetest signs and sensibilities" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 16.16). Although seemingly paradisaical, Armida's island is significantly fallacious, and is in reality a sign of earthly error, a locus of temporal folly. (For a masterful reading of canti 14 through 16 of *Jerusalem Delivered*, see James T. Chiampì's "Tasso's Rinaldo in the Body of the Text.")

Although Armida's would-be paradise resonates with intratextual connections to the *Aminta*, it is in a less apparent version of the pastoral in Tasso's epic that the most explicit gloss is found for the pastoral drama. The forest, enchanted in canto 13, is the locus of this crucial index for the *Aminta*. This bewitched grove terrifies the crusaders (including Tancredi) and must be conquered by Rinaldo. While Armida's bower enacts the danger of the *locus amoenus*, it is in the forest that the tacit peril of the pastoral realm is simultaneously invoked and unveiled.

The forest, like Armida's island and the *Aminta* itself, appeals to sensual desire. The danger posed by the forest becomes most explicit when Rinaldo enters the grove. When the crusader first arrives in the forest, the narrator emphasizes that the knight's "reason is refusing faith in what his sense would proffer him as truth" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 18.25). The grove thus encourages a potentially disastrous tension between intellect and impression--a pernicious split illustrating the mendacious danger of sensual delight. More important than the forest's tendency to confound reason, however, is the strange pastoralism of the scene. Upon continuing through the forest, Rinaldo observes, "an oak appears before him that (making its own incision) / opens its hollow entrails in fertility and gives birth; and there issues out of / it (O marvelous!), clothed in strange fashion, a nymph full-grown" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 18.26). The narrator thus describes the

literal embodiment of a figure from the *Aminta*. In the forest of the *Jerusalem Delivered*, nature comes alive with the physical effects of love. In the next octave, the nymphs issuing forth are described in a theatrical simile: “As the stage displays, or as we see sometimes painted the woodland goddesses, / their arms bare and their gowns girt up, with buskins fine / and tresses disarrayed, in such manner appeared the fictive daughters of the / rude tree trunks, except that in place of bow, and quiver one holds a lute” (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 18.27). Crucially, this scene draws attention to its own overwhelming pastoralism. Yet, this overtly pastoral scene’s purpose is solely to encourage misreading.

The episode is not merely a blind appropriation of the pastoral convention, yet at this moment, the pastoral is both embedded in illusion and is paradoxically its most truthful. The narrator emphasizes the fact that the bucolic scene is a simulacrum as he carefully notes the mimesis that underwrites the entire scene. The nymphs appear “as the stage displays” or “as we see sometimes painted,” and are wholly located in the realm of specifically theatrical mimetic illusion. Yet, the illusive quality of the scene is simultaneously reminiscent of the *Aminta* itself for Silvia is, etymologically, “of the woods.” Indeed, it is crucial to note that the narrative does not simply describe a pastoral scene, but rather the performance of one. As the episode progresses, it becomes clear that the nymphs appear on the pretext of reuniting Rinaldo with his love-object, Armida. Here desire is valorized, and the landscape literally “grows joyous” at the supposed possibility of love. The wood, apparently glad at the prospect of a fulfillment of desire, exemplifies the monstrous aspect of an earth literally amenable to desire. The implicitly monstrous implications of a world infused with love become patent as Rinaldo vanquishes the illusion: “he ... doubles his blows against the defended tree, which groans at the blows as if it had a soul” (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 18.36). Thus, the *Aminta*’s figuration of a world driven by love is reassessed while the horrors of its literal realization are simultaneously unveiled.

The forest of romance begins with a scene that is a version of the *Aminta* in microcosm and forms a crucial gloss for Tasso’s pastoral. Unlike the characters of the *Aminta*, however, the epic hero remains immune to such appeals to desire. Yet, Rinaldo was not always an exemplar of moral probity. As the reader returns to Armida’s island, he glimpses a morally wavering Rinaldo, readily lulled into a state of spiritual slumber. Indeed, the forest boasts similarly Edenic attributes: “Bedewed with manna was every leaf, and honey dripped from the trunks, / and again and again was heard that strange jocund harmony of singing...”

(18.24). Yet, there is a disjunction between the two loci of delight. The power of Armida’s enchanted isle is neutralized in this would-be grove (18.24). This is not due to any inherent ‘flaw’ of the forest, but rather attests to the newfound morality of Rinaldo whose spirituality has been fortified anew. Rinaldo’s strengthened morality is exemplified at the very outset of the grove episode by his response to the “pleasantly shady” grove. While walking through the forest, Rinaldo feels a “great rumbling of deep fearfulness” (18.19), a response that starkly differs from the “footloose and eager” attitude characterizing his earlier lapse (14.59). Indeed, the forest of romance literally mirrors Armida’s artful Eden. However, this mirror is different from the Narcissistic cousin that lurks in the enchantress’ bower.

### Versions of the Mirror

The function of the mirror might very well be considered a metaphorical statement of the unfinished emblem created by the *Aminta*. In Tasso’s pastoral, the figure of the mirror is Ovidian and implicitly invokes the folly of Narcissus. Yet, in Tasso’s epic, the mirror acquires an ambivalent quality and, while retaining its Narcissian resonance, is also endowed with a positive dimension, as a mirror of truth. The duality of the mirror is most apparent in Armida’s bower where the premier Christian hero, Rinaldo, lies languid in the lap of Armida: “a tremulous and wanton smile glints in her glistening / eyes ... he lifts his face to hers / and avidly feeding on her his ravenous gaze, is consumed and destroyed” (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 16.18-19). This image is shot through with a certain violence and the mirror becomes a figure of dangerous, consumptive self-reflexivity.

The Narcissian version of the mirror finds redemption in a more positive counterpart, the adamant shield, which is the instrument awakening Rinaldo to his epic task. Rinaldo shakes off his moral torpor only after Ubaldo and Carlo present him with the spectre of his own visage: “He turns his gaze upon the shield, in which is mirrored for him / what manner of man he is become ... As a man by deep and heavy sleep oppressed returns to himself after long / delirious raving, so he returned by gazing upon himself” (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 16.31). Quite different from the consumptive self-reflexivity of earlier mirrors, the shield revalorizes the myth of Narcissus; self-knowledge is redeemed and the element of peril surrounding the mirror is neutralized. As Chiampì has characterized it, the shield functions as “an important agent of his return to the referential” (501).

The figure of the mirror is also prominent in the *Aminta*, though, here, the ambivalent quality of reflection is absent.

The mirror of truth is not present in this pastoral world and the figure is accordingly stripped of its transcendent potential. Indeed, the conspicuous absence of the virtuous aspect of the mirror is underlined by explicitly embedding the mirror in a narrowly Narcissian tradition. The figure of the mirror is nevertheless prevalent in the text of the *Aminta* and first appears as Dafne attempts to persuade Silvia to cast off her chastity. After theorizing that it is Silvia's lack of knowledge that encourages her lack of desire, Dafne narrates the story of her own initiation into the mysteries of love. Finally, Dafne remarks, "No lovely less than you if you should glance within the mirror of some fountain's pond / is Amaryllis" (*Aminta*, 1.1.90-93). Here, Dafne unwittingly stages the implicit danger in which this literary landscape is immersed. In the Ovidian tale, Narcissus' salvation from consumptive self-love was a lack of self-knowledge. By encouraging Silvia to enact the deadly error of Narcissus, Dafne both shows herself to be a misleading guide and exemplifies the error that pervades the *Aminta's* landscape. Indeed, the danger of the Narcissian mirror is signified by the Satyr as well: "I am not one to scorn... / I saw myself reflected in the liquid sea" (*Aminta*, 2.1, 36-37). The Satyr's glimpse into the mirror is not wholly self-reflexive since it takes as its object the affection of Silvia. This version of the mirror retains the element of danger implicit in Narcissian reflection since the Satyr's moment of self-recognition, in which he glimpses only the positive aspects of his reflection, threatening to inject an element of violence into the pastoral world. Even the seeming mirror of nature is mendacious here, engendering its own dissolution.

The mirror prefaces another episode threatening to introduce violence via rape into the pastoral landscape of the *Aminta*. While trying to convince Tirsi of the efficacy of raping Silvia, Dafne argues that Silvia's artlessness is not wholly valid and cites a Narcissian moment of self-admiration: "she ... seemed to take delight in her / reflection ... she seemed / to ask the water counsel" (*Aminta*, 2.2,39-42). This moment of self-regard renders Silvia both "artful" and amenable to desire. However, the episode is emphatically monadic and functions as a tool for self-containment rather than a portal to truth.

The differing versions of the mirror allegorize the possibilities of the alluring garden trope. The mirror itself symbolizes the central flaw of the *Aminta*, demonstrating the danger of allowing the spectator or reader to complete the emblem and supply the text with its 'soul'. When the pastoral becomes a mirror in the narrowly Narcissian sense, it is refused its moral redemption and becomes implicitly Sirenian. The *locus amoenus* might well be considered the

embodiment of the implicit tension in Tasso's poetic theory between the sensual and distracting 'images' created by overtly erotic verse and their moralizing 'soul'.

The necessity of bridling seductive verse with morality is made explicit in Tasso's epic. In *Jerusalem Delivered*, the Platonic fear of mimesis (for an exhaustive account of Tasso's poetic theory see Laurence Rhu's "The Genesis of Tasso's Epic Theory") resurfaces as we turn to the first canto's explicitly Christian invocation: "O Muse, do not wreath your brow on Helicon, with fading bays, but / among the blessed choirs in Heaven above possess a golden crown of deathless stars" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 1.2).

Whereas the necessity of bridling seductive verse with morality is made explicit in Tasso's epic, the implicit danger in this pastoral drama is symbolized by the plight of rhetoric in the play. In the *Jerusalem Delivered*, the Platonic fear of mimesis resurfaces in the first canto's explicitly Christian invocation: "O Muse, do not wreath your brow on Helicon, with fading bays, but / among the blessed choirs in Heaven above possess a golden crown of deathless stars" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 1.2). Despite the rather severe assertion of 'overgoing' the classical tradition, the narrator begs, "and grant me pardon if with the truth I interweave embroiderings, if partly / with pleasures other than yours I ornament my pages" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 1.2). The narrator immediately follows this admission with a justification: "So we present to the feverish child / the rim of the glass sprinkled over with sweet liquids; he drinks, deceived / the bitter medicine and from his deception receives life" (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 1.2). Tasso thus fortifies his "embroideries" within the walls of the 'ancients' using the familiar *utile dulce* trope. Put in terms of the emblem, Tasso's invocation, much like his "Il Conte O Vero De *L'Impresa*," insists upon accompanying the beautiful 'body' of the text with a redeeming 'soul'.

### The *Aminta* Allegorized

In the *Aminta*, though, pleasing verse left unaccompanied by a moral aspect implies the absence of a rhetorical 'soul.'<sup>7</sup> Throughout the *Aminta*, there are numerous scenes in which characters employ rhetoric. Yet, the continual use of rhetoric is matched by its own impotence. The conclusion of the play is effected not by the triumph of love but from misunderstanding and misreading. In the *Aminta*, rhetoric is rendered both corrupt and ineffective. This is exemplified by the incongruous juxtaposition of Dafne's advice and the

<sup>7</sup> "Rhetoric" is a term laden with significance. For the present purposes, rhetoric is referred to as the art of using language with persuasion or influence as its intent.



intertextual tradition from which she springs. The eponymous Aminta serves as a version of Orpheus. As Kristy Cochrane notes in her assessment of the 16th-century articulations of Orpheus in the musical, theological and humanistic realms, the myth of Orpheus was often interpreted as a figure of persuasive and eloquent speech (1-13). Indeed, this tendency to align Aminta with Orpheus is made explicit as Aminta proclaims, "Unto my tears I've seen / the rocks and waves for pity's sake reply, / and leaves all seem to sigh" (*Aminta*, 1.2.1-3). This Orphic resonance is strengthened later as Aminta asserts, "I'll go amid the fire / and even into hell, if she be there, / if hell could be where one so lovely is" (*Aminta* 2.3.31-33). Yet, Aminta's overt Orphic resonance is corrupt. Despite his open avowals of the power of his own verse, he is unable to move Silvia with his words. Rather, it is his actions which are predicated on misinterpretation that allow him to gratify his desire. Aminta's rhetorical power is thus rendered impotent. Language, it appears, is stripped of its persuasive potential and is reliant upon its own corruption for success. The impotence of language and, in particular, Aminta's use thereof is intriguing, especially given the fact that Aminta is the title character. In a sense, the *Aminta* embodies the tacit error of verse, of poetry completely stripped of a redemptive moral dimension.

While the *Aminta* might itself be considered a 'pleasing interlude', *locus amoenus* in Tasso's epic functions as moments in which the reader might quench the thirst engendered by energetic epic narration with romantic "embroiderings." Yet, by doing so, the reader misinterprets the sign and enacts the faulty Narcissism of a Rinaldo unaroused by shame. If Armida's island, for instance, is read as the deceptive version of nature that it signifies, then the episode acts as another type of mirror, allowing the audience to read beyond the patent sensuality of the island and to glimpse the dangerous Narcissism of Armida's bower. This very tendency to read beyond the immediacy of the sign is exemplified by the literal mirror of Armida's island, the grove of canto 18. It is here that Rinaldo recognizes the error implicit in the forest and conquers it. These episodes are, in terms of poetics, ambivalent.

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