

# Sent Away from the Garden? The Pastoral Logic of Tasso, Marvell, and Haley

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## Abstract

*The pastoral genre, in poetry, plays, and paintings, describes and praises an escape to the countryside. The departure from the city or the court to an imagined place of calm and harmony is portrayed as a retreat from conflict and from thinking, and a return to a primitive and peaceful life of the senses. But as soon as the court or city dwellers have relocated, the genre almost immediately turns to a discussion of abstract, usually moralizing, truths that reflect their intellectual sophistication. The pastoral provides cognitive literary historians a clear example of how the genre cooperates with and enacts the most basic cognitive tasks of the imagination, namely the common, everyday ability to toggle between concrete sense data and abstractions. Getting away from thinking, it turns out, gives you important things to think about. This essay discusses the predictive processing hypothesis and suggests that it offers a usefully revisionary way of discussing genres and archetypes. Examples from Tasso's *Aminta*, (c. 1573), Marvell's, "The Garden," (c. 1650), and Jennifer Haley's *The Nether* (2013) exemplify both the artists' and the audiences' cognitive flexibility, and the attempts to solve representationally hungry problems by re-representing them.*

**Keywords:** genre; archive; pastoral; *Aminta*; "The Garden"; *The Nether*; cognitive cultural history; predictive processing hypothesis.