

Oren

Define your research question

Public level

I am interested in connections between the way poems try to portray a human mind in action-- exploring a vivid memory, for example, or, judging a powerful feeling--and the way that contemporary philosophers think about and debate the nature and structure of minds and thought. I argue that poetry should be valued, not just for its beauty or wisdom, but as a way of thinking about and understanding how our minds work.

Disciplinary level

Discipline: English Literature

I aim to break through some longstanding institutional and methodological barriers between the study of poetry and philosophy in order to consider poetry's most sophisticated thinking about "ordinary" mental actions like *believing*, *desiring*, *perceiving*, *remembering*, and *intending*. I argue that the conceptual resources of analytic philosophy have value for reading poems—they allow us to see unfamiliar aspects of familiar poetic projects and to recast perennial poetic concerns in compelling new ways. Just as importantly, I explore the possibility that poetry's peculiar modes of address (generic, rhetorical, formal) to conceptual problems can contribute something both rigorous and substantive to the project of philosophical thinking.

Subfield level

Subfield: Poetics

The dominant strain of contemporary English-language philosophy (so-called "analytic philosophy") is distinguished by a doctrine of progress that stands in uneasy relation to the history of philosophical thought, and by a concern with "problem solving" that downplays textual commentary and exegesis. By contrast, contemporary poetic criticism is (virtually by definition) concerned to explicate the projects, problems and contradictions of texts both ancient and modern without imposing a narrative of improvement.

I suggest that our disciplinary explanatory protocols (and therefore our disciplinary conclusions) have been structured by this difference between a progressive account of knowledge on the one hand, and on the other, a view of human mindedness characterized by its unseverable and irrational attachments to lost objects and failed projects. I argue for the interest of an *analytic poetics* that combines a "properly" philosophical interest in the nature of mind and the structure of thought, with a historical consideration of what it is like to be particular and historical persons, bound to live as we can with such minds as we have.

Lab level

(Not applicable)

Elevator Pitch

Headline

I am interested in connections between the way poems try to portray a human mind in action and the way that contemporary philosophers think about and debate the nature and structure of minds and thought; I'm interested in why these two disciplines haven't recently had much to say to each other, and also in what each has to offer the other.

Elaboration

For example, I'm interested in why scholars of poetry have recently been interested in the problem of "melancholia," while philosophers have been more interested in the problem of "akrasia". Both concepts arguably describe a similar problem: the inability to move on from an unproductive state of feeling or action. Both can be found in the long history of art and thought. So why has it come to pass that one is "poetic" and the other "philosophical"?

I argue that these concepts illuminate a fundamental schism between a philosophical tradition that views "weakness of the will" as an aberration in need of rational justification, and a poetic tradition that views the mind's plight (and maybe even its particular virtue) to lie in its insurmountable irrationality. So I read Thomas Hardy's elegiac poetry (in *Poems 1912-1913*, for example) to consider the question of what difference it might make to see mourning as a case of akrasia (remaining stuck in mourning *despite knowing better*) rather than a melancholy (remaining in the grip of loss and lack because *there is nothing better to know*).