

OSL workshop with David Alworth: **Literature and the Social**

Date: February/March 2020 (exact date to be announced)

Location: University of Groningen, exact location TBA

For: PhD candidates and RMA students (preference will be given to OSL members). Limited to 15 participants.

Organisation: Jesse van Amelsvoort (University of Groningen)

Speaker: Dr [David Alworth](#) (Harvard University)

Credits: 1 EC

Description

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the study of literature became decidedly more sociological. Under the influence of thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu and disciplines such as gender and postcolonial studies, scholars started paying attention to the context of literary production. This move has sometimes seen literature reduced to a status subordinated to other disciplines – merely the offshoot of other, ‘real’ processes in society and culture. In this seminar, we aim to rethink how literature relates to the social, in particular regarding the ways in which literature can make our social world legible and visible in new ways.

Literature, David Alworth argues in his book *Site Reading*, is in fact a rich source of sociological knowledge. Departing from Bruno Latour’s sociology, especially his actor-network theory (ANT), Alworth demonstrates the value of literature and literary studies for understanding the social. By attending to the various sites that function as the backdrop of the action in literary works, we can see how these sites either restrict characters’ actions, or enable them. If we want to know more about the human experience of collectivity, we might as well turn to literary representations of that experience.

The seminar aims not only to facilitate interaction and dialogue among the participants, but also explicitly encourages them to actively search for new ways of reading and criticism and include them in their own research projects.

Aims

- To think about the relation between literature and the social, and how the former may illuminate the latter;
- To create and foster a community of RMA and PhD students who are interested in participating in and furthering methodological discussions within literary studies.

Preparation

Aspiring participants apply by submitting a half page letter of motivation, which includes a description of their research project and/or interests, the role that the study of the social plays in their research and 2-3 questions or points they would like to discuss during the seminar. These questions will be shared among the participants as points of reference for the seminar. Participants are required to have read 60-80 pages of assigned readings before they come to the seminar.

More details and a complete schedule will be available soon