NEW LITERARIA-
An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities
Volume 7, No. 2, January-February, 2026
ISSN: 2582-7375
www.newliteraria.com

Editorial: Humanity, Crisis, and Change

Dr Tamoy Kundu
Editor, New Literaria

The twenty-first century is increasingly defined by an unrelenting succession of crises that permeate political, social, ecological, and cultural life. Pandemics, climate emergencies, wars, mass displacement, economic instability, and rapid technological transformations have produced what many scholars describe as a condition of permanent crisis. Rather than being exceptional or temporary, crisis has become structural, shaping how humanity understands vulnerability, responsibility, and change. This Special Issue on Humanity, Crisis, and Change brings together critical and creative interventions that examine these intersections and interrogate what it means to be human in times of sustained uncertainty.

The concept of *crisis* itself is historically and philosophically charged. Reinhart Koselleck (2006) reminds us that the term originates from the Greek *krisis*, meaning judgment or decision, and signifies "a situation of tension in which a decision is called for but has not yet been made" (p. 358). This understanding frames crisis as a decisive moment- one that simultaneously signals danger and possibility. Crises disrupt the illusion of stability, forcing societies to confront the ethical, political, and cultural foundations upon which they rest. Literature and the humanities become particularly significant in such moments, as they provide interpretive frameworks through which crisis can be understood, narrated, and challenged.

At the core of this Special Issue lies the contested idea of humanity. While often invoked as a universal category, humanity is unevenly recognised and distributed. Judith Butler (2004) powerfully observes that "certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanised" (p. 2). This selective recognition becomes especially visible during crises, when some lives are mourned and protected while others are rendered disposable. The contributions in this issue examine how literature, cultural texts, and critical theory expose these hierarchies of value and resist the processes of dehumanisation that accompany war, displacement, racial violence, and ecological destruction.

Crisis also foregrounds human vulnerability as a shared yet politically mediated condition. Butler (2004) argues that "precariousness is a shared condition of human life," yet it is "unequally distributed" (p. 31). Literary representations of crisis often make this unevenness visible by focusing on bodies, emotions, and lived experiences rather than abstract statistics. Through storytelling, poetry, and testimony, literature insists on the visibility of suffering and affirms the ethical necessity of empathy and care. In doing so, it challenges dominant narratives that normalise loss and suffering as inevitable or collateral.

The relationship between modernity and crisis has been critically examined by sociologists and cultural theorists. Zygmunt Bauman (2007) describes contemporary society as existing in a state of "liquid modernity," where "uncertainty, insecurity, and instability have become permanent conditions of life" (p. 1). According to Bauman, modern crises are not anomalies but outcomes of social systems driven by speed, consumption, and disposability. This insight is particularly relevant in the context of ecological collapse and economic precarity, where human and non-human lives alike are treated as expendable. Several contributions in this Special Issue engage with this critique, examining how literary and cultural texts respond to the ethical consequences of such systemic instability.

Crisis is also deeply entangled with power. Naomi Klein (2007) warns that moments of collective shock are often exploited to advance authoritarian and neoliberal agendas, noting that "crises are exploited to push through policies that citizens would otherwise resist" (p. 6). This understanding complicates the idea of crisis as inherently transformative or progressive. While crises may open spaces for solidarity and reform, they can equally entrench inequality and violence. The works included in this issue critically examine this duality, exploring how crisis becomes a site of struggle between domination and resistance.

Importantly, this Special Issue acknowledges that crisis is not experienced uniformly across the globe. Postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe (2001) argues that for many societies, particularly in the Global South, crisis is not an interruption but a persistent historical condition shaped by colonialism, exploitation, and structural violence. He notes that "the postcolony is characterised by a state of permanent tension and instability" (Mbembe, 2001, p. 16). Several contributions challenge Eurocentric conceptions of crisis by foregrounding voices and experiences that reveal crisis as an ongoing reality rather than an exception.

Alongside critique, this issue also emphasises the role of imagination in responding to crisis. Fredric Jameson (2005) famously remarks that "it seems easier for us today to imagine

the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism" (p. xii). Literature, particularly speculative and dystopian writing, resists this imaginative limitation by envisioning alternative futures and ethical possibilities. By engaging with such texts, this Special Issue highlights the transformative potential of the humanities- not as escapism, but as a critical force capable of reimagining humanity beyond crisis.

In bringing together diverse scholarly and creative voices, Humanity, Crisis, and Change affirms the enduring relevance of the humanities in a fractured world. The contributions collected here do not offer definitive solutions; rather, they insist on sustained critical engagement, ethical attentiveness, and imaginative courage. In a time when crisis threatens to normalise despair, this Special Issue seeks to reaffirm the power of literature and thought to bear witness, challenge injustice, and envision more humane futures.

References

Bauman, Z. (2007). *Liquid times: Living in an age of uncertainty*. Polity Press.

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. Verso.

Jameson, F. (2005). *Archaeologies of the future: The desire called utopia and other science fictions*. Verso.

Klein, N. (2007). *The shock doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*. Metropolitan Books.

Koselleck, R. (2006). Crisis. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 67*(2), 357–400. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2006.0013

Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the postcolony*. University of California Press.

.