

THE CRISES IN LITERATURE

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This talk will look at what the multiple crises that this conference is concerned with mean for literature. In order to do so, I intend to formulate a conception, if not a definition, of literature, instead of leaving the term floating freely in a sea of inchoate assumptions, nibbled by the sharks of relativism and elitism in turns. Having done so, with partial reference to my study, *Literature Against Fundamentalism* (OUP, 2024), I will trace what has happened to 'literature' under the impact of capitalism, sometimes in collaboration with well-meant but under-examined tendencies even in critical scholarly developments, such as Postcolonialism, and then proceed explore the impact of digitalisation and, now, AI. The talk will argue that literature *qua* literature is not a sphere to protect from the onslaught of capitalism or AI. Instead, it is the most necessary weapon for human beings to deploy, or redeploy, in order to regain control of their worlds – and of making meaning in this world. Without an urgent and bold re-engagement with literature, we will fail in the face of the many crises besetting humankind today.