The Criterion: An International Journal in English
Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed Open Access e-Journal
(ISSN: 0976-8165) Vol. 17, Issue-VIII, September 2026
Special Issue: World Literature
www.the-criterion.com

Editorial

World Literature: A Special Issue of *The Criterion*

Selected papers from the International Conference *Literature at the Crossroads: Encounters, Departures and Odysseys in World Literature* (27 January 2026)

It is with pleasure and pride that we present this Special Issue containing selected papers presented at the International Conference on Literature at the Crossroads: Encounters, Departures and Odysseys in World Literature, which was jointly organised by D.T.S.S. College of Commerce (Autonomous) and the Dept. of English, University of Mumbai, along with the Mumbai Munster Institute of Advanced Studies, on 27th January 2026.

The idea of the conference germinated over half a year before that date. The first step was when D.T.S.S College of Commerce, the Dept. of English, University of Mumbai, and the Mumbai Munster Institute of Advanced Studies invited several eminent English scholars and faculty members from various Universities and colleges in Mumbai to the Roundtable of World Literatures on 11th July 2025 to discuss potential themes for the conference. The aim was to have a theme broad enough to encourage a plurality of discourses, yet precise enough for that discourse to be meaningful, and relevant enough to be useful at this point in time. At a juncture when the world is repeatedly and persistently encountering precarity in all its hydra-headed variations, when the term ‘literature’ itself is being contested, expanded and re-defined, the relevance of ‘world literature’ has never been more significant. Yet, we also realise the need to strategically resist homogenisation, to multiply and pluralise the meanings we assign to, and manifest for, this category of world literature.

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We acknowledge the western roots of the term—Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, coined in 1827—as well as his excitement about, and fascination with, literatures of other lands and nations, and the processes of translation that made cross-border circulation of texts possible, ushering in what Goethe calls "the epoch of world literature." Many of the papers included here, including the invited papers by the conference resource persons, acknowledge how the term World Literature has been reinvigorated by David Damrosch, who focuses on how texts become world literature through translation and circulations, gaining meanings through sharing elliptical space between home cultures and new cultures.

The evocative concept note for the conference, drafted by UGC JRF scholar Xavier Menezes, states: "Literature as a form of cultural production and artistic expression accordingly operates like the interplay between sensation and speech, drawing on the materials in its immediate vicinity, but capable also of weaving together ideas and discourses collected in works across continents and centuries. In its capacity to spread a matrix of aesthetics, philosophies, allusions and forms gathered from innumerable cultures and spaces across the span of a single page, as rich in its catalogue as of concepts as it is demanding in its need for interpretation, literature functions as an intellectual equivalent of the crossroads. The activities of reading, composing and discussing literature provide ample opportunity for diverse perspectives to meet, mingle and set off with new trajectories, enriched and enlightened by the process of exchange, and capable of carrying the gifts of these travels to locations they might never have otherwise reached, a pollination via polyvocality."

But this polyvocality comes with a caveat. Valerie Henitiuk explained in her 2012 essay that "texts become successfully worlded only through interpretive acts of mediation profoundly bound up in aspects of culture." "Successfully" is a value-loaded term, and other scholars of world literature have raised valid questions about the politics of ownership, control, transmission, access and inclusion/exclusion in world literature. Both parts of the

term, “world” and “literature” are open to critical debate, to multiple interpretations, and that is perhaps what keeps the term alive and relevant. The papers selected—through a rigorous process of blind peer review and revision—for this special issue reflect and respond to some of these debates.

To sum up, we can do no better than to end with Xavier’s words from the concept note: “Worlds, much like literatures themselves, can be as expansive as a sea of stars and as compact as the breadth of a letter, but are always mobile, evolving, and animated by the flux of space and time, economics and culture, fame and obscurity, and countless permutations and alterations of circumstance and interpretation. To read world literature, then, is to venture out and to choose, to meet and to march on, and it is precisely such a crossroads of approaches, ideas and texts that this conference hopes to provide.” We know that an issue of twenty five papers is but a microscopic sampling of the vast multitude that comprises world literature and the discourse it generates, but we hope it will make you curious to explore further, just as wetting your toes in the ocean is a prelude to diving in deeper.

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Mumbai, August 2026