

P.R.I.S.M.A. – *Pondering Risk and Imagining Resilience. A Digital Atlas of Seismic and Volcanic Events in Literature*

The project

P.R.I.S.M.A., winner of the cascade call for projects on “Volcanic and Seismic Risk Imagination in World History and Literature”, has been developed within the Spoke 3 – VS3 “Earthquakes and Volcanoes” of the PNRR RETURN Partnership. The research project reflects on how literature has represented natural disasters – earthquakes and eruptions – turning them into stories of trauma, solidarity, and rebirth.

From the ruins of Lisbon after the 1755 earthquake, which led thinkers like Voltaire and Kant to question the limits of reason and human vulnerability, to the trauma of Fukushima in 2011, which was narrated by authors such as Ryū Murakami and Hideo Furukawa, P.R.I.S.M.A. investigates how literary language becomes a space of resistance, knowledge, and regeneration.

Goals and Vision

The project has led to the creation of a digital atlas that visualizes the network of texts, symbols, and images through which cultures around the world have imagined risk, disaster, and resilience. The aim of this tool is to provide a dynamic and interactive map of how societies, over time, have represented catastrophe as an integral part of human experience.

The literary representation of risk does not merely consist in the description of geological entities and events: it is a complex cultural process, interweaving scientific knowledge, aesthetic languages, religious beliefs, and moral values.

An Interactive Digital Atlas

L.A.V.A. – *Literary Atlas of Volcanic and seismic Activities* lies at the heart of the project: it is a visual and relational space that translates the research process into digital form. Literary works are not regarded as mere testimonies but as laboratories of emotion and thought, where individuals and communities process fear, loss, and reconstruction.

Each node displayed in the atlas represents a point of connection between:

- real events (earthquakes, eruptions, disaster sites),
- cultural symbols and metaphors,
- historical and social consequences,
- philosophical and poetic languages of risk, trauma, and rebirth.

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A Dialogue Between Disciplines

P.R.I.S.M.A. weaves together literature, geography, philosophy, ecopsychology, anthropology, history, and sociology, fostering dialogue between Earth sciences and the Humanities. The project is carried out by a network of scholars in English and German studies, Comparative literature, and Geography, in collaboration with scientific and cultural institutions, archives, and digital platforms. Seminars, conferences, and educational programs ensure the dissemination and vitality of the research, creating a shared space where humanistic knowledge becomes an essential resource for understanding risk and a privileged tool for education.

Research and Beyond

In its initial phase, P.R.I.S.M.A. reconstructed the state of the art concerning catastrophic events and their literary representation, highlighting the need to move beyond a purely thematic approach to explore the semiotic, narrative, and symbolic forms of disaster.

The critical analysis of literary works has revealed a hybridization between scientific language and poetic imagination, generating new (eco)narratological, (eco)poetic, and (eco)semiotic perspectives.

This reflection has led to the development of conceptual and methodological models capable of addressing risk as a cognitive, social, and symbolic phenomenon, and not solely a physical one.

Expanding Our Perspective

A central axis of the project is the intention to broaden our perspective: concepts such as “risk,” “disaster,” and “catastrophe” are reconsidered as keys to understanding the multiple instabilities of the present – environmental, social, and moral. P.R.I.S.M.A. presents itself as a laboratory of thought and action, aimed at developing theoretical and cultural tools to address the challenges of climate change, ecological crisis, and ethical responsibility.

Contacts

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PNRR RETURN – Spoke 3 – VS3 “Earthquakes and Volcanoes”

P.R.I.S.M.A. is an invitation to read risk as a shared narrative, to transform the memory of catastrophe into knowledge, and knowledge into care.