

Alessia Vignoli, *Natural Disasters in Literature: French Caribbean Writing (Katastrofy naturalne w literaturze: pisanstwo franko-karaibskie / La catastrophe naturelle en littérature : écritures franco-caribéennes)*

Keywords: Natural disasters; Haitian literature; French Caribbean Literature; Haitian earthquake

The main purpose of my thesis is to examine how the catastrophic earthquake that struck the Republic of Haiti on January 12, 2010 has been transposed into literature by many writers of Haitian origins living in the country or in the Diaspora (Quebec, France, USA) and by authors from different cultural horizons. My thesis is based on an analysis of the hybrid post-earthquake corpus, composed by works (novels, essays, witness accounts, poems) that are devoted entirely or for the most part to the representation of the earthquake. On the one hand, I analyzed some selected works about the Haitian earthquake. On the other hand, my research has taken into consideration the writing of natural hazards in other cultural contexts. In particular, I investigated the literary representation of cataclysms (floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tropical storms, avalanches) in French Caribbean literature, mainly in the French Antilles (Martinique, Guadeloupe) but also in the West (in France, Switzerland and in the UK), working on some selected works which have contributed to the constitution of a canon: the literature about natural disasters.

My basic assumption was that the Haitian writer, whether from Haiti or living in the Diaspora, when confronted to the catastrophic effects of the disaster, committed to a “duty of remembrance”, feels compelled to express in words the psychological, social and economic distress. Our analysis have also shown that the Haitian post-earthquake literature, while remaining committed to ethical issues, has for the most part escaped patterns and categories and literary or ideological programs, turning to the various forms of fictional representation of the earthquake and its effects on a thematic and formal level. These representations are almost always a way to adopt a subjective attitude towards reality, in contrast to the “official” statements about the disaster, such as news reports and newspaper articles.

My research is interdisciplinary. To describe the interpretation of natural disasters from the Antiquity until today and their meaning in different cultural contexts, my analysis were based on historical and anthropological works (Peter Utz, François Walter). For the analysis of the Haitian corpus and the novels about natural disasters in Martinique and Guadeloupe, I mainly used works belonging to the field of cultural anthropology, cultural studies and postcolonial studies (Martin Munro, Yves Chemla, Marie-Denise Shelton). Moreover, ecocriticism (Malcom Ferdinand, Serenella Iovino) and disaster studies (Mark D. Anderson) have proven useful to study the environmental issues put forward by the selected works. I also used psychoanalysis and psycho-criticism (Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Anny Dayan Rosenman) and socio-criticism (Régine Robin).

My thesis encourages an original perspective in relation to the current state of research on natural disasters and their literary transpositions. First of all, the research is based on a very contemporary topic which belongs to the “*extrême contemporain*”, taking account of several works that have not been analyzed yet by researchers specialized in francophone postcolonial studies. Furthermore, I examined the various ways of experiencing and writing natural disasters in different cultural environments (Caribbean, North-American and European).

These analyses have not been conducted yet by the researchers specialized in francophone and postcolonial studies. Therefore, my work aims to contribute to the development of the academic research on this “minor” literature (according to the definition by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) written in French in the Caribbean.