

Prospero Rivista di Letterature e Culture Straniere

A Journal of Foreign Literatures and Cultures

Call for Papers: Volume XXXI (2026):

NARRATIVES OF CRISIS IN ENGLISH AND GERMAN-LANGUAGE LITERATURES

The deepest and broadest meaning of the term ‘crisis’ is illuminated by its origin, now more than ever: the Greek root *κρίσις* encompasses the ideas of choice, judgement and the critical stage of an illness, and perhaps no other word in our present age holds such urgent significance. At the same time, the idea of crisis is so deeply embedded in the very concept of modernity that it has become an essential category in the cultural reflection of diverse traditions. Modernity has, in fact, been built around the concept of crisis, from the paradigm shift caused by the great scientific revolutions and geographical discoveries that collapsed the ancient episteme between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to the great revolutions of the late eighteenth century, the epistemological rupture of Darwinism and the profound tensions of the late nineteenth century, to mention only the most decisive ones, and literature has consistently interpreted this awareness, particularly from the early twentieth century onwards.

As some sixty years ago, according to Lyotard, postmodernism emerged precisely from a ‘distrust of metanarratives’, from the crisis of the grand narratives of science, religion and history, the link between the diagnosis, awareness and analysis of the crisis and the forms of narration is part of every cultural and artistic attempt to address the crisis as a category and/or paradigm of a civilisation’s development. The relationship between modernity, progress, the philosophy of history and crisis has been at the heart of philosophical debate throughout the twentieth century, from Existentialism to the Frankfurt School, to Reinhart Koselleck’s idea of the perpetual crisis of modern society, as a ‘structural condition of the contemporary world’.

Moreover, the very idea of crisis has always been conceived on different levels – economic, political, social, cultural, religious, humanitarian and environmental – which in turn can influence and generate further crises in terms of identity, values and epistemology. This diversity and constant transformation at the heart of the problematic definition of a ‘modern civilisation’ has fuelled and shaped literature, and continues to be interpreted through literature, as a response to crisis. This apparently commonsensical statement has perhaps not received enough critical attention in terms of the crucial relationships between literary productions and forms of crisis in their manifold articulations and implications, and within various theoretical frameworks. Or, at the very least, it still offers ever-new avenues of inquiry. Literary periods identified as ‘literatures of crisis’—from Decadence to 20th-century European Modernism as the most classic examples—have been followed by other contemporary forms of reflection that have produced narratives of and on the epochal, transformative and ‘perpetual’ crises, aimed at articulating the urgency of an ever-evolving concept generating ever new meanings, though often rooted in history and history-related.

From the literary periods identified as ‘literature of crisis’, from Decadence to twentieth-century European Modernism as the most classic examples, other contemporary forms of reflection that have produced narratives addressing epochal, transformative and ‘perpetual’ crises, aimed at identifying and creating forms capable of articulating the urgency of a constantly evolving concept, while it is often generated and bound by historical roots. Finally, a fundamental dimension of the literary conception of crisis is that of the tension between a ‘conjunctural’ (Gramsci, Williams, Jameson) and a ‘constitutive’, epistemological vision (De Man, deconstructionist readings, but also Rita Felski’s post-critique), to cite just a few references among many.

Building from the various conceptions of crisis as a hermeneutic concept, and of narration as a mode of representing and understanding phenomena across time and space, the critical reflection on the idea and state of crisis in literary production can also focus on the evolution of genres, and on the ways in which literature responds to the crisis of the present and the past, shaping our understanding and definition of it. From this perspective, **volume XXXI (2026) of *Prospero*** aims to reflect on the **constitutive link between crisis and narrative in English- and German-language literatures**, in which the very meaning of crisis is conceived as a hermeneutic process generating forms of representation, and, as such, is absorbed and transformed within the imagination.

Among the many possible lines of inquiry, the proposed contributions may consider the following areas in English and German literature:

- Paradigms of crisis and historical narratives
- Literary representations of the recursiveness of crisis
- Contemporary pathologies and pathographies of illness as crisis
- Crisis and the critique of justice
- Imago crisis: visual narratives and relationships between literature and the visual arts
- In/from/on the crisis: narratives and retrospective perspectives
- Perpetual crisis between narrativisation and denied closure
- Shipwrecks with spectator
- Intermedial forms and genres of crisis
- The aesthetics of violence as a narrative of crisis
- Critical dystopias and 'alternative history' as narratives of crisis

An abstract of no more than 400 words, written in English, German or Italian, must be submitted to the journal's email address Prosperojournal@gmail.com and to gefter@units.it, marilena.parlati@unipd.it, by May 4 2026 at the latest. Notification of acceptance will be sent by the end of May. Contributions, accompanied by a 350-word abstract in English and ranging in length from 6,000 to a maximum of 10,000 words, must be submitted as a Word attachment by 14 September 2026, in accordance with **MLA editorial style**; a style sheet guide can be downloaded from the journal's webpage.

For queries and further information about the journal policy, please visit the webpage at: <https://www.openstarts.units.it/entities/journal/Prospero/details> or contact the editor in chief Roberta Gefter at gefter@units.it.

Prospero is a printed (ISSN 1123-2684) and open-access publication (E-ISSN 2283-6438) of the Department of Humanities (DiSU), University of Trieste, published annually by EUT, Trieste University Press, since 1994. It is indexed by MLA, ERIH+, among others. **Prospero has been included in the list of Class A-journals for English and Germanic studies by the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of University and Research Institutes (ANVUR).**