

Origin and Secrecy. IX. International Conference on Epimodernism and Literature.

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The title of the conference refers to the second epimodern value, as explained by Emmanuel Bouju in *Epimodernism: Six Memos for Literature Today*.¹

Memories of historical and political traumas, as well as individual traumas connected to them, have a significant impact on contemporary literature. Wars and crises throughout Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries have generated vivid interest in family and generational novels, biographies, autobiographical fiction, historical novels and their variations, as well as science fiction and dystopian novels. These genres explore the experiences of individuals and communities facing the consequences of past, present and future catastrophes. These genres also explore the experience of being subject to history.

The fragmented and broken family lineages presented in epimodern novels are the result of investigations into the past that were only partially successful. Though they brought facts to light, they could not be joined together to form a coherent and continuous (hi)story. Secrets from the past linger, often concealed by substitute or multiple narratives that act like mirror boxes to alleviate phantom pain.² Furthermore, these double or multiple narratives can divert the focus from the origin, misleading seekers by offering different alternatives to the truth. The quest for the past is often a quest for the truth. Regarding recent social and political experiences, the notion of post-shame is closely associated with that of post-truth.

Although epimodern literature seems sceptical about the existence of an ultimate truth, presenting instead a variety of possible truths, it reacts critically to the post-truth and post-shame condition in which we are currently living. Today, literature seems to navigate between the pitfalls of engaged art and the necessity of ethical expression in an aesthetic manner.

On the other hand, investigations into the past and family histories are closely linked to questions of identity. The idea of fragmented identity appears to have lost its appeal in literary texts written since the postmodern period. These investigations are driven by the desire to unveil the secrets of the past and reconstruct a coherent narrative that facilitates the formation of identity. Nevertheless, important postmodernist insights still influence

¹ Bouju, Emmanuel: *Epimodernism. Six Memos for Literature Today*. Transl. by Reed Cooley. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan 2023. (= Palgrave Studies in Modern European Literature)

² *Ibid.*, pp. 40.

epimodern literature, preventing it from becoming stories that offer consolation through the successful development or attainment of identities and happy endings.

Depending on the perspective, writing about the past in literature today can take on different forms. For example, it can have autobiographical or autofictional features; it can be ironic; or it can have a strong ethical dimension. It can also integrate elements typical of well-known genres and subvert them to address current issues.