



What happens when the body matters?: Phantom transmissions and corporeal textualities in the life and work of Olive Schreiner and J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace

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Abstract

This essay explores intergenerational transmission of trauma as evidenced in the body. Specifically the somatic experiences of two white South African women, one historical (Olive Schreiner, author of *The Story of an African Farm*, 1883) and one fictional/contemporary (Lucy, a character in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*) are considered in order to elaborate the legacy of white colonial psychic disavowals in post-colonial South Africa. Using feminist and relational psychodynamic theories, this article addresses the alexithymia of the colonial predicament via an assertion that unwitnessed somatic distress as a result of disavowed trauma in individuals is potentially transmitted to subsequent generations and requires nuanced clinical attention. Jessica Benjamin argues that in attending to the psychic wounds of the doer, the done-to and those parts in each of us, we can interrupt the ongoing violent resonances of collective traumas. Curiosity about somatic distress is one avenue for this attending.

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