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... THE ANTI-IMPERIAL APPROACHES TO
CHAUCER (ARE THERE THOSE?)
AN ESSAY IN IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES

...the anti-imperial approaches to Chaucer (are there those?) ... (Spivak, "Making of Americans" 875)

I

I offer this paper as a way of thinking about some inflections of presentness, those of "women," "postcolonial" and "critical theory," that I read as problematic and urgent because each, it seems to me, threatens to become recuperative and normative. I don't need to rehearse the debate over the split between the theoretical construct "woman" and the pragmatic concerns of "women"; instead I want to agree with Teresa de Lauretis and Gayatri Spivak who argue, in their different ways, that this split, like the one between theory and practice, is a symptomatic one (Spivak, "Criticism" 1; Lauretis 11-15). It is the effect of an "interweave of institutional politics, discursive formations, textual specificities and intellectual rivalries": an effect of the cultural politics in which knowledge is produced.

The study of Chaucer in Australia, in my reading, is produced by certain kinds of privilege operating at the level of cultural formation and articulated through certain modes of narrative. One effect of such privilege is that of canonicity; a second effect, is that of "speaking as" a Chaucerian. This doesn't mean speaking in Middle English but rather "speaking as a Chaucer scholar." This phrase, in its turn, is a synecdoche which positions the speaker, rhetorically, in relation to the formation of knowledge. This is also to be identified as subject: produced by institutional and discursive processes and the subject of regulatory procedures. This effect is prescriptive in two ways, for it's not only who will be authorised to speak that is regulated but also how that subject will be heard. This subject is scripted in ways that are frequently doubled. For instance, the trained Chaucer scholar may speak about Chaucer but not about feminism. Or the feminist Chaucerian — a contradiction in terms since she would reject the traditionalist label "Chaucerian" — may speak about feminism and Chaucer but not about postcolonial theory. Whatever the particular inflection, this subject is displaced from the debates over disciplinary shifts because she has been scripted as a reader of Chaucer texts. This scripting, of course, has not very much to do with

the supposed object of knowledge and mostly to do with the politics of subjectivity operating within that same institutional site busily producing the object of knowledge identified by the name Chaucer.

My use of "postcolonial" is strategic: I am not going to make Chaucer into a postcolonial subject — or a woman, for that matter — and my repeated reference to the politics of cultural formations will indicate that I have no use for Chaucer as a theoretical construct. What I find useful in what has become institutionalised as "postcolonial reading" is its dismantling of cultural and political hierarchies ('imperialisms') in the production of knowledge that discloses some of the specificities of my own location as subject. I make no claim to theoretical purity nor do I have any particular investment in respecting categorical boundaries. I place no value, in other words, on what I read as idealist positions located within either theoretical paradigms or disciplinary rules. And it is perfectly clear to me that Chaucer occupies space within the institution and the research budget that some postcolonialists would regard as contestable. That position too I read as idealist: my concern is not with the propriety of the Chaucer canon but with the politics of a specific discursive formation that operates as knowledge.

The question in my title comes from an aside Gayatri Spivak makes in a discussion about pedagogy in the American academic context: it is an off-the-cuff remark that is jokey, provocative and theatrical — the voice of the demagogue, that Spivak claims, in her interviews, to be. She is offering a critique of canonicity in this piece and comments that "to be consistent with this resolve, even the feminist approaches to Shakespeare, the Marxist approaches to Milton, and the anti-imperialist approaches to Chaucer (are there those?) will have to relinquish the full semester allowed on the coattails of the Old Masters of the Canon" ("Making of Americans" 785). Instead, she suggests, students will "have their lives changed perhaps by a sense of the diversity of the new canon and the unacknowledged power play involved in securing the old" (785). That question about Chaucer, located in parenthesis, might be an expression of disbelief or one of scorn; at any rate there is some kind of doubt. Chaucer is being positioned as an Old Master, as canonical, and thus, logically, as open to rereading — but, really, the aside suggests, who would devote the energy to trying to reread Chaucer?

This question is central to my concerns. First, because it articulates a sense that Chaucer is simply irrelevant or at least intractable material to the politically informed agenda. Chaucer, and this is from a Marxist-feminist-deconstructionist whose work engages intensely with theoretical texts, poses not just discontinuity with but resistance to ideological critique. Second, because it is a question and so raises the possibility of some kind of answer. The rhetorical form here is dialogic. Third, a question implies a speaker, a subject position, a mode of address, a distance from which space can be investigated. Fourth, the question is posed in the context of an institutional debate not only about canonicity but also about the politics of pedagogy, cultural specificity and gendered difference. Spivak begins this section of her paper by saying that, like her

opponent E.D. Hirsch, she is a teacher of English; that English is "the medium and the message through which, in education, Americans are most intimately made" and that she "entered a department of English as a junior in 1957 in another world, in Presidency College at the University of Calcutta" ("Making of Americans" 784).

It is this insistence that "textual" issues — those of "scholarship" — must be formulated within the interweave of cultural politics that I find strategic in Spivak's work and that I want to use here to engage with the practice of reading Chaucer within a present scripted by the political specificities of culture, gender and institutionalised space. I want to do this by offering a reading of four separate but related textual fragments in order to engage with a debate that is as central to Spivak's concerns as it is, in a different way, to my own. These textual fragments each thematise history in particular ways that are oppositional to any notion of official history, of "reading the archive." The project of reading the institutionalisation of knowledge through the literary canon in Australia is a recent one — I'm thinking here about current work on Shakespeare — and the position of Chaucer within such an enterprise is, as I will suggest, importantly different.

Instead, the fragments I will read are variously anecdotal, prefatory, fictional and representational, but I want to read them as texts that narrativise and thus historicise an institutional formation that produces both a knowledge and a subject position. I want to claim for these fragments the same status as Foucault's account of the anecdote as the narrative means of writing that "union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (Foucault 78-92). Further, the anecdote "entertain[s] the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects" (83).

Postcolonial theory, as I understand it, divides over the reading of history and this is the second way in which my use of such theory is strategic. What's at stake here is not only, as an essay such as "The Rani of Sirmur" argues, that reading "the unprocessed *historical record*" has a place within the disciplinary critique of reading the archive that deconstructs binary oppositions about the status of history, but that the project of disclosing "the absence of a text that can 'answer one back' after the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project," in the specific instance I am addressing, is problematic (Spivak, "Rani" 131). This project of allowing such a voice to speak means that different kinds of historical discourse, different modes of narrative, need to be read at the same time even though, as Meaghan Morris says of postmodernism, such discourses are frequently oppositional (Morris 479).

II Reading Situation

The first fragment is from a conversation between Meaghan Morris and Stephen Muecke recorded in December 1989. They are discussing, among other things, the history of the intellectual formations they are positioned within as they work in Australia, some of the time, and elsewhere, at other times. So their conversation is about remembering their own intellectual history as much as it is the disclosure of an unofficial history of intellectual formations. This is Morris:

There are networks of circulation, rather than spaces in communication, and the space—local, national, international—where one is acting at any given time is criss-crossed by all those networks, each of them constructing "space" differently. I'm not saying that Australia is a figment of the imagination, or that nation-states are disappearing, I think those arguments are silly, but their reality is *changing*. So what matters now is not the origin of ideas—here, there, coming in, going out—but like you were saying before, the performance of the text *on the spot*, and how intellectuals work to *define* their 'spot' in the world, and its relations to other 'spots'. (Morris and Muecke 77)

Morris is talking here about the location or context of her work both now and in the seventies. She describes her own project, and that of the people she works with, as culturally specific: she sees her "spot" as an "Australian intellectual context, informed by our own social and historical experience (77). At the same time, Morris dismisses any trace of old-style nationalism or simple-minded nostalgia because for her an "Australian intellectual context" is "criss-crossed" by formations of knowledge developed in Britain and the US as well as Europe. She talks about the development of "Australian theory," earlier in this interview with Stephen Muecke, a term that she says she learned in America where it is read as "so sophisticated" while being misread as monolithic and hegemonic (76).

For Morris the effects of historical event, social change and the formations of knowledge are constitutively related and ruthlessly specific. So, a paradigm shift such as that evidenced by poststructuralism looks like "some kind of rupture of human history" in Paris in May '68 and is commodified later as "Parisianism," but shows up in Australia as a set of specific writings by Althusser, Juliet Mitchell and Foucault that are deployed in analyses of the Australian economy and leftist politics in a cultural space opened up by the anti-Vietnam campaign and its conjunction with the international student movement (Morris and Muecke 66). In this context, the work of an intellectual such as Althusser winds up in the Australian Communist Party rather than at Sydney University and this has important implications for what becomes known as "Australian theory."

I am interested in the ways Morris identifies the relations between the specificities of those words "Australian," "intellectual," and "context" because those relations form a "spot" or speaking position that is not only derived from the operations of institutionalised intellectual activity. She

uses Liz Grosz's work as an example and this is what she says:

... the other work that Liz is doing ... her stuff on Levinas. He published in French, sure, but the point is that he was Jewish, and Liz is Jewish, and she can make his philosophical work on alterity interesting here because so many Australians now are refugees or children of refugees. Liz on Levinas makes *Australian sense*, and I think that fussing too much about foreignness gets neurotic. I would hate to see the critique of import culture become a sort of post-modern nationalist "Let's go back to home-grown paspalum-theory" nostalgia. (Morris and Muecke 60)

Grosz's work on Levinas is positioned by their shared Jewish identity. She can make his philosophical work on alterity speak to Australians because of their shared identity as others, as refugees. This network of connections makes "*Australian sense*" because these relations can be articulated from a spot that makes meaningful the specificities encoded in the word "Australian" and making "sense" I understand to mean making those connections. The fact that Levinas wrote originally in French and is thus positioned as a European intellectual is not irrelevant but the point is that the reality of contexts is *changing*. So there's no such thing as "common" sense; instead, as an intellectual, Grosz is continually shifting the boundaries of her work to make sense of her own "social and historical experience." One effect of this changing reality is that each performance of a text moves away or differs from a previous performance: what makes connections in one context won't work later on, in another context. And so Grosz's work, like that of Morris and Muecke, in fact, like "*Australian theory*," winds up criss-crossed by other formations of knowledge and the performance of any text "on the spot" marks that text as mobile, different, contextualised.

Morris's rhetoric here owes nothing to postcolonial theorisation but her conversation offers an account of positionality, context, specificity and the production of knowledge that "answers back" to the imperatives encoded in the experience signified by the term "Australia," and this is valuable as a critique of any project of cultural imperialism.

III The President's Address

My second fragment is prefatory. The Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies is the professional body that represents the collectivisation of individuals, research and courses of study dispersed through institutions of tertiary study in Australia and New Zealand. Like the Modern Languages Association or the New Chaucer Society, though on a much smaller scale, ANZAMRS (as it is abbreviated and pronounced) is the site for negotiations about what its members would call "the discipline" and it is a crucial institutional site for the reading of Chaucer. In 1968, R.W.V. Elliott wrote the Preface for the first issue of the ANZAMRS *Bulletin*. Originary fictions are telling and none more so than this one.

It looks as if the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies has come to stay; over a hundred and forty members in Australia and New Zealand within less than a year is no mean achievement for two countries whose own Middle Ages only happened yesterday and whose Renaissance is yet to come.

The founders of "Anza Mrs", as she is coming to be known among her intimates, owe much to the pioneering work of [various scholars.] . . .

The establishment of a society of scholars and students interested in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance is a sign of the steadily increasing maturity of the Australasian academic scene. But the Association will remain a mere shell unless it is nourished from within by local groups busily engaged in fostering contact among members through whatever appropriate activity individual ingenuity can devise . . .

The feeling of isolation so long a burden to scholars in Australia and New Zealand is steadily waning. Within our two countries the growth of the older universities and the foundation of new ones are reinforcing the humanities; facilities for research are being improved by modern techniques and growing library resources; air travel and regular study leave make for easier contact with other scholars and other places . . . (Elliott 3-4)

It is easy to read a rhetoric of imperialism here; to articulate a paradigmatic hierarchy of metropolitan centre and marginal Antipodes that structures this formation of medieval and Renaissance discourses (I am thinking here of the enormous range of theoretical work being done in Australia and other postcolonial sites mapped out in Ashcroft et al.). These discourses are defined first by historical moment in "two countries whose own Middle Ages only happened yesterday and whose Renaissance is yet to come"; second, institutionally by the "growth of the older universities and the foundation of new ones"; third, by geographical distance and, most powerfully, by a sense of nostalgia, a "feeling of isolation so long a burden to scholars in Australia and New Zealand." History, institution and desire all point to the absent centre, a centre that remains so poignantly lost as to be unspeakable except to say that air travel is making for "easier contact."

Elliott's Preface is telling a story that deals specifically with the problem of transportation. This is why distance figures so importantly in this story. Authority privileges authenticity and for, say, Chaucer "scholars" it is difficult to be authentic when you are one of those, as the Oxford English Dictionary has it, "who dwell directly opposite to each other on the globe, so that the soles of their feet are as it were planted against each other; *esp. those who occupy this position in regard to us.*" (OED s.v. *Antipodes*, emphasis added). In this story, "we" are represented as transported to the edge of time and place, manfully contributing, through the agency of ANZAMRS, our "share to the cultivation of the humanities," and clearly, within this alien culture, this means the cultivation of

humanity. The specificities of white Australian history mean that such authority is negotiated between the positions of coloniser/colonial through the penal economy of transportation. ANZAMRS is mapping the territory and claiming it for the centre from which all this *originates*. The cultural cargo transported is the knowledge of this hierarchy of English centre and Australian/New Zealand periphery.

An institutional model for this enterprise is provided later in the *Bulletin's* account of the first Medieval Studies courses developed in Australia which "were fortunate in having a substantial contribution" from two Oxford professors (Downer 22). One effect of this model returns us to the problematic of authenticity and the production of a subject position through the process of "othering." Although students may study courses shaped by the Oxbridge-trained professors the knowledge produced within such a marginal site can only be counterfeit, a copy that is imperfect and imprecise through its distance from the original. In this paradigm, the definitive point of opposition is not the indigenous person, on whom the economics of this imperialism is entirely dependent, but an other for whom all the paraphernalia of the colonial outpost silences the voice that attempts to answer back.

This is not the only kind of epistemic violence being enacted here. The ANZAMRS President's fantasy embeds a version of the family romance in which the social construction of woman within patriarchal culture provides a figure for the process of discursive formation as home-making. "The founders of 'Anza Mrs,'" as she is coming to be known among her intimates" speaks the fantasy of the devoted wife whose "untiring efforts" provide the social and domestic support system behind every successful (white, middle-class, male) academic. Her work is articulated in a rhetoric of maternal care — she has "transformed" the original *Newsletter* into the *Bulletin*; she is responsible for the "steadily increasing maturity of the Australasian academic scene"; she is "busily engaged in fostering contact among members." This is the work of building a home (a sign for both civilisation and England) in this distant and uncongenial place where the scholars who belong to the society can live and work as members of the one big family. But the patriarch still authorises the originary site for we learn that "Dr. K.V. Sinclair [not Dr. Audrey L. Meaney, and here the nomenclature reflects the practice of identifying only women by their full names] was largely responsible for convening the inaugural meeting . . . and he has been assiduously [not tenderly] nursing the infant society ever since."

This is the same hierarchy that suppresses the constitutive position of the feminine to inscribe the family romance as patriarchal and knowledge as phallocratic. The ideology here constructs a gendered paradigm in which institutional position is read as masculine because it is constructed in a binary opposition to social position which is defined by the feminine. Knowledge too in this paradigm is read as masculine because the enterprise of both the "older universities" and the "new ones" is what the President calls "the cultivation of the humanities in the Antipodes." In Elliott's story the socialised representation of woman as

wife positions her *behind* the male academic and simultaneously, as wife, as "Anza Mrs," the association becomes the exchange item *between* men. Woman, as both social body and institutional agency, operates as the passive currency in the homosocial economy of the professional academic industry. In this male fantasy about the construction of a discursive formation the narrator positions himself as the one who *knows* the story; he knows, for instance, what "her intimates" call ANZAMRS. He also knows that, just like Chaucer's patient Griselda, she can't answer back: after all, who ever listens to the wife who answers back?

IV White Knight

My third fragment is a fiction and comes from Frank Moorhouse's story called "The Year of the White Knight: a collection of omens and sub-news, and a memorandum of feelings" in which one of the characters is a medievalist called Stephen Knight. I'm not going to retell this intriguing story. Instead, I want to quote the two moments in which the character Stephen Knight appears.

She said, "As Stephen would say, the White Knight thing all began with the Arthurian legends and Gawain — all these series are about Round Table knights — it can never really be an old-wave idea." She was referring to Stephen Knight [says the narrator], associate professor, a medievalist at Sydney University. (Moorhouse 58)

Turning forty has nothing to do with it [explains the narrator later in the story]. And I'm not forty yet. I was actually quoting Knight to Sandra and he's an expert on the Knight's Tale from Chaucer. It all links up. It's very spooky. (61)

The story closes with another medievalist, this one unidentified; but it all links up.

Later in the next year he was working at a university and they had given him the room formerly occupied by a medievalist.

He was seated at the desk for some hours before he realised that a poster of an ivory chess piece on the wall facing him was a white knight — the caption said it was from the Isle of Lewis. The white knight was glum and toy-like and it did not frighten him. He photographed it and, during his time at the university, became quite fond of it. (70)

This story is, in part, about the status of particular kinds of knowledge. Stephen Knight knows "all" about the history of the white knight and both Sandra and the narrator are impressed by his knowledge. This kind of knowledge is not represented as part of a social context in the story. Rather, Knight's knowledge of history is authorised by his position at Sydney University where he is an "expert" on "the Knight's Tale from Chaucer." The status of this knowledge of Stephen's, which is positioned as truthful, reliable, scholarly, as separated out from the social context of

the rest of the story, is a cause of deep anxiety for the narrator. The collection of omens and sub-news he is recording is made more serious, less arbitrary, larger in scale and more frightening by the placement of Knight and his esoteric knowledge of history within the calendar of the narrator's year. Because what Knight knows is connected to the authentic and authorised structures of disciplinary knowledge represented here by Chaucer. As the story tells it, when Knight speaks he is identified as a Chaucerian, as a medievalist, as an expert — unlike the narrator or his friend Milton — everyone listens.

The Sydney University in this story may or may not be the University of Sydney that has an endowed chair called the McCaughey Professor of English Language and Early English Literature.¹ This chair is funded by a bequest from the Honourable Samuel McCaughey made in 1919, just after the first world war and, arguably, when pro-Empire enthusiasm was failing to cover over the appalling cost of the war effort and its political consequences that would be articulated by the great depression. The study of English language and early English literature, in this context, is a means of sustaining connections between the colonial edge and the colonising centre doubled through the same medium that is the object of disciplinary procedures. This is not, of course, the only professorial chair in the department of the non-fictional Sydney University: there are two others, the Challis Professor of English Literature and, much later and by public subscription, the Professor of Australian Literature (U of Sydney *Calendar* 479).

There is an important distinction here in the cultural value of these institutional positions. Shakespeare, briefly, is the canonical figure who has been accommodated by Australian cultural formations. The teaching of Shakespeare at secondary and tertiary levels, the Globe Theatre Project, associations in each state for the promotion of Shakespeare, the Shakespeare Room at the Mitchell Library, the Challis Editions of the plays with "annotation," as the back cover of every edition says, "[that] instead of assuming a reader in the northern hemisphere, is directed to the student or non-specialist reader in Australia" — all of these sites inscribe Shakespeare within Australia: or is it the other way round? (cf. Campbell and Mead). Chaucer, as the Moorhouse story tells us, is something other than this: Chaucer is esoteric knowledge, arcane history, authoritative, remote: a phallocratic speaking position. Chaucer is scholarship or "the effect of an interweave of institutional politics, discursive formations, textual specificities and intellectual rivalries: an effect of the cultural politics in which knowledge is produced." And no-one in the Moorhouse story answers back to Stephen Knight and the knowledge he signifies.

V Another Story

My final fragment doesn't have a name and is not "written" in the same way as the other stories I have been quoting. This story is about representation and returns me to Gayatri Spivak and what I will call a

"semiotic" function. I want to use this term as a way of suspending the distinction between theory and practice that, as I have said, I read as symptomatic. In this story, Spivak problematises, for me, the "Anglo-Celtic" formation in Australian culture which would claim Chaucer as the agent for an imperialist project.

I want to pay some attention to this formation because, through the work of Sneja Gunew, it has become a synonym for the "mainstream" in Australia (see e.g. Gunew and Longley). I find this locution, "Anglo-Celtic," problematic. First, it ties together two groups, Anglo and Celtic, that, if my understanding of the history of Northern Ireland is in any way accurate, are and have been hostile. Second, both terms, Anglo and Celtic, normalise and homogenise categories of ethnicity that are importantly differentiated, at least by the members of those categories. The term Anglo, for instance, does not mean "British" in the story I am about to tell; it is instead a term of unstable difference.

This first photograph (figure 1) was taken in the first decade of this century; it is an icon of the family: husband, wife and the first of the next generation each positioned to reiterate the specific markers of white, middle class decency and conformity. The dress is English, Edwardian, the posture is secure, and the gaze is steady. This image was not recorded in Australia or Britain, but in Calcutta, probably in 1911. The family are not white but Anglo-Indian, as they called themselves or Eurasian, as the British called them.² As such they are positioned on some kind of ground between British and Indian social and racial networks, regarded as half-castes by the British and outcastes by Indians. This photograph was taken at a time when the political status of this group was the subject of political and economic, as well as racial, contestation articulated in a dispute over its identifying name.

As an ethnic group Anglo-Indians historicise the fiction of their origin by quoting a letter sent by the Court of Directors of the East India Company to the President of Fort St George (later Madras) dated 8 April 1687. This letter was a response to a socio-political problem posed by the unspeakable but sexualised bodies of Indian women and the equally sexualised though much louder bodies of British soldiers. This is the relevant paragraph:

The marriage of our soldiers to the native women of Fort St George is a matter of such consequence to posterity that we shall be content to encourage it with some expense and have been thinking for the future to appoint a pagoda to be paid to the mother of any child, who shall hereafter be born of any such marriage, upon the day the child is christened if you think this small encouragement will increase the number of such marriages.

(East India Co. ff. 144-45; *Records of Fort St George* 46-49.

Summarised in Bruce 2. 572)

This letter appears in all the historical accounts by Anglo-Indians about their origins; you can see why. For writers such as Herbert Alick Stark, Frank Anthony and Gloria Jean Moore this letter from the Court of Directors of the East India Company to the President of Fort St George

authorises the sexual practices that legitimate what later comes to be regarded as miscegenation.³ This paragraph is repeated by these writers as an originary narrative but I want to suggest that it also discloses a bureaucratisation of desire.

In my reading this letter not only authorises sexual practice but also produces structures of patriarchy, property and political power. The letter became the law; in fact, it's a very clear instance of the letter of male sexual practice becoming the law of patriarchy. The effect of this law is a claim to the inheritance of the father: a claim to the inheritance of British custom, the English language, and separation from the Indian mother as well as mother India. This is another instance of "othering," for what is suppressed here is the other that is marked as woman, native, other (Spivak, "Rani" 132-36). Hence, as the story goes, the social practices of British dress, family, speech, education, public and private behaviour that became a kind of uniform of Anglo-Indian life. As Bernard Cohn explains in his study "Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism," dress in nineteenth-century India marked the "establishment of a categorical separation between dark subjects and fair-skinned rulers. (For some of the cultural effects produced by this politicisation of dress see Chaudhuri.)

The next photograph (figure 2) is the baby some twenty or so years later; in the early 1930s when, once again, the status of Anglo-Indians became politically tense with petitions to the British parliament and representation to the Government of India for recognition of some kind of special status. Britishness was at a premium. The taller woman is the Anglo-Indian and is photographed here with one of her students; she was a teacher, and she is wearing a sari. (For the significance of sari, see Pengilly 136 and Cyrill.) The issue of class, and therefore profession, is an important operative in the narratives of Anglo Indians and I do not have time to unpack those connections here.⁴ I inherited the sari I am wearing (figure 3) along with the photograph. While the wearing of saris has become, in Dulali Nag's sophisticated theoretical reading, a mark of difference in the discourse of modernity in Calcutta today, here in this photograph wearing sari represents a cultural, racial and political hybridisation of a kind that would have satisfied neither British nor Indian, nor, especially, Anglo Indian agendas (see Nag, and, for the effects of variable skin-colour in a "mixed" family, Suleri). Narratives of miscegenation were/are scandalous both to coloniser and colonised — disrupting as they do the securities of skin-deep identities. The dispersal of this narrative across my own body, made emphatic by a dark-coloured sari draped across my own white skin, makes feminist (that is, political and conflictual) agency out of the sexualised, racialised, embodied self I am constructing here.

VI Changing Space

Gayatri Spivak has been "commodified," to use her word, as "the post-colonial critic." The cover of her book of the same name represents her as exotic, oriental, the subject of a painting, as produced by Routledge,

that clearing house of international intellectual reputations. In her own interviews and biographical comments Spivak represents herself as the high-caste Bengali who answers to the West's desire for a version of Indianness and Third World woman, as well as feminist-deconstructivist-Marxist — the whole package glamorously wrapped up in a sari. And while Spivak deploys herself strategically as each of these names she also consistently identifies herself a "teacher of English."⁵ But in the context of making "Australian" sense of my own position Gayatri Spivak is more like the return of the repressed. Her texts and the text of her subjectivity are, for me, densely cathected.⁶ This is not a story about a nostalgic return to ancestral roots; nor it is about marginalisation. I want to draw attention here not only to what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls "the artifice of history" with its concomitant question "who speaks for 'Indian' pasts," but to the necessity of problematising the nature of the imperialist project in the context of Australia and to insist on the difficulty of locating a subject who is constantly displaced as she is articulated by those imperialist discourses. It would be naive for me to argue that my reading of imperialist discourses has not been normed by my experience as gendered subject in white, middle-class discourses of academic privilege, just as it would be pointless for me to suggest that my reading of imperialist discourses has not been normed by the family in which I grew up — that taught me to speak English with a *chee chee* accent and read me stories from Kipling and the Bible in that order.⁷ To say that the experience of imperialist discourses produces an effect of asymmetry is not, it seems to me, sufficient to answer back.

So, reading Chaucer is an interrogative practice and the first question addresses the assumed object of knowledge: what is Chaucer in the changing reality that is the context of "Australia"? To ask this question is also to ask: who is speaking, as subject? and who is listening, as subject? These questions may well be, as the handbooks say, "rhetorical" in the sense of disclosing "a text that cannot 'answer back' after the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project."

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Jenna Mead

I gave an earlier version of this paper in July 1992 at a seminar entitled "Re-positioning Women in Post-Colonial Critical Theory," and I am grateful to the convener, Sue Thomas, for her invitation to speak in that forum. This paper is part of a larger project called "Reception Centres: Doing Chaucer in Australia" which is forthcoming.

- 1 McCaughey, "who was a native of County Antrim, in Ulster, Ireland, came to Australia at twenty years of age, and engaged in pastoral pursuits. In the course of his occupation he amassed a large fortune by skilful management and improvement of his stock, and by making important arrangements for irrigation and conservation of water. He was a member of the Legislative Council from 1899. The approximate annual income from the fund is \$100,000" (University of Sydney, *Calendar* 1990-91 483).

- 2 For an articulation of the bitter dispute over nomenclature, "Anglo Indian" meaning British-born but resident in India and "Anglo-Indian" meaning of mixed race parentage, see MacMillan, *Women of the Raj* 8.

For a contemporaneous version of this problematic racial relation in fiction see Douglas, *Olivia in India* 185.

Spivak uses the term "Anglo-Indian" suggestively to refer to her own language, specifically, her grammar: see "Explanation and Culture" 105. She uses an inversion of the term to "Indo-Anglian" (after the Writers' Workshop collective in Calcutta's usage) to refer to another version of language practice; this time a category of fiction, in "Feminism in Decolonization" 141ff.

- 3 On the Anglo-Indian "problem," see, for example, Nundy, Carstairs, and Gidney.

This genealogical reading of history is contested by writers such as Bahadur Varma who reads Anglo Indians as racially victimised by both oppressors and themselves. Varma also refers to the East India Company directive (11): my thanks to Ms Julie Marshall of the Borchardt Library at La Trobe University who obtained this document for me.

- 4 For a representation of Anglo Indians as lower classed see Kincaid, and MacMillan ch. 3, "The Society of the Exiles"; as class specific see Renford; as ranging from lower to upper class excluding private enterprise or agricultural occupations in India see Younger. For Anglo-Indians as lower class thugs and troublemakers see Vikram Seth.

Class locations were also shaped by geography: Anglo Indians in Calcutta, for instance, maintained different class and social affiliations from Anglo-Indians in Bombay (Dipesh Chakrabarty, personal communication). When I gave this paper at a Postcolonial Studies conference in Fremantle, December 1993, a middle-class Indian woman academic commented to me afterwards that she had "never thought of Anglo-Indians in that way before." I presume that "that way" means as the subject of a discourse rather than marginalised by or excluded from discourse. It would be very difficult for me to give this paper anywhere in India.

- 5 Spivak disclaims glamour in *The Post-Colonial Critic*:

I don't dress well, according to Indian terms. No, in fact I dress hopelessly. The only way (I mean, I can look strange), if I want to get "something done," I will produce an English which is *very* fake Britishy-sounding, and then I think I am considered some kind of foreign person who is so eccentric that she can dress like this. See, I've been asked in Calcutta where I learnt Bengali so well. Because I'm dressed so poorly. (82)

For another version of the teacher of English, this time an Anglo-Indian woman who remains in India after independence, see 36 *Chowringhee Lane*, directed by Aparna Sen with Jennifer Kendall as Miss Violent Stoneham, a teacher of Shakespeare, made in 1981.

- 6 My warmest thanks to Sarah Bevan whose phrase I have borrowed.

- 7 *Chee chee* or *chi chi* is the term usually used to describe the accent of Anglo-Indian speakers and was sometimes used as a generalised term for Anglo Indian. The term frequently has derogatory connotations, see for examples Pengilley 133 and MacMillan 47.

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