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The Concept of Transgressivity in Literature: A Geocritical Study

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Abstract

Transgressivity, as theorized by Bertrand Westphal in Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Space (2007), constitutes a foundational premise of geocritical analysis. Derived from the Latin translatio meaning "to carry over," transgression denotes the act of crossing boundaries—whether social, moral, political, metaphysical, or narrative. This paper undertakes a geocritical examination of transgressivity across three literary and mythological texts: Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, the Greek creation myth as retold by Jean-Pierre Vernant, and Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. The study argues that transgressive acts in literature are not merely devices for shock or comedy but serve as powerful tools to critique established orders, explore the limits of human nature, and provoke transformative thought.

The analysis proceeds in three parts. First, examining Chaucer's Wife of Bath as a social and cultural transgressor, the paper demonstrates how her proto-feminist voice and economic independence are spatially determined by the city of Bath—a place whose historical reputation for cloth-making and female autonomy enables her defiance of medieval patriarchal norms. Second, analyzing the Greek myth of Uranus and Gaia, the paper reveals how incest, castration, and cosmic rebellion function as foundational transgressions that establish spatial hierarchies (Tartarus, Olympus, and the Sea) while simultaneously generating moral order. Third, reading Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, the paper argues that Faustus's metaphysical transgression—his pact with Lucifer—is fundamentally geographical: his desire for omnipotence reflects an "aggressive ego" (Yi-Fu Tuan) seeking to extend dominion across earthly and cosmic space. Across all three texts, transgressivity emerges as a spatially embedded phenomenon that continuously erodes and reconstitutes the very boundaries it crosses.

Keywords: Transgressivity, geocriticism, Bertrand Westphal, space and place, Chaucer, Marlowe, Greek myth, boundary crossing

Geocriticism, as outlined by Bertrand Westphal, is place centric literary approach that analyses how space and place shape the character, destiny and psychology of a native. Geocriticism is built on several key premises. First, it posits that time and space operates on an oscillatory logic, where fragments are not necessarily part of a coherent whole. Second, the link between represented space and real space is indeterminate; instead of being unreal, every representation points to a broadly imagined reality with a "weak ontology" (14). From this, we understand that space can only be grasped in its heterogeneity. The third tenet is transgressivity, which Westphal refers to in chapter 2 of his book Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Space (2007). The present article takes up a

geocritical reading of some renown literary texts to understand how the major characters try to overcome the boundaries imposed on them by their geography.

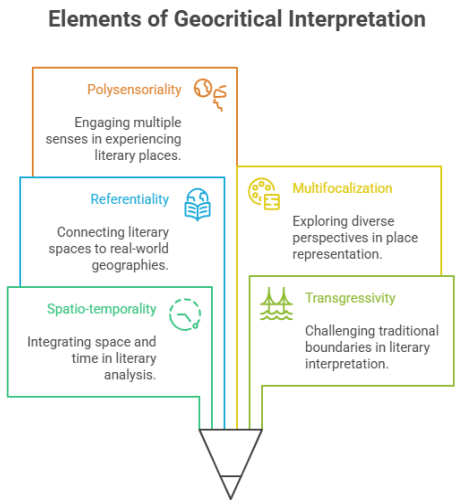

Figure 1: Basic Tenets of

The word transgression comes from the Latin *translatio* that means "to carry over." Hence, transgressivity implies border crossing, in more ways than one and in literary context primarily refers to geographical boundaries. There is no original word as "transgression". According to *Little Oxford English Dictionary* (2005), "transgression" is a derivative – that is, something which is based on or comes from something else. The derivative "transgression" comes from the verb "transgress". Transgress means "go beyond the limits of what is morally, socially, or legally acceptable" (Hawker 746). Therefore, transgression suggests the act of doing something that is not accepted in the society, morally or legally. One can notice from the definition that three things are significant here: society, morality and judiciary. Our society is built on certain principles or general rules by which something can be decided upon. Society includes people, living together at a place, in a region or country, in an ordered community, having shared customs, laws and organizations. The principles created on the grounds of morality or judiciary are supposed to be in interest of everyone. As we zero in, we realize that the most potent (deux-ex-machina) is that of the society and morality and judiciary are the tools that work at the behest of the former. Society starts with family and relationship one shares with others. Some relationships are based on blood, while others are by laws or mutual understanding and emotional bonding. Thus, we have the custom that family members are supposed to take care of each other, and society being a family in the wider sense entails that a person must take their neighbor as brother/ sister. Anything which disrupts or violates this principle is morally incorrect and judicially accountable in the society. The concept of transgressivity in literature usually refers to an act by some character (major or minor), in the narrative (designed by the author) to deliberately cross and violate established some social norms, moral codes, ethical concerns, or cultural boundaries. Transgressivity does not just involve breaking of rules to shock the reader; it is rather used as a powerful literary device in order to critique society, explore the limits of human nature, and provoke thought in the reader. Transgression can be against:

- **Social Norms–** going against the notions regarding one's class, gender, or expected etiquette are social transgression.
- **Moral Codes –** letting go of the distinction between right-and-wrong, or committing a murder, or infidelity are acts of moral transgression.
- **Political or Legal Boundaries –** Rebellion against the government, committing treason, or anarchy falls under political/ judicial transgression.

- **Metaphysical Laws –** denying the existence of God or being blasphemous, dealing with the devil, or challenging divine order are amongst the acts of metaphysical transgression.

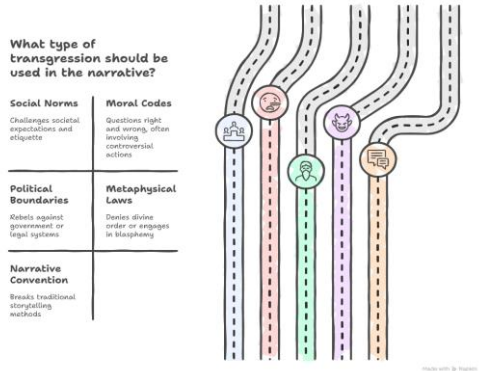

Figure 2: Various Types of Transgressivity

- **Narrative Convention –** a creative writer transgresses when they include any of these: breaking the fourth wall, presenting an unreliable narration, constructing a non-linear structure in their work [Various types of transgressivity in shown in the graphic image above].

The medieval text "General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer presents transgressive actions of various kinds. Transgressivity in *The Canterbury Tales* can be seen in characters' non-confirming actions, which challenge the established social norms and accepted behavior. The text is set in the Middle Ages – a period that has been defined by a rigid hierarchy, the pervasive influence of the Church, and a slowly evolving political structure. Chaucer seems to critic these social constructs collectively by underlining the flaws in individual characters that represent the various economic class and ranks of the socio-political order. He does not use transgression as a tool for comedy or shock value, but appears to mark the loopholes in the society and his fellow humans. *The Canterbury Tales* is a collection of 24 short stories narrated by a group of pilgrimage which comprises of people of varying social hierarchy and economic class. The question of degree, and of the social perceptions conditioned by rank, determines the human world and Chaucer craftily delineates that in the "General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales*. The "General Prologue" outlines the circumstances that bring the pilgrims together at the Tabard Inn before they embark on their journey to Canterbury to pray at the tomb of the martyred St. Thomas Becket. It establishes the frame narrative and introduces the pilgrims, presenting them to us—through the narrator's perspective—as accurately as possible according to their social rank and position. ('Me thynketh it accordaunt to resoun / To telle yow al the condicioun / Of ech of hem, so as it semed me, / And whiche they weren, and of what degree') (Sanders 36).

I'd spoken to them all upon the trip
And was soon one with them in fellowship,
Pledged to rise early and to take the way
To Canterbury, as you heard me say.
But none the less, while I have time and space,
Before my story takes a further pace,
It seems a reasonable thing to say

What their condition was, the full array
Of each of them, as it appeared to me,
According to profession and degree,
And what apparel they were riding in (Chaucer 22);

Chaucer highlights the circumstances that grant him the opportunity to observe and inquire about the pilgrims. It is their coincidental meeting at the Tabard Inn, all bound for the same destination—the shrine at Canterbury Cathedral—that creates this moment of collective pause. Their presence at this specific location and time offers the narrator both the temporal and spatial framework to engage with them. This aligns with Yi-Fu Tuan's concepts of space and place, as outlined in his 1977 work. Tuan describes these as fundamental elements of human experience: place represents a small, secure, and self-contained environment, while space conveys a sense of freedom, openness, and the vast, unrestricted world. "Man, out of his intimate experience with his body and with other people, organizes space so that it conforms with and caters to his biological needs and social relations" (34). By space Chaucer means the state of affairs that have created the possibility for building social relations with the other pilgrims and this space endows him with the freedom to observe other pilgrims at such a close quarter. He utilizes this space with expertise as can be witnessed by his detailed, minute and intricate depictions of each and every traveler-story-teller. Amongst all the twenty-nine pilgrims the following stand out as transgressors for defying the social norms, morality and class structure: the Wife of Bath, the Miller, the Pardoner and the Friar.

Social and Cultural Transgression:

The Wife of Bath is one of the most iconic characters in the history of English literature not because of her idiosyncratic traits or personal shortcomings but her ability to dwell in the narrow zone of transgressivity wherefrom she can view the horizon beyond. She is a quintessential social transgressor. As a woman, she defiantly rejects the medieval ideals of female meekness, silence, and obedience. She has had five husbands and is going to have the sixth one yet when people seem amazed by this knowledge, she defends herself quoting biblical reference:

Then why not marry two or even eight?
And why speak evil of the married state?
'Take wise King Solomon of long ago;
We hear he had a thousand wives or so.
And would to God it were allowed to me
To be refreshed, aye, half so much as he!
He must have had a gift of God for wives,
No one to match him in a world of lives (Chaucer 311)!

The modern reader may wonder how the Wife of Bath, Alison, could find her voice at a time when the society was dominated by religious clerics and archbishops. She could be what she is only because Alison is the Wife of "Bath" – the wife from 'Bath – from where originates her courage, boldness and confidence. A spatial analysis of Wife of Bath highlights how the character Alison's identity and proto-feminist voice are deeply connected to the historical and cultural reputation of the city of Bath. Chaucer's use of "Bath" in her title is not arbitrary: Bath is associated with the Wife in such a way as if it's her surname. A surname identifies a family and can sometimes provide clues about a

family's history, origin, or profession. The word "Bath" in Alison's name does provide additional information related to her origin (she belongs to place of historical significance and cultural lineage) and profession (the business she is involved in – merchandise of clothing). And herein lays the significance of her geographical background. To understand Chaucer's creation of the Wife we have to notice the place she comes from, that is the city of Bath.

Geocriticism, with its emphasis on the multifocal, layered, and multisensory interpretation of place, offers valuable insight into our understanding of Bath—a city shaped through the continuous interaction of its architecture, literature, social practices, and natural surroundings. Situated in Avon, England, the City of Bath is a celebrated cultural and archaeological landmark, best known for its remarkably preserved Roman Baths and its deep historical significance.

> The city of Bath in South West England was founded in the 1st century AD by the Romans who used the natural hot springs as a thermal spa. It became an important centre for the wool industry in the Middle Ages but in the 18th century under the reigns of George I, II and III it developed into an elegant spa city, famed in literature and art (UNESCO).

Bath, though initially meant for luxurious bathing, pleasure and relaxation, eventually grows into a cultural hub. People from every corner of England start flocking at the Bath at various seasons. We have numerable references in literature where characters go to the Bath with different motives. Mary Wollstonecraft argues in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that women are not naturally inferior to men, but appear to be only because they lack education. She suggests that both men and women should be treated as rational beings. Wollstonecraft imagines a social order founded on reason. The Wife of Bath, Alison is educated and in the above quoted lines she applies her reasoning based on scriptures. She also expresses her gratitude to the God for His bounty: "Blessed is God that I have wedded five! / Welcome the sixth, whenever he appears" (Chaucer 311). The patriarchal society, adhering to the *New Testament* which portrays Eve as a being created from the rib of Adam, treats a woman as the weaker sex who is dependent on her spouse for provision, protection and procreation and who lacks knowledge, reasoning and perception. It allows a man to be open about his libidinal desires while expecting the woman to be the sole property of her husband. Consequently, when the Wife of Bath talks about her marital history in front of other pilgrims, they are shocked here. Simon De Beauvoir writes in "The Data of Biology" of "Part I: Destiny" of her book that "in the human species individual 'possibilities' depend upon the economic and social situation" (Beauvoir 62). The place Alison comes from is Bath. Bath was well-known for its cloth-making industry, and married women, particularly widows, were able to gain financial autonomy there in ways that were less common in other English towns. The Wife of Bath is described as a skilled cloth-maker, echoing Bath's renowned for fine textiles. As a woman from this city, Alison's commercial success and mobility reflect actual opportunities available to Bath's women; her economic ability serves as a means for her access to education which provides her confidence and agency. She is depicted as a wealthy, well-dressed, and widely traveled lady, who directly ties her personal identity to her geographic origin, confirming Beauvoir's statement that economic and social situation can bring forth new possibilities for the emancipation of women.

Chaucer's adamant heroine does not require any male support, for she can speak for herself when required:

> To wed, o' God's name, where it pleases me.
> Wedding's no sin, so far as I can learn.
> Better it is to marry than to burn.
> 'What do I care if people choose to see
> Scandal in Lamech for his bigamy?
> I know that Abraham was a holy man
> And Jacob too – I speak as best I can –
> Yet each of them, we know, had several brides,
> Like many another holy man besides (312).

Her presence of mind, reasoning aptitude and confidence prove her strength: "Show me a time or text where God disparages/ or sets a prohibition upon marriages/ Expressly, let me have it! Show it me! (312)" She challenges the religious dogma which places great emphasis on the chastity of a woman.

> And where did He command virginity?
> I know as well as you do, never doubt it,
> All the Apostle Paul has said about it;
> He said that as for precepts he had none.
> One may advise a woman to be one;
> Advice is no commandment in my view.
> He left it in our judgement what to do (312).

Chaucer's titular "Wife of Bath" represents the spirited, urban, and liberal female identity. Bath's reputation as a spa city is associated with healing, pleasure, and social gathering, would have been familiar to Chaucer's audience. These associations cast Alison as a character with worldly experience, sexual frankness, and an unapologetic approach to marriage and desire. Her ability to negotiate her own agency and power in marriage is thematically tied to the freedom and commercial potentiality available in Bath, distinguishing her from more rural or cloistered female characters. The Wife of Bath is as modern as her creator. She continues boldly, asking almost in a medico-scientific tone and speaks in a manner which is beyond the expectations of a reader of the medieval society:

> Tell me to what conclusion or in aid
> Of what were generative organs made?
> And for what profit were those creatures wrought?
> Trust me; they cannot have been made for naught.
> Gloze as you will and plead the explanation
> That they were only made for the purgation
> Of urine, little things of no avail
> Except to know a female from a male,
> And nothing else. Did somebody say no (314)?

The phallogocentric society, which has conceptualized and perpetuated the subordination of women to men, has always taught us that 'women have not produced important advances in thought because of their biologically determined preoccupation with nurturance and emotion, which led to their essential "inferiority" in regard to abstract

thought' (Lerner 6). But that history is 'his' story – the story of men. This history – the recorded and interpreted record of the past of the human race – which is, as Lerner points out in the Introductory chapter of her book, taken as a universal account of humankind, is actually "the viewpoint of the male half of humanity only" (4). Characters like the Wife of Bath refute such history to break free of the cultural confinement through their transgressive declaration of selfhood. Her prowess and eloquence of speech marks her theological knowledge and oratory skills as well as her open discussion on the use of sexual power to gain "sovereignty" over the spouse underlines her perception of womanhood. Beauvoir celebrates a woman like the Wife, claiming that:

> THE women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of femininity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways; but they do not easily succeed in living completely the life of a human being. Reared by women within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting still upon solid economic and social foundations (Beauvoir 30).

Alison is one of the "women of today". She is a wealthy, self-made businesswoman who has "solid economic" foundation in the cloth trade which is traditionally a male domain. Her entire Prologue is a transgression of what was considered an acceptable speech for a woman. Her transgressive action against the conventional ideologies regarding gender, class and feudal hierarchy can be regarded as the beginning of feminism. Alison's confidence and proto-feminist leanings are not just personal quirks, but are shaped by her geographic context. Alison's assertion of the self is symbolic of the economic and social sway that Bath can afford to enterprise the subjugated: women. Modern critics often wonder if Chaucer is satirizing or celebrating women empowerment through Wife of Bath. However, it seems more likely that he is attempting to uplift the second sex by providing them access to the education through economic independence. The city's economic might and culture of relative female autonomy are geographically embedded in Alison's persona. Her voice becomes a spatial product, doubly marked by the city's reputation and her own lived "experience," which she foregrounds over traditional authorities.

Metaphysical Transgression:

A classic example of transgression or transgressivity (Westphal's term) can be seen at work among the Greek pantheon of superhuman entities. One of the questions that have always kept humankind wondering is 'What was there when there was not yet anything, when there was nothing' (Vernant 2)? The Greeks answer that question with myths and stories. "The Origin of the Universe" tell us how the Earth or Gaia, as they Greeks call it, comes out of Void. This Gaia gives birth to the other entire natural element.

> In the house that is cosmos, the Earth constitutes the foundation, but that is not its only function. It breeds and nourishes everything; except for certain entities…. Gaia is the universal mother: Forests, mountains, underground caves, ocean waters, vast sky – all of them come from Gaia, Mother Earth (4-5).

Gaia, being the universal mother has a principle to "breed" and "nourish." through her own power Gaia first delivers a very significant figure. She gives form to a latent part of herself, which upon its birth becomes her equal and opposite: the Starry Sky. This sky, or

Uranus, becomes at once her double and her antithesis. A perfect equal in substance and scale, Uranus stretches across Gaia. They become the two superimposed planes of the cosmos—the bottom and the top, the floor and the ceiling—enveloping each other in a total embrace. The introduction of Uranus, who embodies the male sky as Gaia embodies the female earth, transforms the process of creation. Procreation shifts from being an internal, parthenogenetic act—where Gaia or Uranus generates offspring alone—to a collaborative one. From their union, new creatures emerge, distinct from both and born from the fusion of their separate natures. In Hesiod's account, their first children were the one-eyed Cyclopes, named Brontes (Thunder), Steropes (Lightning), and Arges (Bright). These were followed by the Hecatonchires—Cottus, Briareos, and Gyges—monstrous beings each possessing a hundred arms and fifty heads and the six Titans [Oceanus, Coeus, Crius, Hyperion, Iapetus and Cronos] and their six Titan sisters: Theia, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phoebe and Tethys.

> Now of the many children that were born to Sky and Earth,
> These were the fiercest ones, and from the very outset they
> Were hated by their father and he hid them all away,
> As soon as they were born, deep in the earth; he took delight
> In doing this wicked deed and did not let them reach the light (Lines 154-158).

This seems to be the first act of transgression in the whole of universe where a father tries to murder his children because of fear and lust. As a progenitor Uranus is supposed to look after the children. Instead of performing his fatherly role, he violates the familial principles both as a spouse and a parent. His cruelty causes Gaia terrible pain and engenders the lives of all her children. Then Gaia lets loose her groan and calls on them – particularly on the Titans: "Listen here! Your father, Sky, is doing us all injury, he is inflicting dreadful violence on us, and this has to end. You must rise against your father" (Vernant 8). Gaia's children were afraid to revolt against their father, the might Uranus, only her last-born son, Cronus agrees to help her. Gaia devises a sickle and Cronus uses this instrument to castrate his fathers. The narrative of transgressive father echoes in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* wherein Clytemnestra murders her husband Agamemnon for sacrificing their innocent daughter Iphigenia, through deceit and lies. But there is a difference between the drama of Euripides and the verse poem of Hesiod. Hesiod's narrative presents the act of transgression as a selfish act in a cosmic family while Euripides' drama upholds betrayal in the family for the sake of social relationship. Agamemnon offers the life of his daughter to appease the goddess of wind, so that the Trojan ships could sail. In his adamant desire to help his brother, save the honor of the Greeks, he ignores his fatherly duties. Geocriticism interrogates the spaces represented in literature and myth as sites of encounter, negotiation and transformation. Vernant's narrative shows the relationship between myth, landscape and cultural boundaries. In his retelling, the Greek myth of the creation of the universe originates from the undifferentiated chaos – which exists sans topographical boundaries. Yi-Fu Tuan in the chapter titled "Mythical Space and Place" states that:

> Two principal kinds of mythical space may be distinguished. In the one, mythical space is a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known; it frames pragmatic space. In the other it is the spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which

> people carry on their practical activities. Both kinds of space, well described by scholars for nonliterate and traditional societies, persist in the modern world (86).

The Chaos falls into the first category of Tuan's divisions of mythical space. This "fuzzy area," Chaos is the "conceptual extension of the familiar and workaday spaces given by direct experience" (86). This Chaos or abyss or chasm, being without boundary or shape or order, surpasses the space (the Earth, the sky, and everything in the universe) humans inhabit and experience in their daily life. What comes out of the Chaos is the Earth or Gaia. Gaia is the second kind of mythical space. Tuan claims that –

> The second kind of mythical space functions as a component in a world view or cosmology. It is better articulated and more consciously held than mythical space of the first kind. World view is a people's more or less systematic attempt to make sense of environment. To be livable, nature and society must show order and display a harmonious relationship. All people require a sense of order and fitness in their environment, but not all seek it in the elaboration of a coherent cosmic system (88).

Tuan's two types of mythical spaces can be depicted in the following graphic image:

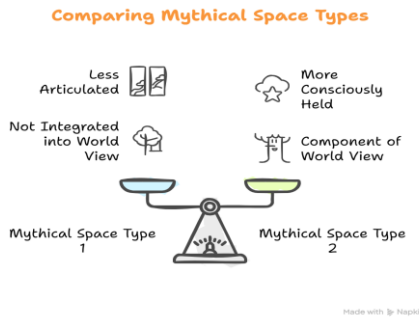

Figure 3: Tuan's First Mythical Space vs Second Mythical Space

Gaia introduces order in the cosmos by adhering to the moral codes of conduct. The relationship between Gaia and Uranus embodies that between spouses, who are supposed to 'display a harmonious relationship.' But Uranus transgresses code of conduct when he prevents their birth of their children. He disrupts the family environment which calls for re-order and coherence. Transgressivity in this ancient Greek creation myth is also represented through self-centered actions that violate established cosmic, social, and moral boundaries. Foundational narratives—such as the union between Gaia and her son Ouranos—are steeped in incestuous desire and acts of violent upheaval. Cronus's castration of Ouranos, for instance, symbolically disturbs generational continuity and restructures the cosmos. These moments of sexual and cosmic transgression do not merely break rules but establish the socio-cultural norms to be observed in the human-world; the narrative actively dismantles and reconstructs the boundaries between earth and sky, male and female, divine and mortal.

A spatial reading of the narrative shows that the incestuous unions and ensuing conflicts lead to disastrous consequences; like the birth of monstrous beings and the distinct spatial domains. Transgressive acts—such as castration of Uranus and the imprisonment of rebellious offspring—serve to divide the mythic world into separate realms: Tartarus, Olympus, and the Sea. Each transgressive act thus operates on two levels:

spatial, by redefining territories and relocating entities; and existential, by establishing new cosmic orders that challenge the old.

Moral and Religious Transgression:

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* presents the transgressive act of moral and religious kind. Faustus is a young man who is very intelligent and seems bent to study something extraordinary. He chooses various subjects for himself and one by one excels in them, only to quench his thirst for knowledge. He wants to study Analytics but decides to discontinue it because the end of Analytics is only to dispute well and he has already achieved that. He chooses Medicine but he realizes that he has made the renown that he can in Medicine, he then chooses to study Law and Divinity but discards the idea stating that while Law is "a mercenary drudge" (434) focusing on external trash, the punishment of sin is hard and humans are sinful. The end of all these disciplines fails to satisfy him because his desire for knowledge seems unbound. To understand Faustus better one has to delve deeper and discover the origins of Marlowe's tragic hero. Viewed from spatial lens reveals how the place (Germany) Faustus belongs to structures his intellectual trajectory and shapes his desires for dominance. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey note in the introductory chapter of their edited volume on Christopher Marlowe that the play, set precisely within the academic world of post-Reformation Germany, is the product of the distinctive culture, deeply anxious about magic, religion, knowledge, and salvation. The Prologue confirms this with the statement that Faustus, born in Rhodes, as an adult goes to Wittenberg which was Martin Luther's own university. To an Elizabethan audience this was not an ordinary choice. By placing his protagonist in Wittenberg, Marlowe situates him at the epicenter of the conflict between religious zeal and spiritual doubt, introduced by Luther's *Ninety-five Theses*. The opening scenes evoke this with the declaration that Faustus begins with Divinity and earns the doctoral degree:

> So soon he profits in divinity,
> The fruitful plot of scholarism graced,
> That shortly he was graced with doctor's name,
> Excelling all whose sweet delight disputes
> In heavenly matters of theology… (432).

It is interesting that Faustus begins with theology only. He lives in a humanist intellectual world that has rejected the rigid confines of medieval science and religion. This is clear in his opening speech, where he restlessly jumps from one book and discipline to another, driven by the belief that knowledge is power. But his spatial setting has more to offer than the "scholarism" and theology which inspires him initially.

> As with Tamburlaine, the humbly born man aspires to the realization of his proper natural authority; as with Barabas, the outsider seeks to demonstrate that he is at liberty to reject the imposed restrictions that he despises. Like both, when Faustus sets himself against convention, he slips into an arrogant self-justifying fantasy of his invincibility (Sanders 92).

Marlowe portrays Faustus as an academic in intellectual quest but he seems more interested in 'power' for he wants to resolve his 'ambiguities' regarding his 'enterprise', and all this is evident in the speech he makes after having learnt the arts of necromancy:

> How am I glutted with conceit of this!

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
Resolve me of all ambiguities,
Perform what desperate enterprise I will?
I'll have them fly to India for gold,
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
And search all corners of the new-found world
For pleasant fruits and princely delicates.
I'll have them read me strange philosophy
And tell the secrets of all foreign kings.
I'll have them wall all Germany with brass
And make swift Rhine circle fair Wittenberg.
I'll have them wall the public schools with silk,
Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad.
I'll levy soldiers with the coin they bring
And chase the Prince of Parma from our land,
And reign sole king of all our provinces;
Yea, stranger engines for the brunt of war
Than was the fiery keel at Antwerp's bridge
I'll make my servile spirits to invent (436).

The soliloquy expresses Faustus' desire for Indian gold and Orient pearl. He wishes to "search all corners of the new-found world" and try the delicacies that prince have tasted. His words echo that of his literary sibling, Tamburlaine, who declares his motive in *Tamburlaine the Great*:

Nature, that framed us of four elements
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
60 Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds.
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world
And measure every wand'ring planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Wills us to wear ourselves and never rest
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown (161).

It seems like Tamburlaine and Faustus have exchange their speeches for the former, being a war hero bent on empiricism limbs 'after knowledge infinite' while the latter wishes to "chase the Prince of Parma from [his] land". Faustus might not acknowledge this but he unconsciously harbors the lust for empire. He even dreams of becoming the "sole king of all [the] provinces" and wants to invent better "stranger engines for the brunt of war" by his devilish spirits. Faustus not only expresses his desire for empire but plans to secure his country as well. His wish to "wall all Germany with brass" directly connects him to the contemporary war campaign. All these show that Faustus is way too much involved in building an empire of his own, to establish his author and rule. However, just like, Ramus, Faustus knows that: "Alas, I am a scholar, how should I have gold?/ All that I have is but my stipend from the king,/ Which is no sooner received but it is spent" (646). Marlowe's

brilliant scholar, Ramus, based on the historical figure of French Protestant Pierre de la Ramée, in *The Massacre at Paris* becomes a victim of the Duke of Guise's avarice for gold and power. Thus, Faustus takes the path less trodden and plays clever. He aspires not only for the world but for heaven. He then chooses Divinity only to realize that it cannot extend his intellectual territories beyond a mortal's limits who eventually has to embrace death.

If we say that we have no sin,
We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us.
Why then belike we must sin,
And so consequently die.
Ay, we must die an everlasting death (434).

So far Faustus' greed appears to be only for knowledge until he rejects Divinity and decides upon Magic, claiming that:

[*He picks up a book of magic*.]
These metaphysics of magicians
And necromantic books are heavenly,
Lines, circles, schemes, letters, and characters –
Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires (434).

In choosing the art of black magic Faustus trespasses the boundaries of sanctioned knowledge. The ambivalence of Faustus's own ambitions is localized to this context. His desire to be "as cunning as Agrippa" ironically alludes to Henry Cornelius Agrippa, an author who both explored learned magic and later renounced the follies of learning. The above quoted lines underline that Faustus's desire is geographical rather than intellectual. He considers the metaphysics of magic as "heavenly" and a "sound magician is a mighty god" (434-435).' He yearns to become a deity and his transgression lies in going against the Divine order. He not only desires profit and delight but honor, power and omnipotence as well. Just like the titular protagonist in William Shakespeare's drama, *Macbeth*, Faustus forsakes his comfort zone in order to achieve that which lies beyond the threshold of mortal real. Read from geocritical angle one may notice that Faustus here aspires for a particular place – a world or the whole world:

O, what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honor, of omnipotence
Is promised to the studious artisan!
All things that move between the quiet poles
Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;
But his dominion that exceeds in this
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man (435).

Faustus' hunger for knowledge is actually his "thirst for power". He wants to extend his territory, so that he can dominate over everything that exists between the two poles. He desires to rule the world but is it really the mortal world that he longs for – maybe he is too intelligent to understand that he cannot and must not aspire for heaven (space) for that is beyond his reaches. One born as a human can go to the heaven only after death but that seems too harsh a fact that one has to die to go there. In quitting the study of Divinity he shows that his awareness of human's fallibility. Thus, he tries to attain something that is not heaven per se but has some of its attributes – something that is akin to heaven

('heavenly') – hence, he desires the books of necromancy. He summons the devils and commands Mephistopheles upon his arrival.

> I charge thee wait upon me whilst I live,
> To do whatever Faustus shall command,
> Be it to make the moon drop from her sphere,
> Or the ocean to overwhelm the world (442).

As can be seen here Faustus' words repeatedly betray his motive of dominance and agency. For now, his attempt to extend his intellectual territory includes not just the earthly realm but the waterbody as well. Faustus reflects Yi-Fu Tuan's "big man" who requires more room for his aggressive ego. Tuan writes in the chapter titled "Spaciousness and Crowding" that:

> Space is a resource that yields wealth and power when properly exploited. It is worldwide a symbol of prestige. The "big man" occupies and has access to more space than lesser beings. An aggressive ego endlessly demands more room in which to move. The thirst for power can be insatiable— (58).

The more he knows the more confidence he feels. But the possession of wisdom cannot fulfill his hunger for none of these disciplines can bring in power and authority. Thus, Faustus fails, and he fails miserably when Mephistopheles tells him that it's not his magic that raise him but he came on his own accord and that if Faustus wants the service of Mephistopheles, he must make a deal with his master, Lucifer. Faustus gives his body-and-soul to Lucifer in exchange of a period of twenty-four years of servitude of Mephistopheles.

> I, John Faustus of Wittenberg, Doctor, by these presents do give both body and soul to Lucifer, Prince of the East, and his minister Mephistopheles, and furthermore grant unto them that, four-and-twenty years being expired, the articles above written inviolate, full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods, into their habitation wheresoever (Marlowe 453).

This transgression constitutes a violation of social, cosmic, and spatial hierarchies—orders that are divinely policed and geographically mapped within the play's world, from Wittenberg to Rome. Faustus signs the document which states that on the expiry of it Lucifer is entailed to take him, body and soul into their habitation wheresoever. He desires to experience 24 years heavenly dominance on earth and agrees to dwell into Hell forever. This is the metaphysical transgression is manifested spatially – for no sooner does he seal the contract; he enters the Hell. Mephistopheles informs him that "where we are is hell" (453) –The place where he is right now is transformed into Hell. Faustus's transgressive acts propel him into a spatialized state of being, one that destabilizes the very fabric of the cosmos. In this new reality, the fixed coordinates of heaven, earth, and hell dissolve, becoming permeable and contested sites of negotiation and conflict. *Doctor Faustus* embodies the geocritical view of space as the limits the hero, thereby inspiring in him the will to transgress. The play denies unity, showing all boundaries as fluid and Faustus forever on their "unnerving edge." Its narrative exists in the interstitial—between Wittenberg and Rome, earth and hell, ambition and damnation—where transgression continuously erodes and reconstitutes the very limits it crosses.

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