**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF MOVING "OUT OF PLACE" AS TEXTURED BY SOME ENGLISH POETS

## YOUSUF ALI

Research Scholar
Department of English, AMU, Aligarh

**YOUSUF ALI**

### ABSTRACT

Apart from the political domain, the thinking or the consciousness of moving out of place or displacement whether forcefully or voluntarily has always been the subject of literature: poetry or prose. Though there are many Romantic and Georgian poets who, as many critics allege, tend to look the easier aspects of life and incline to ignore the harsh reality of life or, in other words, the bleak patterns of life; but there are poets who has taken up such issues of displacement or moving towards the endangered side of the world into which people have been getting lured by its apparent promise of pleasure. Taking cognizance of this fact, this paper devotes itself to the critical study of some English poets who has addressed such issues of self-imposed or self-created psychological displacement known or unknown in their poems.

**Key words:** consciousness, politics, literature, moving, out, place, psychological etc.

Over the last century onward, speculations on moving out of place are gaining momentum in the field of postcolonial politics. National and international relations that warrant such exilic concerns become more imperative to be thought of on a larger scale. Thinkers like Neville J. Mandel, Lowell Joseph Ragatz, Theodor W. Adorno, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Antonio Gramsci and Eqbal Ahmad have registered their individual reflections on exile in their respective writings (Bayoumi 445-469). Most prominently, Edward W. Said has explored almost the entire spectrum of the history of exile and its various telling issues in his works that include *The Politics of Dispossession* (1994) and *Out of Place* (1999). These thinkers, however, have focused on various modes of exile in terms of geographical or political perspectives. They have shed very low light on the subject pertaining to "ethical exile" or "moral exile" save somewhat on "cultural exile," or the "spiritual exile" as Lynne Young feels it, or the "Diaspora" with regard to the Afro-American or Israel-Palestinian crisis which is again limited to the periphery of geo-political aspects. In fact, they have displayed very little interest in taking the cognizance of "religious exile" or "the exile of values" from the human society at large down the ages and culminating now in modern times. The following definition of exile by Jo-Marie Claassen fits to compass the range of their approaches towards the issues of exile encircling the limitation of their merely geo-political considerations:

Exile is a condition in which the protagonist is no longer living, or able to live, in the land of his birth. It may be either voluntary, a deliberate decision to stay in a foreign country, or involuntary. In some cases, exile can be the result of circumstances, such as an offer of expatriate employment. Such instances will usually cause hardship to the protagonist. However, exile may be enforced. This last occurrence frequently results from a major difference of political disagreement between the authorities of a state and the person being exiled. Often such exiles are helpless victims of circumstances beyond their sphere of influence; sometimes, however, the exiles are themselves prominent political figures, exiled because of the potential threat to the well-being of their rivals. (Claassen 9)

In the domain of literature, however, the exilic consciousness concerning the "religious decline" or the "decline of values" or the "denial of the divine scheme or order" was felt as early as in the Old English Period (450-1066 A. D.) (Abrams 219) in the poetry attributed to Caedmon who in the poem, *Genesis* takes up the subject of religious exile considering the first denial of the divine order dared by Satan—the denial that amounted to his banishment from the Heaven, and which in its turn wrought his exile. The poem reads the incident as—

> ….They knew no sin nor any evil; but
> dwelt in peace for ever with their lord. They wrought no deed in
> heaven save right and truth, until the angel prince in pride
> walked in the ways of error. (II, LL. 18-21)
> .......        …..        …..        …..        …..
> Then was God angered and wrathful against that host
> which He had crowned before with radiance and glory. For the
> traitors, to reward their work, He shaped a house of pain and
> grim affliction, and lamentations of hell. Our Lord prepared
> this torture-house of exiles, (II, LL. 32-36)
> …..        …..        …..        …..        …..
>        Our Lord expelled and banished out of
> heaven the presumptuous angel host. All-wielding God dismissed
> the faithless horde, a hostile band of woeful spirits, upon a
> long, long journey. Crushed was their pride, their boasting
> humbled, their power broken, their glory dimmed. Thenceforth
> those dusky spirits dwelt in exile.    (Book I, B, LL. 58-63)

Book II goes in the same vain—

> Behind them stretching wide their mansions
> lay, crowned with glory, prospering in grace in God's dominion, a
> sunny, fruitful land, empty of dwellers, when the accursed
> spirits reached their place of exile within Hell's prison-walls. (II, LL. 85-88)

*Genesis* Book XVI tells the exile of Adam and Eve, the first parents, after being deceived by the fallen Satan to eat the forbidden fruit. The Almighty pronounces the punishment:

> "Thou shalt seek another home, a joyless
> dwelling. Naked and needy shalt thou suffer exile,…" (II, LL. 926-927 )

Exilic awareness relating to such denial of the divine principles or ethical values finds expression in the poetry of George Herbert (1553-1633) and Henry Vaughan (1621-1695). Herbert seems to locate the root of this sort of moral exile. He observes—

> Religion stands on tip-toe in our land,
> Religion to pass to the American strand.
> When height of malice, and prodigious lusts,
> Impudent sinning, witchcrafts, and distrusts
> (The makers of Future bane) shall fill our cup

Unto the brimme, and make our measure up;

..... ... ... ... ...

And all her calendar of sinnes fulfill;

In his *The Retreat*, Henry Vaughan too deals with religious exile which owes much to the experience of worldly pleasure at the expense of religious hold. The poet expresses his grief for his exile from the earlier religious "track"—

…I taught my tongue to wound

My conscience with a sinful sound,

Or had the black art to dispense

A several sin to every sense,

But felt through all this fleshly dress

Bright shoots of everlastingness.

O, how I long to travel back

And tread again that ancient track.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) in his *The Deserted Village* similarly expresses his sorrow over the exile of ethical spirit as replaced by the ever-growing materialist mercantile spirit of his age. Likewise, Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) also handles this subject of such exile of values from human society. In his poem, *The Broken Man*, he laments over people's exile from moral values:

We took no tearful leaving.

We bade no long good-byes.

Men talked of crime and thieving.

Men wrote of fraud and lies.

'T was time and time to go—

..... ..... .....

(They scan the shipping still ),

And that's your Christian people

Returning good for ill!

More recently, in his prose work, *Edward VII: A Portrait,* Christopher Hibbert, in a passage of this fiction quoted by Simpson as "Edward VII Escapes from Victorian Values" in the chapter entitled "Getting Out" of the *Oxford Book of Exile*, clearly traces the moral "escape" or exile from moral "values" practised in the Victorian England. Thus, such ethical exile often occurs in English literature. John Simpson in the introductory chapter of his book, *The Oxford Book of Exile* dwells upon the same:

Each of us in exile: the thought is a hackneyed one, but it still remains a little force. We are exiles from our mother's womb, from our childhood, from private happiness, from peace, even if we are not exiles in the more conventional sense of the word. The feeling of looking back for the last time, of setting our face to a new and possibly hostile world is one we all know. It is the human condition;…" (4)

Simpson also cites in this book a quotation entitling "Their Solitary Way" (p. 4) from Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*, Book XII to ensure the reader about the recurrent usage of this subject of religious exile or the "denial of the Divine decree" in English literature. As a matter of fact, whenever there is a societal deviation from morality or religious righteousness, or exile from the biblical background, the writers or the poets ranging from Caedmon to the modern poets like W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden have always reacted to this type of exile from the earlier ideal societal values in their literary works.

W. B. Yeats has dealt with such type of consciousness of moving out of place in his poem "The Happy Townland". Here one should note the ironic edge of the title of the poem. The poet satairically uses the word "happy", for the description of the traveler in the poem, who is going towards town from village thinks himself happy. But the poet can foresee his miserable life which he would shortly face in the town. The speaker of the poem records his feeling over the same—

The little fox he [farmer] murmured,

'O what of the world's bane?'

The sun was laughing sweetly,

The moon plucked at my rein,

'O do not pluck at his rein,

He is riding to the town land

That's the world's bane.' (13-20)

Here in the third line the reference to sun's laughing also highlights the satiric mode of the poem. Clearly enough, the last two lines quoted above state the shift towards town from village is often sought but is not always positive rather it "is the world's bane".

In "Sailing to Byzantium" too Yeats portrays almost the same nature of this sort of exilic ambiance or the moving out of place which was originally beneficial. The following lines are very important in this perspective:

The young

In one another's arms, birds in the tress

—Those dying generations— at their song,

The salman-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,

Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long

Whatever is begotten, born, and dies. (1-6)

Here the phrases "dying generations" and "Fish, flesh, or fowl" emphasize the gradual degradation of society and at the same time the world's movement towards something unnatural towards unknown place or foreign land or exile or out of place, which is further explained by the lines that follow:

Caught in that sensual music all neglect

Monuments of unageing intellect.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,

A tattered coat upon a stick, ...

.....            .....            .....

Consume my heart away; sick with desire

And fastened to a dying animal

The repetition of the word "dying" underlines the theme of something fast vanishing or fast changing or moving out of place. Again the young of the earlier period moves on to the old generation and this old generation yields to the young generation and thus creates and forms Yeats' concept of *double* "gyres", which perfectly accommodates his consciousness of the moving out of place.

"This mode of isolation, of exile…finds many expressions in the…poetry of T. S. Eliot…," writes Finley Eversole (129). Eliot's "Landscapes" (I, "New Hampshire") depicts the theme of such movement towards exile or being out of place. The very first few lines of the poem:

Children's voice in the orchard

Between the blossom- and the fruit-time:

Golden head, crimson head,

Between the green tip and the root. (1-4)

are full of beautiful images. "Children's voice" whispering in the orchard creates a romantic atmosphere in the poem. The words like "blossom", "fruit" add to the richness of the romantic beauty of the serene ambiance which is supposed to be in an orchard. Moreover the use of the words "golden" and "crimson" unfailingly enhances the charm of the scenic beauty. So it can be said that the poet has left no stone unturned to beautify the orchard. And accordingly the reader expects that the poem is going to feast a grand enjoyment in the orchard. Again the word "children" has something to with childhood innocency as well as pure delight. But reader's expectation is met with a jolt and the expectation of something heartily enjoyment is vanished when the phrase "Black wing" appears in the fifth line of the poem. And as the poem grows and develops we are confronted with more words that have negative connotations.

Black wing, brown wing, hover over;
Twenty years and the spring is over;
To-day grieves, to-morrow grieves,
Cover me over, (5-8)

The second line quoted above is pivotal to the central theme of moving out of place in the poem. The utterance — "the spring is over"— signifies the end of the happiness of childhood that is further illustrated by the phrase "twenty years". Thus the poem in its totality captures the road to exile or individuals moving out of place at least at the psychological level if not at the physical level.

W. H. Auden also shows his worry over the magnitude of the tribulations of such exile or moving out of place in his poem *The Exiles*. The very beginning lines of the poem try to zero in on this issue in a metaphorical manner:

What siren zooming is sounding our coming
Up frozen fjord from freedom
What Shepherd's call
When stranded on hill,
With broken axle
On track to exile? (1-6)

Here, Auden is cynically cautious of the modern people's passage towards civilization and towards freedom – freedom that eventually accelerates modern people towards exile. The same feeling of moving out of place can be found in his another poem entitled "The Diaspora". Here one thing is to be noted that in both the cases, the title of each of the two poems directly elaborated the theme of moving out of place. Though in a different way, the later poem speaks of the same:

And he…
…..                …..                …..
…was a godsend to the lowest of mankind.
Till there was no place left where they could pursue him
Except that exile which he called his Race.
But, everything him even that, they plunged right through him
Into a land of mirrors without time or space,
And all they had to strike now was the human face. (7-14)

Thus, from the above discussion it can be said that consciousness of the moving out of place is very much present in English poetry, may it be Old English poetry or the English poetry of the Modern Period. The consciousness of exile or moving out of the original place that is present in the poetry of Caedmon is mainly spiritual or psychological but the movement involves physical departure too since the creator has expelled the fallen angels and Adam and Eve from Heaven. But coming to the modern scenery it has become mostly spiritual and religious. Corruption in the modern society has resulted in the individual's moving out of place, which is, beside earlier poets, described in the poems of Yeats, Eliot and Auden.

**Notes:**

Very little is known about the period of Caedmon's life-span. According to Albert (Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print. P.14.), "He was summoned into the presence of Hilda of Whitby (658-680)," "when already an elderly man" (Birch, Dinah. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print. P.182.)

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