

# Analysis of the moment by margaret atwood essay



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The poem titled "The Moment" is a beautifully illustrated and compactly presented work, and its meaning is especially relevant for contemporary societies. The poem is organized in three stanzas of six lines each. The first stanza sets up the narrative by making the claim about human beings' 'ownership' of earth. The second stanza counters the first stanza by explicating the inherent folly behind the notion of 'ownership'. The final stanza qualifies the second stanza by giving reasons for why human beings cannot be owners of the planet. The poem can be summed up thus:

Whenever human beings start believing that they have mastered their environment and start believing in a misplaced sense of superiority over mother nature, then they are setting up their own doom. We as a species will always remain products of nature and to that extent subordinate to the wellbeing of our natural environment. Through the course of our planet's history, we as a species are only recent arrivals. One day we will perish too, while Mother Nature with her mix of the animate and inanimate objects will continue to live and dictate terms.

This poem assumes an added resonance, as it directly appeals to the environmental activism that is witnessed across the world today. Terms such as global warming and environmental degradation have started finding everyday reference in print and broadcast media, highlighting the critical juncture at which our planet is poised. The Moment is a valuable addition to the popular discourse on these subjects.

The poem differs from others in the genre in that it easily lends itself to be paraphrased into expository prose. To the extent that this is true, the poem is not subject to various contrasting interpretations. In the poem, lines such

as “ house, half-acre, square mile, island, country” and words such as “ trees”, “ birds”, “ cliffs”, “ air”, “ breathe”, etc make it adequately clear what the subject matter is, namely that of our natural environment. Treating these objects in nature as endowments of mother nature, one could propose a contrarian feminist interpretation of the poem. This would be to interpret planet earth and its resources as representing feminine qualities of creating and care-giving. And just as the subordination of women to men had held back human civilization for millennia, the subjugation of nature to our species is also a regressive idea. Hence, a careful reading of the poem reveals to the reader the underlying didactic attitude of the author.

Coming to the poetic technique employed by the author, including such aspects as rhythm, meter, tone, etc, the emphasis is laid on sound, tone and diction to the neglect of the rest. Atwood herself has noted that the most important component of a poem is the syllable. Considering that Atwood sees her poems as ‘ prose poems’ - a hybrid art form that differs from orthodox definition of poetry - one can see why the emphasis is on the rhythmical syllabic structure. What gives *The Moment* its special quality is the manner in which its syllables are arranged. Here, the importance is given to meaning and effect of the lines, while compromising on other technical aspects such as rhyme and meter. One can observe the evidence for this in the poem, where corresponding lines in the three stanzas vary in number of words and syllables. For example, the first line of the second stanza is “ is the same moment when the trees unloose”, which is distinct in style from the first line of the third stanza, which is “ No, they whisper. You own nothing.”

These lines in the third stanza are also instructive of the history of Canada and erstwhile European imperialism. The lines “ You own nothing. You were a visitor, time after time, climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming” implies the displacement and elimination of native Indian population by European settlers. The “ you” in these lines seem to refer to the European settlers, Atwood herself included, who over a period of time have adopted and assimilated materialistic values. In other words, the author seems to point an accusing finger at her own community for failing to comprehend history in its entirety. This view is further validated when we take into account the history of Canada prior to European colonization, and later injustices in the form of European imperialism, oppression and dispossession of native Indian tribes and more recently, the assimilation of materialistic consumer culture at the cost of ecological destruction.

Finally, *The Moment* is also suffused with Shamanic references. The author’s use of natural imagery, especially in the second stanza, can be attributed to a primal, shamanic mode of narrative. The phrases “ trees unloose their soft arms from around you”, “ the birds take back their language”, “ the cliffs fissure and collapse” and “ the air moves back from you like a wave” that are placed in succession in the second stanza make evident the shamanic symbolism applied by the author.

#### Work Cited:

Atwood, Margaret, *The Moment*, retrieved from < [http://www. poemhunter. com/best-poems/margaret-atwood/the-moment/](http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/margaret-atwood/the-moment/)> on 2nd February, 2010.

Brave New World is a profound literary work that encompasses themes of philosophical discourse, projection of societies in the future, the impact of technology on human relations, etc. The major theme in the novel, however, is the link between dystopian societies and an underlying technocratic socio-political order. Huxley uses conflict and control in the realms of politics, human relations, culture and technology to showcase all the malefic aspects of a technocracy. This essay will flesh out this thesis in detail.

One of the constant undercurrents in Brave New World is the dehumanizing effects of technological progress. It would be simplistic and false to blame technology per se for the situation, for there is a political angle to it as well. In other words, if sophisticated technology is wielded by powerful political institutions for vested gains then the results can be disastrous for humanity. Eugenics and scientific planning are two .