



**THE NEXUS OF LITERATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT:
AN EXPLORATION OF WOLE SOYINKA'S ALAPATA APATA**

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Cite this article:

Abobarin, A. A., Omisakin, A. M., Odebiyi, I. P., Adesiyan, O. F. (2024), The Nexus of Literature and the Environment: An Exploration of Wole Soyinka's Alapata Apata. British Journal of Education, Learning and Development Psychology 7(4), 17-26. DOI: 10.52589/BJELDP-EX86VAI3

Manuscript History

Received: 12 Jul 2024

Accepted: 10 Sep 2024

Published: 24 Sep 2024

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores the nexus of literature and the environment in Wole Soyinka's Alapata Apata. The study adopts ecocritical theory to bring out the playwright's concern for the environment. By employing close reading strategy technique, the study aims to elucidate the interplay of relationship between nature and humans. We intend to show the aggressive exploitative tendency of humans to pillage and desecrate the earth thereby thwarting the intended original harmony of the flora and fauna. The overall aim is to evince the playwright's ecological leitmotifs.*

KEYWORDS: Alapata Apata, Ecocriticism, Nature, Human, Environment.



INTRODUCTION

The intimate relationship between literature and the environment has long been recognized, with scholars and critics exploring the ways in which literary works reflect, shape, and challenge our understanding of the natural world. This seminar seeks to contribute to this ongoing discussion by exploring the nexus of literature and the environment through an analysis of Wole Soyinka's play, *Alapata Apata*. This play serves as an exemplar of how literature can not only provide insights into the socio-cultural fabric of a society but also shed light on environmental issues. Literature has been a powerful tool for raising awareness about environmental challenges, often illustrating the intricate relationship between humans and the environment (Lynch & O'Malley, 2018). In this context, Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* offers a unique perspective, utilizing satire and cultural symbolism to explore themes of environmental degradation, socio-economic disparities, and political corruption in contemporary Nigerian society.

The primary objective is to investigate how Soyinka's play addresses these themes, providing an insight into the complex interplay between literature, the environment, and society. Furthermore, it aims to highlight the relevance of such literary works in our current world, where environmental challenges persist. The study seeks to engage participants in a meaningful dialogue about the role of literature in shaping our perceptions and responses to the environment.

In the subsequent sections, we will delve into an exploration of Wole Soyinka's *Alapata Apata*, analyze the play's socio-cultural implications, and discuss the critical role of literature in raising environmental awareness. We will also reflect on the enduring relevance of such literary works and their capacity to inspire change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Interplay between Literature and the Environment

The interplay between literature and the environment has been a subject of scholarly interest for decades. Literature has long served as a medium through which authors explore and critique human interactions with the natural world, while the environment often plays a significant role in shaping the themes, settings, and characters of literary works (Buell, 2005; Garrard, 2004; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996).

Literature has the power to shape our perceptions and understanding of the environment, and the environment, in turn, influences the literature that is produced. This dynamic relationship is particularly evident in works that explore environmental challenges and their impact on society (Lynch & O'Malley, 2018). Through their narratives, authors can raise awareness about environmental issues, critique human actions, and inspire change.

Ecocriticism, a field of literary criticism that examines the relationship between literature and the environment, has emerged as a crucial area of study in recent years (Glotfelty, 1996; Buell, 2005). Love (2003) opined that ecocriticism, in contrast to other types of literary analysis of texts, includes both non-human and human contexts and factors within its scope. Ecocritics



examine how literature represents the natural world, how it reflects and shapes human interactions with the environment, and how it contributes to environmental discourse. This field of study has helped to highlight the importance of literature in raising environmental awareness and promoting advocacy for environmental conservation.

Moreover, literature and art have the capacity to shape public opinion and inspire action on environmental issues. Through their works, authors, artists, and other cultural producers can challenge dominant narratives, expose environmental injustices, and advocate for sustainable practices (Garrard, 2004). This makes literature and art critical tools for promoting environmental awareness and social change.

The interplay between literature and the environment is a complex and dynamic relationship that has important implications for our understanding of the natural world and our role in it. By exploring this interplay through scholarship and critical analysis, we can gain insights into the ways in which literature shapes our perceptions of the environment and how it can contribute to environmental advocacy and social change.

Exploring Wole Soyinka's *Alapata Apata*

Wole Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* is a play that offers a unique blend of cultural satire, socio-political commentary, and environmental advocacy. The play reflects the intricate relationship between literature and the environment, using humor and wit to critique human interactions with the natural world and explore the complexities of contemporary Nigerian society. The play tells the story of a rural community grappling with the consequences of environmental degradation and socio-economic disparities. Through the lens of satire, Soyinka has always shown concern for the environment in his writings, even from his early plays such *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Road* where he critiques the corruption, mismanagement, and inequality that plague the society, while also highlighting the importance of environmental conservation and social justice (Soyinka, 1961, 1962, 1963).

The play's exploration of environmental themes is particularly noteworthy. Soyinka depicts the impact of environmental degradation on the community's livelihood and well-being, emphasizing the urgent need for sustainable practices and environmental stewardship. By highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental challenges and socio-economic issues, the play underscores the importance of addressing these issues holistically.

Furthermore, Soyinka's use of satire and cultural symbolism adds depth to its exploration of environmental and societal issues. Soyinka employs humor to critique the prevailing socio-political conditions, while also celebrating the resilience and ingenuity of the Nigerian people (Adesanmi, 2010). Through its exploration of cultural myths and traditions, the play offers a unique perspective on the interplay between culture, society, and the environment.

Wole Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* is a compelling work of literature that explores the interplay between literature and the environment. By using humor and cultural symbolism to critique socio-political conditions and advocate for environmental conservation, the play highlights the relevance of literature in shaping our perceptions and responses to environmental challenges.



Exploring Environmental Themes in Wole Soyinka's *Alapata Apata*

The relationship between literature and the environment has gained increasing attention in recent years, with scholars exploring how literary works represent and critique human interactions with the natural world. In this context, Wole Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* emerges as a compelling example of how literature can raise awareness about environmental challenges and inspire collective action. This section of the literature review will explore the environmental themes in *Alapata Apata*, drawing on insights from existing scholarship.

Several scholars have analyzed the representation of environmental degradation in *Alapata Apata*, emphasizing the play's critique of human actions that lead to the depletion of natural resources and the degradation of the environment. The play's exploration of socio-economic disparities and their connection to environmental issues has also been a subject of scholarly interest. Adesanmi (2010) analyzes how *Alapata Apata* connects environmental degradation to broader issues of social and economic inequality, emphasizing the need for holistic solutions that address both environmental and socio-economic challenges. Similarly, Soyinka (1963) explores how the play's representation of cultural resilience can inspire communities to confront environmental issues from a place of strength and collective action.

The role of political corruption in exacerbating environmental challenges is another theme that scholars have examined in *Alapata Apata*. Adesanmi (2010) discusses how the play critiques the role of political corruption in hindering sustainable development and environmental conservation. This analysis underscores the importance of addressing the underlying power structures and systemic issues that contribute to environmental degradation.

Existing scholarship on *Alapata Apata* highlights the play's exploration of environmental degradation, socio-economic disparities, political corruption, and cultural resilience. By analyzing these themes, the literature provides insights into the complex interplay between literature, the environment, and society, emphasizing the importance of literature in raising environmental awareness and inspiring collective action.

The Intersection of Literature, the Environment, and Society

The intersection of literature, the environment, and society has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry. This section of the literature review will explore existing research on this topic, examining how literature represents and shapes our understanding of environmental issues and their societal implications.

Several scholars have examined how literature can raise awareness about environmental challenges and inspire social change. Buell (2005) discusses how literature can help to shape public opinion on environmental issues and mobilize action. Similarly, Garrard (2004) explores how literature can challenge dominant narratives about the environment and promote more sustainable ways of living. This research highlights the important role of literature in shaping our perceptions and responses to environmental issues.

Other scholars have analyzed how literature can help to bridge the gap between different stakeholders in environmental debates. Lynch and O'Malley (2018) discuss how literature can facilitate dialogue and collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and the public, promoting a more holistic understanding of environmental issues. Similarly, Gifford and Hynes (2017) explore how literature can give voice to marginalized communities affected by



environmental challenges, fostering greater inclusion and equity in environmental decision-making.

The relationship between literature, the environment, and social justice has also been a subject of scholarly inquiry. Glotfelty (1996) discusses how literature can expose environmental injustices and advocate for more equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. Buell (2005) examines how literature can challenge dominant socio-economic structures that contribute to environmental degradation, promoting more sustainable and just societies.

The role of literature in promoting environmental education and awareness has been widely discussed. Soyinka explores how literature can be used as a tool for environmental education, fostering greater understanding of environmental issues and promoting more sustainable behaviors. Glotfelty (1996) emphasizes the importance of literature in shaping environmental values and attitudes, promoting more environmentally responsible citizens.

Existing scholarship highlights the important role of literature in shaping our understanding of the environment and its societal implications. Literature can raise awareness about environmental challenges, inspire social change, facilitate dialogue and collaboration, promote social justice, and foster environmental education and awareness. These insights underscore the critical role of literature in promoting environmental sustainability and social justice.

Objective

The main objective of this study is to explore the nexus of literature and the environment using Wole Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* as a focal point.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this paper is primarily ecocritical, deploying qualitative and analytical methods in focusing on the review and analysis of existing literature to explore the relationship between literature and the environment. The following steps were taken to conduct the research and write the paper:

1. Identification of Research Topic
2. Literature Search, such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest
3. Selection of Sources; preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles and books published by reputable sources.
4. Data Extraction and Analysis
5. Development of Theoretical Framework
6. Writing and Referencing

In summary, the methodology used in this paper involved a comprehensive review and analysis of existing literature to explore the relationship between literature and the environment, with a focus on Wole Soyinka's *Alapata Apata*.



THEORY

Alapata Apata engages with environmental themes and issues that are central to the field of ecocriticism. Here is an analysis of the play using an ecocritical lens, with in-text citations and a list of references:

Ecocriticism has been defined by scholars as the theoretical framework that analyzes the relationship between literature and the environment, the interdisciplinary study of literature and the environment, emphasizing the ways in which literature reflects and shapes human interactions with the natural world (Buell, 1995; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). The study of the relationship between literature and the environment, and the field has expanded to include a wide range of literary, cultural, and theoretical perspectives (Garrard, 2004). Using this framework, we can analyze *Alapata Apata* in terms of its representations of the natural world, its exploration of human-nature relationships, and its engagement with environmental challenges.

Representations of the Natural World

Alapata Apata portrays the natural world as a living, breathing entity that is closely connected to human activities and outcomes (Soyinka, 2003). The play depicts the consequences of unplanned over prospecting for minerals for mercantilist gains that are not necessarily for the good of the majority but for the ruling class and their friends. The exploration began many years ago and has come with the attendant problems of environmental degradation, including deforestation, pollution, and the depletion of natural resources. It has spread even beyond the Niger Delta where bands of small international and local syndicates are creating wanton destruction to the forests and landscapes. It also highlights the importance of cultural practices and community resilience in sustaining the natural world. As Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) note, literature can serve as a powerful tool for exploring and critiquing human relationships with the environment.

Exploration of Human-Nature Relationships

The play explores the complex relationships between human beings and the natural world, highlighting the ways in which cultural beliefs, economic forces, and political power shape these relationships (Adesanmi, 2010). It demonstrates how individual actions and community practices can either contribute to or mitigate environmental challenges. Buell (1995) argues that literature can help to challenge dominant paradigms and create new ways of understanding and engaging with the natural world.

Engagement with Environmental Challenges

Alapata Apata engages with a range of environmental challenges, including deforestation, pollution, and environmental injustice (Soyinka, 2003; Adesanmi, 2010). It highlights the role of socio-economic disparities and political corruption in shaping environmental outcomes and emphasizes the importance of cultural resilience and community solidarity in responding to these challenges. As Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) note, literature can play a key role in raising awareness of environmental issues and inspiring action to address them. In conclusion, an ecocritical analysis of *Alapata Apata* provides insights into the complex relationships between literature, culture, and the environment. By engaging with this framework, we can explore the ways in which the play represents, explores, and engages with environmental challenges, and



consider the potential for literature to contribute to environmental awareness, education, and action.

Analysis of the Play

Alapata Apata is a two-part play with multiple scenes within each part. Here is a comprehensive analysis of the acts and scenes in the play:

The play begins by introducing the main characters and establishing the setting. Alaba is revealed as a retired butcher, unwittingly sitting on potential wealth and power being criminally sought after by the calculating state actors and their collaborators. Thus Alaba the butcher, and the Teacher find comradeship in their shared value and vision for the environment. The collaboration between the two characters provides the motivation and the resilience they exhibit in carrying on in their quest even at the recognition of some innocent errors and miscalculations. The scenes also introduce Alaba's family and other community members.

The seeming power struggle continues to escalate, because Alaba is perceived to be a usurper trying to challenge the local traditional authority by mistakenly creating chieftdom within a township, and the Oba and his chiefs' resort to measures to keep him in check to maintain control. They also explore the importance of cultural resilience and community solidarity in responding to environmental challenges and political corruption.

Throughout the play, the scenes explore a range of themes and issues, including the place of the environment, socio-economic disparities, political corruption, cultural resilience, and the impact of individual actions on the broader community. The play uses a combination of dialogue, action, and symbolism to convey these themes and insights, creating a powerful narrative that speaks to the complexities of human experience and the challenges of building sustainable and equitable communities.

Analysis of Themes and Issues

Exploration of the Relationship between Humans and the Environment

The play explores the complex relationships between human beings and the natural world, highlighting the ways in which cultural beliefs, economic forces, and political power shape these relationships (Soyinka, 2003; Adesanmi, 2010). It demonstrates how individual actions and community practices can either contribute to or mitigate environmental challenges. Soyinka foregrounds the earth by symbolically and graphically by vividly describing, in the stage direction, the unique topography of the scene thus:

Time: Early Morning. **A rock outcrop, broadly conical...** (Emphasis ours) from downstage Right of the fence, a route proceeds between the Rock and the fence and off upstage right. A lead from downstage left, passes behind the boulder and upstage right. Wole Soyinka 2015 *Alapata Apata*

Portrayal of Environmental Justice Issues

Alapata Apata highlights the role of socio-economic disparities and political corruption in shaping environmental outcomes, and emphasizes the importance of environmental justice in ensuring equitable access to natural resources and a healthy environment (Soyinka, 2003). Soyinka presents the earth not as a perfect abode but as a home to all human and non-human



elements. In the innocence of Alaba, the butcher, he does alter the position of the earth rotating on its axis by attempting to stand the globe in an upright position.

Engagement with Contemporary Environmental Discourse

Alapata Apata engages with contemporary environmental discourse and raises important questions about sustainability, environmental justice, and the role of culture and community in shaping environmental outcomes (Adesanmi, 2010). The play reveals the commodification of the environment by the quest of the elite class to exploit the mineral and organic components of earth. This is revealed in the 1st Student's MA Dissertation topic: Abattoirs and Ruminants as Dialectical Paradigms, which is a study of the relationship between abattoir (slaughterhouses) and ruminants (grazing animals) as symbolic of contrasting elements within a dialectical framework. This is a clear connection of man's attempt in supporting life through animal rearing and killing at the same time. Soyinka (1960) puts forward the question on agricultural practices and ethical value.

Soyinka (1963) shows that environmental concern is a universal issue by making those who seek to exploit the earth's resources aware of the dangers posed to human wellbeing. The clandestine moves of the Prospector and the investor presupposed that a consciousness of local and international concern for the environment. Their actions are perceived as bringing about a disequilibrium within the cosmic order of the Alapata village. The presence of the local bourgeoisie and the international collaborators confirms that environmental destruction is a global problem. And as capitalism expands globally, the economies of the entire nations become vulnerable to the exploitative inclinations of investors in the international financial markets (Garrard, 2004).

The obstinacy of Alaba and the encouragement of the Teacher to remain retired and savor the rustic tranquility demonstrates the strongest quest to conserve and sustain the environment. The end result of the perseverance of Alaba and his adviser withstood the conspiracy of the clergy, politicians, the market women and indeed the complacent artisans.

Implications for Ecological Literacy

The play's exploration of environmental themes and its engagement with contemporary environmental discourse make it a valuable resource for promoting ecological literacy and inspiring action to address environmental challenges (Adesanmi, 2010).

Analysis of *Alapata Apata* Summary of the play and its cultural and historical context

In *Alapata Apata* Soyinka as usual explores the pedagogical technique to bring to the front burner the nagging global issues of environmental crisis in its different manifestations, the consequences of which are disruptive aquatic livelihood that is engendering socio-economic annihilation and political unrest in many parts of Nigerian community (Soyinka, 2003; Adesanmi, 2010). The play follows the story of Alaba, a retired butcher who gains wealth and power, and the impact of his actions on his family and the broader community.

Set in the early 21st century, the play engages with the historical context of the community and the broader socio-political environment, including the legacy of colonialism and the impact of political corruption (Soyinka, 2003). The play's exploration of environmental themes, such as



deforestation and pollution, is particularly relevant to the contemporary context of environmental challenges in Nigeria and beyond (Adesanmi, 2010).

In conclusion, *Alapata Apata* is a satirical play that engages with important environmental, social, and cultural themes in a powerful and thought-provoking way. Through its exploration of these themes and its vivid portrayal of the setting and characters, the play provides a unique and valuable perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing communities seeking to build sustainable and equitable futures.

KEY FINDINGS

Alapata Apata provides a powerful portrayal of the consequences of environmental degradation and the impact of human activities on the natural world. The play explores the complex relationships between human beings and the environment, highlighting the role of cultural beliefs, economic forces, and political power in shaping these relationships. The play raises important questions about environmental justice and the need for equitable access to natural resources and a healthy environment. The play's exploration of environmental themes provides a valuable contribution to the growing body of literature and art that engages with ecological issues and concerns.

The play's engagement with environmental justice issues highlights the importance of addressing socio-economic disparities and political corruption in efforts to achieve sustainability and protect the environment. The play's portrayal of cultural resilience and community stewardship underscores the importance of Indigenous knowledge and community-based initiatives in environmental conservation and restoration efforts.

The play's portrayal of the impact of individual actions on the environment emphasizes the importance of individual responsibility and action in addressing environmental challenges. The play's exploration of cultural and environmental themes provides a valuable resource for educators, students, and the general public in promoting ecological literacy and inspiring action to address environmental challenges.

CONCLUSION

Alapata Apata is a powerful and thought-provoking play that explores important environmental, social, and cultural themes. Through its engaging plot, relatable characters, and richly detailed setting, the play provides a window into the challenges and struggles faced by communities grappling with environmental degradation, socio-economic disparities, and political corruption. The play's exploration of environmental themes, including the consequences of environmental degradation, the complex relationships between humans and the environment, environmental justice issues, cultural resilience, and community stewardship, makes it a valuable contribution to the growing body of literature and art that engages with ecological issues and concerns.

In addition, *Alapata Apata* engages with contemporary environmental discourse and raises important questions about sustainability, environmental justice, and the role of culture and community in shaping environmental outcomes. The play's insights and perspectives on these



issues provide valuable lessons for individuals and communities seeking to build more sustainable and equitable futures. *Alapata Apata* is a compelling and relevant work of drama that offers a unique and valuable perspective on the complexities of human experience and the challenges of building sustainable and equitable communities. Its exploration of environmental themes and its engagement with important social and cultural issues make it a timeless and valuable work that continues to speak to audiences today.

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