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A formalist reading of Ahmed Yerima's *The mirror cracks*

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Abstract

This paper presents a formalist reading of Ahmed Yerima's The Mirror Cracks, focusing on the internal aesthetic structures that generate autonomous dramatic meaning for the play. Most analysis of literary works examine the relationship of the works with political, socio-cultural, or even economic theories propounded for evaluation as criticism. The formalist criticism however examines a work to find interpretation and understanding of work only as it is crafted in it. The features of these crafts are analyzed using the principles of Russian Formalism, particularly literariness, foregrounding, and defamiliarization for a better appreciation and understanding of the work. The study examines the play's fragmented plot construction, functional characterization, stylized dialogue, symbolic imagery, and minimalist stagecraft. Through close textual analysis, the paper demonstrates that Yerima deliberately disrupts narrative continuity and psychological realism to foreground form and aesthetic self-consciousness. Meaning in the play emerges through the interaction of dramatic devices that resist habitual perception and compel critical attention to structure and technique rather than external sociopolitical referenceor influence from the author. The study argues that The Mirror Cracks represents a significant instance of formal innovation in contemporary Nigerian drama, and underscores the continued relevance of form-centred criticism in African theatre studies. This adds to the aesthetic relevance of African craft in written form which influences the performance of the art. This promotes the culture and values of the society with a better understanding of it.

Keywords: Aesthetics, characters, defamiliarization, language-use, symbols

Introduction

Formalism is one of the earliest schools of criticism that emphasizes the internal formal structures of literary works. Formalism prioritizes the internal arrangement of literary texts through the operations of literariness, autonomy, and defamiliarization—techniques that produce foregrounding while excluding external social and political contexts. This paves the way for objective criticism rather than subjectivity in a formalist reading. This study undertakes a formalist analysis of The Mirror Cracks by Ahmed Yerima, one of Nigeria's foremost playwrights. Thisentails the analysis of internal formal organisation

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through the plot construction, functional characterization, fore-grounded language, symbolic visual motifs, and restrained stagecraft, to identify how Yerima privileges form as the principal determinant of meaning.

A synopsis of the play *The Mirror Cracks*

Ayodele and Tundun Adegabi, the parents of Olasupo, went their separate ways after their son turned six years. The mother, Tundun, decided to self-actualize professionally as a lawyer, and she eventually became a judge of the Court of Appeal. The father, Ayodele Adegabi, pursued an ambassadorial assignment to his fulfillment. Their child, Olasupo, was left in the care of Joseph, his uncle, Gerald the butler, and his wife, Catherine. Olasupo has his first degree from Oxford University in London, and joins the army. He lobbies and joinsthe peace-keeping mission of the 213 Tank Battalion, but the eventually gets killed. The news of his death is eventually brought back home to his father with all his belongings, which included a five-month pregnant sixteen-year-old Sierra Leonean girl, whose mother, Olasupo, had raped and killed. His death unites his father and mother again.

Theoretical Orientation: Formalism and Dramatic Textuality

This study is grounded in Russian Formalism, a critical movement that emphasizes the autonomy of the literary text and privileges form, structure, and technique over historical, biographical, or ideological considerations. Early formalist theorists such as Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, and Boris Eichenbaum argue that literary meaning resides in the organization of devices that distinguish artistic language from ordinary discourse[1]. A central concept of formalist thought is the concept of *literariness*, which Roman Jakobson identifies as the defining quality of literary art[2]. In dramatic criticism, this emphasis translates into paying close attention to plot construction, character function, dialogue patterns, symbolism, and stagecraft as the primary generators of meaning. Yerima's *The Mirror Cracks* is particularly suited to such an analysis because of its deliberate aesthetic deviation, structural fragmentation, and resistance to mimetic realism.

Plot Structure and Structural Fragmentation

The plot of *The Mirror Cracks* departs from linear narrative progression and classical Aristotelian unity. Rather than unfolding through a smooth sequence of cause and effect, the play advances through episodic confrontations, emotional ruptures, and moments of psychological disjunction. Narrative continuity is deliberately disrupted, producing a fractured but transforming dramatic rhythm. From a formalist perspective, this fragmentation is not a flaw but a deliberate artistic strategy. Viktor Shklovsky's concept of *defamiliarization* explains how such narrative disruption compels the audience to perceive the drama anew[3]. By interrupting habitual narrative expectations, Yerima foregrounds the mechanics of dramatic construction and draws attention to form itself. The fractured plot thus functions as an aesthetic device that resists transparency and demands active critical engagement. The play *The Mirror Cracks* has a fractured plot, in which different narratives are brought in to enhance the interpretation of the play.

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First, the delay in the show of grief is a pattern in the plot of the play. The bereaved father in the play, Gabi, takes to smoking and drinking alcohol over the loss of his only child, his son *Major* Olasupo Adegabi, to keep him from breaking down, but to remain psychologically strong in the face of his loss. This is, however, only a tactical delay in the show of his grief. Shortly afterwards, when he is all alone in his room with his drink and cigar, he breaks down sobbing.

A similar narrative pattern is repeated at the appearance of Tundun, Supo's mother, in the play. She initially comes into Gabi's *house*, which is also her former house, all brave, elegant, and authoritative, knowing her son was dead. Again, there is a delay in the show of grief. But immediately, the supposedly divorced husband offers her hospitality in the form of promising to drive her to her hotel, if need be, and also offers her dinner and empathy and sympathy on the loss of their son, Tundun breaks down in grief. These delayed grieving shows the weight of their grief. The interpretation is that the grief was rather too heavy; hence, the initial numbness and reason for the postponement of the grief. Understandably, this is an only child the accomplished parents expected too much from. But dies at a young age of thirty-six, carrying out a foreign assignment for the army.

Another artistic strategy in the plot is the bringing in of two other narrations to add to the plot of the grieving parents. First, there is the narration from Hawa Kabata-Jones, a sixteen-year-old girl later identified as Major Supo's fiancée, since she is five months pregnant for him. She describes her meeting with late Major Supo and what it was like leaving with him until his death (p. 122-128). Her narration brings another dimension to the parents' grief. The 'Supo'depicted by Hawa is so different from what they believed their son to be. Supo, in Hawa's narration raped, and killed at will. Supo's parents initially have a suspended belief about this narration. The plot has a disequilibrium and a surprise unveiling for the parents. This is carried further by Captain Tade, Major Supo's bosom and childhood friend, as well as a colleague in the army, who narrates how Supo operated and died as a military officer (p. 129-133).The recklessness of Supo is also repeatedly narrated by Tade to corroborate Hawa's narration.

Immediately Tade leaves, Gabi comes to terms with the reality that he is a failed father whose son grew up to become a wicked man while trying to measure up to the high standards and expectations of his parents. Supo unleashed the anger in him at everything around him. He grew up without love in the absence of his parents to nurture him, and so, it was difficult for him to show love. His war assignment also assisted him in carrying out the violence and anger he had in him. While Gabi comes to terms with the predicament of having raised a dysfunctional child, Tundun, the mother, does not come to terms with this immediately, but rather seeks who to blame for the death of Supo and the result of his life. This leads to blame and counter-blame for Supo's father and mother about the result of his life (p. 134-135).

From this encounter, Gabi comes out determined to keep Hawa and Supo's child. The self- realization of wanting a new lease of life does not quickly

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happen for Tundun as it did for Gabi. She processes this slowly as she walks about in the house. This gesture defines the depth of her emotional processing of her experiences at this point. The manifestation of her acceptance of reality and also wanting a new positive way forward comes when she returns to the scene to offer Hawa her old clothes, and accepts her as a part of the family(p.137).

The 'dancification of life' as presented in the plot structure and structural fragmentation is essential to the central aesthetic effect of the play. It removes the automatized perception of everyday life and helps in a return to life and its in-depth sensory perception. The grief of the parents produces a recalibration of life for both Gabi and Tundun, and this realization and recalibration become very real for the audience.

Characterization as Formal Function(as in Form)

Characters in *The Mirror Cracks* are constructed less as psychologically rounded individuals, but more as functional components within the dramatic structure. Yerima's characters are defined through patterned speech, symbolic positioning, and repetitive emotional gestures rather than through the detailed interiority of their personality. Their significance lies in what they do within the structure of the play rather than in their resemblance to real persons.

The characters of Joseph, Hawa, and Tade in *The Mirror Cracks* are deliberately used to advance actions within the structure or form of the play. Characters are to be generally classified according to their role, complexity, and function. Joseph is a static character who is also functional in driving the action in the play *The Mirror Cracks,* further bringing in thematic cohesion. Essentially, he is a confidant of Ambassador Adegabi and an intermediary between the ambassador and his wife, Tundun. He had started preparing the ambassador remotely for the arrival of his wife as the two parents prepared for the burial of their only child. Joseph opened up the discussion on how the ambassador would receive the wife when she comes, and indirectly, on how he should be handling his grief. He tries to make Gabi face his grief by lighting up the living room where we first meet Gabi. He also tries to prevail on him to part with the alcohol and cigar Gabi was using to console himself at the death of his son. Eventually, with all Joseph says and does for Gabi, Gabi breaks down and sobs. This shows his coming to terms with his reality and his preparedness to move forward with life. It also explains why he could eventually relate well with his ex-wife, Tundun, even when she comes to the house 'with her nose in the air.'

Hawa is another static character, functional as a catalyst. Her action of revealing who Supo was in Sierra Leone assisted Gabi and Tundun to truly understand who their son grew up to become as an adult. Supo's biological and surrogate parents all believed what they wanted to believe about Supo: that he was a well brought up as a, first-class person, and that he died as a hero. But Hawa's revelation became an eye-opener for them to see how psychologically destructive their decisions as parents had been on Supo's child as a child, when both biological parents parted ways in their child's early years. This moves them further to re-evaluate their actions and categorically decide to make decisions that will positively affect the future of their family. Eventually, Gabi

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and Tundun both, not only accept Hawa and her child as their family member, but they arealso willing to make decisions that will affect the expectant mother and child positively.

Tade is also a static character who was a functional catalyst in the play. He reinforced the revelations Hawa gave Gabi and Tundun about Supo, their son. Tundun is initially horrified and angry about the narration from Hawa. Her first reaction was a desire to simply wipe out of existence both Hawa and her child, because she could neither believe nor accept what she was faced with as the reported reality of the life, or the adult, that Supo grew up to become. She exclaimed,"

> "No, not Supo! Not my son. No!" (p. 126).

She repeated this denial several times while listening to Hawa's narration. At a point, she says:

> No! I will not take this anymore! (*Gets up, angry, but speaks in a very dignified cold tone, biting every word*) I do not know the man who got you pregnant. He is not my child. If you came all the way from Sierra Leone only to destroy what is left of my son's memory, I shall destroy you first. The Nigerian Army say my son was a hero … now you have the audacity tocall him an animal … and the father of your bastard? Over my dead body. No. (p. 127)

The narration from Tade, who was a friend, a brother, and a soul mate as well as a colleague of Supo, sank the truth about Supo into Gabi and Tundun. For Gabi, it came when he said:

> "My God! It is true then? …Everything she said was true then? (p. 133).

But for Tundun, she was in denial and delusion for a while. After all that Tade narrated, Tundun still said:

> "I am waiting Gabi. I still want to know what killed my son" (p.134).
> However, when she eventually accepted Hawa and her child, she says; (To Gabi)
> "… I felt if she was going to be part of the family tomorrow, she might as well look the part" (p. 137).

This approach aligns with the formalist rejection of mimetic characterization. As Eichenbaum argues, characters in literary texts operate as devices that advance action, generate rhythm, and sustain aesthetic coherence [4]. In *The Mirror Cracks*, opposition, repetition, and contrast organize character interaction, ensuring structural balance while minimizing psychological realism.

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Language, Dialogue, and Foregrounding

Language in *The Mirror Cracks* is highly stylized and deliberately foregrounded. Yerima employs repetition, pauses, silences, and metaphorical density to disrupt conversational realism. Dialogue often assumes a ritualistic quality, privileging rhythm and sound over narrative clarity. Foregrounding, a key formalist concept, draws attention to the materiality of language, transforming speech into an aesthetic object. Jakobson's assertion that (poetic) language emphasizes its own construction is evident in Yerima's dialogue, which functions not merely as a vehicle for meaning but as a structural device that shapes dramatic rhythm and emotional intensity. [5]

In the opening part of the play, Gabi describes life as "*wonderful mysterious fusion*". This is an oxymoron where contradiction is used to produce a heightened or nuanced effect. While "wonderful" suggests delight and admiration, "mysterious" implies obscurity or the unknown. This deepens the meaning of what is addressed. It adds to the tense and melancholic atmosphere of the scene in the home where an only child of thirty-six years just died. This was followed shortly by a speech containing "*sombre steps of the mourning cortege*", which creates a kinesthetic imagery of a funeral procession, allowing a visual and feel of a measured pace of mourning. There is also a mild use of metonymy here as "*steps*" stand for the collective movement and emotional weight of the mourners rather than literal footsteps alone. There is an intensified mood that regulates the audience's perception without explicit exposition.

The build-up of pain and grief continues in the play with another speech act, which internalizes conflict. This is further illustrated with - "*I hope I do not get too excited in my sleep either and scream my head off.*" This is a hyperbole. Again, heightening emotional intensity, foregrounding the speaker's anxiety and fear. The colloquial diction contributes to verisimilitude in the play, giving it a realistic psychological space and making the utterance credible and immediate. The statement also has a mild ironic undertone in hoping to control behavior while unconscious. This underscores vulnerability and foreshadows possible loss of control.

The statement "*What a waste! What a bloody messy waste this life is.*" is an exclamatory syntax foregrounding emotional intensity and creating heightened dramatic pitch. The pain and grief of Gabi continue to build up. The repetition of 'waste' serves as emphasis and cohesion, binding the two clauses into a unified expressive structure and producing foregrounding which draws attention to the central evaluative judgment embedded in the language. "*bloody*" and "*messy*" contribute to the colloquial force and emotional aggression, and "*messy*" introduces a concrete, tactil equality which sharpens the abstraction used here.

An abstract concept is converted into a linguistically ordered judgment, achieving transformation of emotion into the structure of the play. The brevity of the first sentence followed by the expanded second creates a crescendo effect, allowing language itself to perform dramatic action by escalating emotional force. Through patterned speech and verbal motifs, language

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contributes directly to the play's formal unity and emotional rhythm. This is also evident further in the play. After hearing the narration of Hawa's experience of meeting and living with Supo, Gabi summarizes Supo's life thus:

> "*See how the well-arranged bouquet of flowers was done on a bottomless vase. See how shamefully our well-framed mirror cracks. See!"* (p. 129).

The 'see' functions as anaphora, foregrounding visual perception and compelling attention to the images presented. The repetition creates rhythmic cohesion and focus for the audience. It is a key concern of formalist analysis. There is also a symbolic contrast. The *"well-arranged bouquet"* suggests order, beauty, and stability, but the "*bottomless vase*" undermines that order and introduces structural emptiness. Similarly, the "*well-framed mirror*" connotes completeness and self-recognition, but its cracking signifies formal disruption and fragmentation. Portraying the futility of their supposed good efforts in training Supo, who grows up to become a mixture of a reprobate and a 'first-class' army.

Part of *Bishop*'s speech as he joins the grieving family moderates the final form for the play. For the Bishop:

> "*Imagine my meeting his fiancée, and expectant baby a day before his burial. God has taken and with the same hand has given. May we have the humility to accept God's gift with gratitude.*" (p. 138).

This gives imagery, parallelism, and tonal modulation. "Imagine" functions as a rhetorical device here that gives an emotionally charged mental image, foregrounding pathos through visualization. The next sentence brings balanced parallelism and antithesis; *"has taken"* against *"has given"*, which creates structural symmetry and compresses loss and consolation into a single rhythmic unit. The formal balance stabilizes the escalating emotional turbulence with the linguistic order. The final sentence signals tonal movement from grief to moral resolution. The sentences here operate as consolatory and reflective dialogue. The language performs emotional reconciliation; form regulates feeling, allowing imagery and syntactic balance to transform personal loss into communal acceptance. This is further reinforced when Bishop later says, *"Yes, God has a purpose for everything."*(p. 139). There is deliberate use of words to build up the form of the drama, which are cohesion of concepts towards the thematic goals of the play.

Symbolism and the Motif of the Mirror

The mirror operates as a central organizing device in the play. Rather than functioning as a metaphor to be decoded thematically, it operates formally by structuring visual imagery, spatial relationships, and narrative disjunction. The cracking of the mirror corresponds to the fragmentation of plot and character stability, reinforcing aesthetic disruption. Symbolically, the mirror represents self-perception and identity. The description *"funny mirror"* that makes the speaker look *"fatter, and monstrous"* suggests a distorted self-image, indicating

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insecurity, inner conflict, or alienation from the self. The mirror does not merely reflect appearance; it refracts identity, turning the self into something grotesque. The attempt to fix it symbolically reflects a desire to correct or repair the self, implying internal dissatisfaction.

The mirror's fall *"off the hook"* signifies the loss of stability in self-knowledge. As the mirror breaks, the speaker's identity fractures, reinforcing the idea that the self-image was fragile and dependent on an external reflective surface. The injury to the *"little finger"* underscores the cost of self-intervention; self-awareness and attempted self-repair of the character involved in the action, Tundun.This results in pain for her. All these also explain some experiences of Supo as a growing child, and his various explorations as narrated by Hawa Kabata-Jones.

The mirror as a motif reinforces the themes of distortion of identity, fragility of human mind and fragmentation. Its cracking into *"tiny little pieces"* visually and structurally echoes psychological disintegration or emotional breakdown of the majority of the characters in the play. Each fragment implies incomplete or fractured self-understanding as it is verbally admitted by Tade, Supo's friend. Symbolism derives its effectiveness from its integration into the structure of the work. Shklovsky emphasizes that devices must operate within the artistic system to produce aesthetic effect[6]. In *The Mirror Cracks*, the mirror's symbolic force emerges through repetition and visual alignment with dramatic action, ensuring that symbolism remains embedded within form rather than external reference.

The mirror motif externalizes inner turmoil through physical action. The mirror's destruction replaces introspection with visible stage imagery, allowing psychological conflict to be enacted rather than explained. The mirror operates as both a symbolic object and a device that transforms inner crisis into tangible action, advancing characterization and deepening thematic resonance.

Stagecraft and Visual Composition

Yerima's use of stagecraft in *The Mirror Cracks* is marked by restraint and economy. Scenic minimalism, controlled movement, and deliberate spatial arrangement contribute to the play's aesthetic intensity.

> The stage is dark when the play begins. Classical music is playing. As lights rise to dim, we see the figure of Gabi seated on a rocking chair, a glass of brandy in his left hand, and a cigar in his right hand. The music plays, as he rocks and smokes in the darkness. (p. 115)

This excerpt from the opening of the play foregrounds as meaning-producing elements, emphasizing how theatrical form communicates before dialogue is introduced. The darkened stage at the opening functions as a formal device of visual suspension, delaying narrative, and creating an atmosphere of introspection and ambiguity. Darkness here is not merely technical but structural: it prepares the audience for psychological depth and emotional isolation. The gradual rise to dim lighting exemplifies controlled illumination, a

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formal technique that regulates perception and focuses attention, revealing character incrementally or gradually, then fully.

The use of classical music operates as an aural component of formal composition, establishing mood and rhythm independent of spoken language. Its continuity as Gabi rocks and smokes creates temporal cohesion, aligning auditory rhythm that mirrors emotional stagnation or inner restlessness, both of which were displayed shortly later in the play. The brandy glass and cigar serve as a symbolic extension of character, suggesting indulgence, contemplation, and authority without explicit exposition.

The solitary figure of Gabi seated center-stage in visual composition constructs a balanced but enclosed image, reinforcing isolation through spatial arrangement. The synchronized interaction of light, sound, gesture, and props here exemplifies formalist theatre's emphasis on non-verbal sign systems, where meaning is generated through the orchestration of stage elements. Dramatic significance thus emerges from compositional harmony and contrast with the stagecraft itself, performing narrative and psychological work before speech begins.

Visual repetition and carefully orchestrated gestures reinforce narrative fragmentation and emotional tension.From the following:

> Just then the door to Tundun's room opens. She comes down slowly. Both Gabi and Hawa stare at her. She is holding a black dress and a hat. She walks to Hawa and gives them to her. (p. 137)

There is an orchestrated gesture as a meaning-producing element in drama, where movement, pacing, and spatial interaction function as structured signs independent of dialogue. The slow opening of the door and Tundun's measured descent are carefully controlled gestures that foreground suspense and emotional gravity. Slowness here is a formal device that regulates rhythm and directs audience attention. The simple entrance is a moment of heightened significance. The silent mutual gaze between Gabi, Hawa, and Tundun operates as visual dialogue, allowing meaning to be communicated through stillness and eye contact rather than speech.

The black dress and hat serve as visual symbols of mourning, and their presentation through gesture rather than words intensifies their dramatic weight. Tundun's movement towards Hawa and the physical act of handing over the items constitute a ritualized gesture that formally encodes loss, transition, and emotional responsibility. The gesture performs narrative action by transferring grief from one character to another or suggests a fellowship in mourning. The sequence exemplifies how an orchestrated gesture replaces verbal exposition. Controlled movement and object interaction are used to generate meaning. The precision of timing, spatial arrangement, and physical exchange transforms gesture into structure, allowing the scene's emotional and thematic significance to emerge through form rather than dialogue.

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From a formalist perspective, stagecraft functions as an extension of textual structure. Movement, silence, and spatial design operate as devices that sustain rhythm and coherence, further distancing the play from mimetic realism. The integration of visual and verbal form underscores the autonomy of the dramatic text.

Defamiliarization and Aesthetic Effect

Defamiliarization constitutes the central aesthetic effect of *The Mirror Cracks*. Through fragmented narrative, stylized dialogue, symbolic staging, and functional characterization, the play disrupts conventional dramatic expectations. This disruption compels the audience to experience the drama as an artistic construct rather than as a reflection of social reality. The following excerpt highlights defamiliarization and the display of aesthetic effect in the play.

> **Gabi:** (*He kneels down for prayers. He gestures to Tundun to kneel.*) Join me in praying for my son's turbulent soul.
> **Tundun:** I shall join you when I understand why. My son shall not need your prayer, until I have a grasp of what and who killed him.
> (*Gabi does not answer her, instead he begins to pray. This angers Tundun who goes to him and stands right in front of him. Gabi stops praying. He opens his eyes, and in one slow, dry voice*)
> **Gabi**: Get thee behind me, oh satan.(p. 134)

Defamiliarization is achieved here by reworking familiar religious gestures and biblical language into a context of unresolved grief and confrontation, thereby renewing perception and intensifying aesthetic impact. Ordinarily, kneeling for prayers and inviting another to join is associated with humility, reconciliation, and spiritual unity. This familiar ritual is estranged by Tundun's refusal and demand for a rational explanation. Her insistence on *"understand[ing] why"* before prayer disrupts the expected emotional script, forcing the audience to perceive prayer not as consolation but as evasion. This inversion exemplifies defamiliarization by making a common religious act appear morally and emotionally contentious.

The aesthetic effect is heightened through orchestrated gesture and silence. Gabi's continued prayer despite Tundun's challenge, and her aggressive movement to stand directly before him, transform stillness and proximity into visual tension. The delay before Gabi's response, his stopping, opening his eyes, and speaking in *"one slow, dry voice"*, extends perception and intensifies dramatic focus, which is a key aim of defamiliarization in formalism. Again, the biblical utterance *"Get thee behind me, oh Satan"* is itself a highly familiar phrase, but its application to a grieving mother radically estranges its meaning. By transplanting sacred language into a domestic, tragic conflict, the play strips the phrase of devotional comfort and recasts it as an instrument of moral aggression. Aesthetically, this produces shock and emotional dissonance, compelling the audience to re-experience language, gesture, and ritual as charged dramatic forms rather than as habitual expressions.

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Shklovsky argues that art exists to restore the sensation of life by making perception difficult[7]. Yerima's dramaturgical strategies align with this principle, ensuring that *The Mirror Cracks* functions as a self-conscious aesthetic object that foregrounds form and structure.

Conclusion

Amechi N. A. in *The Criticism of African Literature*, examine approaches as it is most appropriate for the study of African literature. He posited that the 'internal characteristics' of a literary work are identified as such only on the basis of certain model of reading or criticism, since every practice implies a theory. It is pointed out that the pursuit of the author's intention is not entirely helpful because the so-called intention is a construct of the author's or of the readers. This is quite different from the work itself. The conclusion is that, literature, criticism and theory are inter-connected activities and the discussion of a work of art can only be carried out by a way of theory. From Faniran and Adetuyi(2017), the fundamental skills of a reader's ability to discriminate, judge, and make comments about a work of literature can best be derived through textual analysis of literary works. The approach employed by a critic also determines the literary achievement of the findings. In their study, the concept of formalism and its proponent's insight is linked to stylistics, with an application of the aesthetic approach. In their analysis of the poem *Abiku* by Wole Soyinka. The result of their study portrays a proven mark of eclectic creativity with elements similar to Aristotle's traditions. The study shows the beauty of the poem discovered in its formal elements revealing Soyinka as a profound human poet with his use of devices ranging from rhetorical questioning, imagery, sad tone, effective language use and influence of indigenous culture evidenced in his work studied.

For Ojo Esther (2015), in a study carried out on *Predominant Stylistic devices of proverbs in selected Yoruba literary texts*, Yoruba proverbs are explained as treasured sayings which project the wisdom, ethics, cultural heritage, and worldview of Yoruba people. The study particularly analyzes how the writers of the studied texts examined, utilizes the proverbs to make their works of art enticing and classical as they manipulate these devices in order to foreground their elegance, taste, and communicative potential. The study reveals that parallelism emphasizes and completes main ideas. Repetition is used as a foregrounding tool in the texts studied, and this also reiterates important messages in the texts. The allusion used enables the proverb to describe past situations, such that readers share in the rich experience of the writers. As such, the stylistic contextual devices contribute to stylistic elegance, aesthetic, and poetic quality of the Yoruba proverbs, contributing to the literary value and deep understanding of the texts.

This formalist reading of Ahmed Yerima's *The Mirror Cracks* demonstrates that the play derives its artistic significance primarily from its internal formal organization rather than from extrinsic thematic or ideological concerns. Through fragmented plot construction, functional characterization, foregrounded language, symbolic visual motifs, and restrained stagecraft, Yerima privileges form as the principal determinant of meaning.

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By employing defamiliarization as a core aesthetic strategy, *The Mirror Cracks* resists mimetic realism and asserts its status as a self-conscious artistic object. The fractured narrative structure and stylized dialogue operate not as reflections of social disorder but as deliberate formal techniques designed to renew perception and intensify aesthetic experience. Ultimately, the play represents a significant contribution to contemporary Nigerian drama, extending its stylistic and structural range and affirming the relevance of formalist criticism in the study of African theatre.

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