



EPANAPHORA AND MYTHOLOGICAL POETICS OF ÈSÙ IN AHMED YERIMA'S *YEMOJA*

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Abstract:

This study explores the use of epanaphora, a rhetorical device characterized by the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses, in Ahmed Yerima's play *Yemoja*. The focus is on the character of Èsù, the trickster god, and how his strategic use of repetition manipulates divine relationships, power dynamics, and the plot structure. By analyzing Èsù's speech patterns, this research examines how repetition shapes the perception of other gods, particularly *Yemoja* and Ògún, and escalates the play's central conflicts. The study employs a qualitative research design, using textual and thematic analysis to assess how Èsù's linguistic manipulation functions as a tool for control and destabilization. The findings indicate that Èsù's use of epanaphora not only drives the narrative forward but also deepens the themes of deception, trust, and divine authority. Additionally, the study situates the play within the context of Yoruba cosmology, demonstrating how Èsù's manipulation of language aligns with his role as a mediator and disruptor in the cosmic order. The research contributes to the understanding of language as a pivotal element in African drama, emphasizing its role in shaping character interactions, power structures, and thematic development. Through this investigation, the study highlights the complex relationship between language, power, and perception in Yerima's work, offering new insights into the rhetorical strategies employed in African theatre.

Keywords: epanaphora, repetition, myth, Èsù, *Yemoja*, African drama

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1. Introduction

The study of language in literature, especially in African drama, has received growing attention in recent years, with particular focus on the role of rhetoric and linguistic manipulation in shaping the plot and the characters' relationships. One significant area of interest is the use of epanaphora, a rhetorical device that involves the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences. This technique can heighten emotional intensity, create emphasis, and manipulate perception, and in African literature, it often serves as a tool for examining power dynamics, deception, and control (Aristotle, 2007). In this regard, the works of Ahmed Yerima, particularly his play *Yemoja*, offer a compelling study in how language, through its strategic use, can alter the fates and relationships of characters, especially the divine ones. *Yemoja* (2002), one of Yerima's most notable plays, draws deeply from the rich cultural and spiritual traditions of the Yoruba people, blending mythology with drama to explore the complexities of divine relationships. In the play, Èsù, the trickster god of Yoruba cosmology, uses language as a tool of manipulation and disruption. He cleverly employs epanaphora to instigate tension between *Yemoja*, the goddess of motherhood, and *Ogun*, the god of iron and war. Èsù's repeated phrases, particularly those that cast doubt on Ogun's loyalty, demonstrate how repetition in speech can alter the dynamics between these powerful deities, thus setting the stage for a conflict that disrupts the natural order. This use of repetition serves as more than just a stylistic device; it is a reflection of how language can reshape perceptions and shift the course of divine and human interactions (Oladejo, 2013).

The concept of epanaphora as a rhetorical device is widely recognized in classical rhetoric as an effective method of creating emphasis and emotional weight in speech (Aristotle, 2007). In *Yemoja*, Èsù's mastery of this device reveals his power to control not only the characters but also the flow of the plot. Repetition works in Èsù's favour, as it ingrains his words in the minds of the characters, particularly *Yemoja*, who begins to question Ogun's loyalty as a result of Èsù's strategic manipulation. The rhetorical function of epanaphora in this context underscores the fragility of trust and loyalty, key themes that resonate throughout the play and the broader Yoruba tradition, where language and communication often hold deep spiritual and cultural significance (Ajayi, 2018). Beyond its rhetorical importance, Èsù's manipulation of language in *Yemoja* can be understood through the lens of postcolonial theory, which examines the role of language in power dynamics. According to Frantz Fanon (1963), language is not just a means of communication; it is a tool of control and oppression. In a similar vein, Èsù's language functions as a mechanism of control in the divine hierarchy. His use of epanaphora to repeat negative assertions about Ogun is not only a rhetorical strategy but also a method of destabilizing the power balance between the deities. This manipulation of language reflects the broader postcolonial idea that language, as a tool of domination, can distort reality and shape power relations. Èsù's words, once spoken, begin to take on a life of their own, affecting the perceptions and actions of the other gods.

At the heart of the play is the conflict between divine forces and their manipulation through language, particularly in the case of Èsù's actions. His role as the trickster in Yoruba mythology is pivotal in maintaining the cosmic balance. However, Èsù's manipulation of language to cause division among the gods reflects his dual nature: he is both a mediator and a

disruptor. The study of Èsù's language, particularly his use of epanaphora, can thus be viewed as a commentary on the complex relationships that exist between the gods and how these dynamics mirror larger societal and cultural struggles. Èsù's power over language allows him to influence not only divine events but also the perceptions of the characters involved, illustrating the broader theme of how communication can alter reality (Bhabha, 1994). Furthermore, the mythological foundation of *Yoruba* cosmology plays a significant role in understanding Èsù's actions and language. In *Yoruba* thought, the gods are not omnipotent but are subject to the forces of fate, which can be manipulated through language, as seen with Èsù. His role as an intermediary between humans and gods places him in a unique position to influence outcomes. Through repetition and rhetorical manipulation, Èsù challenges the divine order and tests the loyalty and faithfulness of the other gods. This aspect of Esu's character highlights the thematic tension between fate and free will, a recurring motif in both *Yoruba* mythology and in African drama, where the spoken word has the power to alter destinies and redefine relationships (Soyinka, 1976; Okpewho, 1992).

This study seeks to explore how epanaphora as a rhetorical tool enhances the thematic concerns of manipulation, deception, and power in *Yemoja*. By focusing on Èsù's use of language, the analysis will shed light on the deeper cultural, philosophical, and theological implications of language in *Yoruba* drama. Yerima's play, through its exploration of the complex dynamics between the deities, presents a vivid portrayal of how language can serve as both a weapon and a vehicle for maintaining divine balance. The play is a striking example of how language, specifically through the rhetorical device of epanaphora, can influence perception, control relationships, and alter the fate of individuals and communities in African cultural narratives (Finnegan, 2012). Examining the rhetorical device of epanaphora in Èsù's poetics in the play will elicit the thematic concern of the playwright.

2. Statement of Research Problem

In Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja*, the character of Èsù, the trickster god, plays a central role in shaping the narrative and influencing the relationships between the *Òrìsàs* (deities). His cunning use of language, particularly through rhetorical devices such as epanaphora, serves as a critical tool in manipulating the characters and steering the plot toward conflict and deception. Èsù's deceptive poetics are not merely incidental to the drama; they form the backbone of the unfolding tragedy, influencing the actions of other gods like *Yemoja* and *Ògún*. Despite the critical importance of Èsù's manipulative use of language, little scholarly attention has been given to how the rhetorical device of epanaphora specifically functions in Èsù's poetics and how this contributes to the larger thematic concerns of the play.

2.1 Specific Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are:

- 1) to analyze the role of epanaphora in Èsù's poetics in *Yemoja* and its contribution to his character as the trickster god.
- 2) to explore how Èsù's manipulation of language through epanaphora affects the relationships between the *orisas*, particularly *Yemoja* and *Ogun*.

- 3) to examine the thematic implications of Èsù's deceptive poetics, particularly in relation to power, fate, and human nature, within the context of Yoruba cosmology.

3. Methodology

The methodology for this study is qualitative and analytical, focusing on a detailed, close examination of Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja* with particular emphasis on the use of epanaphora as a rhetorical device by the character of Èsù. This approach combines literary analysis with thematic exploration to investigate how Èsù's manipulation of language shapes the plot, power dynamics, and the relationships between the deities in the play. The research employs both textual analysis and contextual interpretation, drawing on relevant theories of rhetoric, postcolonialism, and Yoruba cosmology to uncover the significance of Èsù's speech patterns and their broader implications.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, which allows for a detailed investigation of the textual elements in *Yemoja*. This design is appropriate as it facilitates an in-depth analysis of Èsù's speech, focusing specifically on the rhetorical devices and their functions within the play's context (Oladejo, 2013). A textual analysis methodology is used to identify and evaluate Èsù's use of epanaphora, considering how repetition in his speech manipulates the other gods, particularly *Yemoja* and *Ogun*. This method is crucial because it enables the researcher to delve into the nuances of language and its effects on the narrative and character development. Additionally, contextual analysis will be employed to place the play within the broader context of Yoruba mythology and cosmology. This approach draws on Yoruba oral traditions and cultural beliefs to interpret the ways in which Esu's linguistic manipulation aligns with the divine roles and relationships in Yoruba thought (Ajayi, 2018). Through a careful examination of the play's cultural and philosophical underpinnings, the study aims at providing a richer understanding of Èsù's character and his manipulation of language as a means of controlling divine and human destinies.

3.2 Population and Sample

The primary focus of this study is on the text of *Yemoja* itself, specifically the character of Èsù and his poetics throughout the play. Therefore, the population of the study consists of the textual elements, especially Esu's lines of dialogue within the play. In this case, the sample is derived from the entire play, with a concentrated analysis of Èsù's use of epanaphora in key moments of the plot. The study also includes the interactions between Èsù and the other gods, particularly *Yemoja* and *Ogun*, as these relationships are central to understanding the rhetorical power of Èsù's poetics (Soyinka, 1976). To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the study focuses on key scenes where Èsù's manipulation through language is most prominent, such as his interactions with *Yemoja* and *Ogun*, where the use of repetition significantly influences the development of the plot. These scenes will provide rich material for investigating the role of language in shaping character perceptions and divine conflict in the play. By focusing on these moments, the study

captures how language, particularly repetition, can shift the narrative trajectory and power dynamics.

3.3 Sampling Technique

Given the textual focus of the study, the sampling technique is purposeful, allowing for an intentional selection of excerpts in the play where Èsù's speech is most relevant to the research objectives. According to Finnegan (2012), purposive sampling is common in qualitative research, particularly when the researcher is examining specific aspects of a text. This technique ensures that the analysis focuses on those dialogues where Èsù's use of epanaphora creates a significant impact on the narrative and the interactions among the gods. The selected passages will be analyzed for their rhetorical structure, emotional tone, and thematic significance, particularly focusing on how the repetition affects the plot and relationships between the characters.

3.4 Research Instruments

The primary research instrument for this study is content analysis of the play *Yemoja*, specifically focusing on Èsù's dialogues. Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research tool for examining patterns, themes, and motifs within textual data (Babbie, 2010). In this case, the content analysis will be applied to identify and analyze instances of epanaphora in Èsù's speech, assessing how repetition functions rhetorically and thematically within the context of the play. This method allows for a systematic exploration of Esu's use of language and its impact on the narrative. In addition to the primary textual analysis, thematic analysis will be employed to explore the broader themes related to language, power, and manipulation in the play. By examining Èsù's rhetoric through a thematic lens, the study will investigate how his use of language aligns with key themes such as deception, trust, and divine authority (Oladejo, 2013). Thematic analysis will also help identify how Èsù's manipulation of language reflects the cultural and philosophical views embedded in Yoruba mythology and African theatre.

3.5 Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from the primary source text of *Yemoja* (Yerima, 2002). The collection will focus on passages where Èsù uses epanaphora to manipulate the perceptions of other characters. In addition to the primary text, secondary sources such as academic articles, books, and journal articles on Yoruba drama, language in African theatre, and rhetorical devices were used to provide a broader context for interpreting Èsù's use of language. These sources included scholarly works on African literature, rhetorical strategies, and Yoruba cultural traditions that discuss the importance of language and repetition in shaping divine relationships and power structures.

3.7 Analytical Procedures

Once the relevant excerpts from *Yemoja* were identified, they were subjected to qualitative textual analysis to identify patterns of repetition and assess their rhetorical significance. Using close reading techniques, the researchers analyzed Èsù's poetics for instances of epanaphora and other rhetorical devices, such as parallelism and antithesis, to understand how they contribute to the emotional intensity of the scenes and the manipulation of other characters. This analysis

was guided by theoretical frameworks from rhetoric, postcolonial theory, and Yoruba cosmology to interpret how repetition alters character perceptions and shifts the balance of power. The data were also analyzed for thematic patterns, focusing on how Èsù's linguistic manipulation contributes to the overarching themes of deception, power, and fate in the play. The study explored how repetition functions as a tool of influence, particularly in the way it affects divine relationships and shapes the characters' actions. The analysis considered how the rhetorical strategies in Èsù's speech reflect broader cultural and philosophical views on language and power in Yoruba cosmology. The findings were interpreted within the context of African theatre and postcolonial discourse, providing a comprehensive understanding of the significance of language in Yerima's play.

3.8 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in rhetorical theory, postcolonial theory, and Yoruba cosmology, with a specific focus on the role of language in shaping power relations and human (or divine) agency. This framework explores how Èsù's manipulation of language, particularly through the rhetorical device of epanaphora, functions as a tool for control, deception, and destabilization in Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja*. By engaging with these three interwoven theoretical perspectives, this study will explore the deeper significance of Èsù's linguistic strategies and their implications for understanding the dynamics of power, trust, and fate in African drama.

3.9 Rhetorical Theory and Epanaphora

In rhetorical theory, epanaphora is a device that involves the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences, and it is often used to create emphasis, evoke emotion, and reinforce key themes (Aristotle, 2007). This technique plays a pivotal role in Èsù's dialogue in *Yemoja*, where the repeated phrases intensify the emotional weight of his words, making them more influential on the characters' perceptions and actions. As Aristotle (2007) suggests, repetition in rhetoric enhances the persuasive power of speech by creating a rhythmic and hypnotic effect, making it easier for the speaker to shape the audience's beliefs and emotions. In the case of Èsù, his use of epanaphora strategically alters the dynamics between *Yemoja* and Ogun, highlighting how language can manipulate relationships and perceptions. Èsù's repetition of phrases like "Ogun does not trust you" serves to destabilize the divine hierarchy, particularly by sowing seeds of doubt in *Yemoja*'s mind (Oladejo, 2013).

Èsù's manipulation of language aligns with Aristotle's understanding of rhetoric as a means to persuade and shape action. In the context of *Yemoja*, the emotional and psychological power exerted by Èsù's speech reflects the broader function of rhetoric in both oral traditions and literary dramas. According to Finnegan (2012), African oral traditions often use repetition and parallel structures in speech to underscore key ideas, create a sense of rhythm, and engage the listener's emotions. Èsù's repetitive statements mirror this traditional practice, reinforcing the themes of betrayal, mistrust, and divine manipulation. His rhetorical mastery over repetition allows him to control not only the perception of the characters but also the unfolding of events in the play. This manipulation of language, particularly through epanaphora, exemplifies how rhetoric serves as a powerful tool for shaping fate and influencing divine dynamics.

3.10 Postcolonial Theory and Language as Power

Postcolonial theory offers a critical lens through which to examine the role of language in establishing and maintaining power. Frantz Fanon (1963) argues that language is a central instrument of cultural domination, shaping how individuals and communities perceive themselves and each other. Fanon's assertion that language is intrinsically linked to power and control provides a valuable framework for analyzing Èsù's use of language in *Yemoja*. As the trickster god, Èsù manipulates language to assert his dominance over other gods, much like colonizers use language to assert control over colonized peoples. By repeating phrases that cast *Ogun* in a negative light, Èsù uses language as a tool of psychological manipulation to weaken the trust between the deities, thus shifting the balance of power in his favour. In a postcolonial context, the use of repetition in Èsù's speech can be viewed as a form of linguistic hegemony. Edward Said (1978) discusses how colonizers use language to "other" and subjugate the colonized. In a similar vein, Èsù uses repetition to create a narrative that alienates *Ogun* from *Yemoja*, thereby asserting his control over the divine world. By manipulating how the characters perceive each other through language, Èsù not only destabilizes their relationships but also redefines their roles in the cosmic order. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) further explains that repetition in language can produce a "colonial mimicry," where the dominant power (in this case, Èsù) reshapes the identity and behaviour of the other gods. This aligns with the manipulation seen in *Yemoja*, where Èsù's repeated assertions create an alternate reality, one where *Ogun* is seen as a betrayer rather than a loyal ally.

3.11 Yoruba Cosmology and Esu's Trickster Role

In addition to rhetorical and postcolonial perspectives, the study draws upon Yoruba cosmology to understand Èsù's position and function within the divine hierarchy. In Yoruba thought, Èsù is not merely a trickster but also a mediator between gods and humans. His role as a boundary-crosser allows him to manipulate divine affairs, ensuring the cosmic balance is maintained through disruption and uncertainty (Ajayi, 2018). This dual nature of Èsù—the trickster and the mediator—reflects his control over the fate of individuals and deities, allowing him to challenge established orders. Yoruba religious thought places significant emphasis on the power of language as a means of communication with the divine, and Èsù's use of epanaphora can be seen as an extension of this belief, showcasing his ability to shape divine interactions and affect the trajectory of events through his manipulation of speech. Èsù's role as a trickster aligns with his ability to manipulate language to create confusion and conflict among the gods. According to Soyinka (1976), the trickster is both a disruptor and a teacher, using deception to provoke self-examination and change. In *Yemoja*, Èsù's linguistic manipulation does more than just sow discord; it forces the gods to confront their vulnerabilities and reconsider their positions. His use of repetition in speech is a reflection of how language, in the Yoruba worldview, serves as a tool for both divine intervention and cosmic reordering. Èsù's ability to change the perception of *Ogun* through his words underscores the fluidity of power and the transient nature of divine relationships in Yoruba mythology (Okpewho, 1992).

3.12 Language and Fate in African Drama

The study draws upon the broader tradition of African drama to contextualize Èsù's manipulation of language. In African dramatic works, language often serves as a vehicle for cultural expression and philosophical inquiry. As Wole Soyinka (1976) points out, African drama often explores the relationship between language, fate, and identity, with speech acting as a catalyst for action and change. In *Yemoja*, Èsù's use of epanaphora can be seen as a dramatic representation of how language shapes the characters' perceptions of their fate. The repetition of Èsù's words causes *Yemoja* to question *Ogun's* loyalty, thus altering her actions and, by extension, the unfolding of the narrative. Through this manipulation, Yerima illustrates the power of language not only as a tool for personal influence but also as a mechanism for redefining destiny in African storytelling.

3.13 Synopsis of the Play

Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja* is a play that narrates the characters and peculiarities of the Òrìsàs in Yoruba land. Each Òrìsà has a peculiar characteristic which defines its identity. The Òrìsàs include *Obàtálá*, *Òrúnmìlà*, *Ògún*, *Èsù*, and *Yemoja*, among others. *Yemoja* is a river goddess whose name connotes the mother of fishes. She is extremely beautiful, so much so that her beauty generates so many conflicts among the Òrìsàs. She is betrothed to *Ògún*, the god of iron. According to *Yemoja*, *Ògún* is so skillful in dancing. This dexterity attracts *Yemoja* so much that she jettisons *Ògún's* hot temperament, and agrees to be his suitor. As the discourse of their love is ongoing in the presence of Èsù, *Ogun's* close friend, the sound of war jingles as *Ògún* decides to embark on an adventure to fight the war.

On his mandate to embark on the war, *Ògún* thinks of what becomes of *Yemoja*, his suitor. It then crosses *Ogun's* mind that Èsù, the trickster god and *Ogun's* intimate friend, should look after *Yemoja* in his absence. Unknowingly to *Ògún* that Èsù is blushing for *Yemoja*. Esu has once or twice approached *Yemoja* for love, which has been repeatedly turned down. Thus, Èsù sees *Ogun's* absence as an opportunity to revisit his love advances to *Yemoja*. At *Ogun's* exit, Èsù begins to interrogate *Yemoja* on why she has rejected him for the hot-tempered *Ògún*. In spite of Èsù's renewed love advances, *Yemoja* still turns him down. Meanwhile, *Ògún* leaves a lovely calabash for *Yemoja* and requests that she only open the calabash whenever she encounters any problems. The calabash is not to be opened for fun. Èsù, with his antics, does not know how to convince *Yemoja* further. He thinks immediately about the Calabash and cajoles her to open the calabash to see that *Ògún* is a womaniser. Èsù argues that *Ògún* has many ladies at his disposal and that if *Yemoja* would like to confirm the truth of the matter, she should unveil the calabash. The conviction compels *Yemoja* to open the calabash. At the sight of the calabash, *Yemoja* falls down and is seriously wriggling in pain. She could not stand up effectively.

This makes her passionately appeal to Èsù to please assist her in calling upon *Obatala*, who is a specialist in healthcare. Èsù uses that opportunity to ensure he has a carnal knowledge of *Yemoja*. He requests her to promise to have a round or two rounds of sex with him, if he should assist her to invite *Obatala*, the physician. *Yemoja* could not but say yes to Èsù's advances on the condition that she regains her health. At the arrival of *Obatala*, *Yemoja* is taken inside for treatment. Èsù steps out to allow *Obatala* to attend to his patient. As Èsù takes a step out, he begins to imagine that *Obatala* is having a secret sexual affair with *Yemoja*. He runs to *Ògún* in

the war front and informs him to come home and see how *Obatala* has messed up his suitor. In his rage, *Ògún* runs home to challenge *Obatala* to a duel and to allege *Yemoja* of adultery. In the process, *Yemoja* runs to *Orunmila*, a diviner, to help avert the looping trouble and shame *Ògún* tries to bring on her. *Orunmila* consults the oracle and tells *Yemoja* that she belongs to the sea, and that she (*Yemoja*) will definitely return to the sea on the same day *Ògún* plans to wage war against her and *Obatala*. *Orunmila* divines that the sea creatures are earnestly waiting for *Yemoja* to return home. True to *Orunmila's* words, *Yemoja* returns home that day to bring an end to the duel.

3.14 Data Analysis and Discussion

In Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja*, the character of *Èsù*, the trickster god, plays a pivotal role in manipulating the plot and characters through his linguistic strategies, particularly through the rhetorical device of epanaphora. *Èsù's* poetics often carries the weight of deception, power, and control, using repetition to destabilize the relationships between the gods and create a sense of uncertainty. This analysis focuses on a key scene where *Èsù* employs epanaphora to manipulate the actions and perceptions of *Yemoja* and *Ogun*, furthering the thematic concerns of deception, fate, and divine intervention.

3.15 Linguistic Analysis of Esu's Poetics Using Epanaphora

Èsù's use of epanaphora in this scene is both strategic and manipulative. By repeating the same phrases at the beginning of each clause or sentence, *Èsù* creates a rhythmic structure that commands attention and reinforces the negative message he wishes to convey.

Yoruba Translation	English Translation
<i>Èsù</i> : 1. <i>Ògún onirè, mobá n'jà</i>	Ogun of ire which I quarrel with,
2. <i>Ọkọ ni ó se mí</i>	Make me a husband
3. <i>Koríko odò tí rú 'binrin tòjò-tèrùn</i>	A River plant that sees women always
4. <i>Koríko odò tí rú 'binrin tèrùn-tòjò</i>	A River plant that sees women always
5. <i>Koríko odò tí rú 'binrin loṣàn-lóru</i>	A River plant that sees women always
6. <i>Àwonńa-ẹ̀jì, Yan'mó n mí</i>	One who dances in a fierce fire
7. <i>Alábońlé kítíkítí</i>	One who has gun in his custody often
8. <i>Alábońlé kítíkítí kítí</i>	One who possesses numerous rifle in his house
9. <i>Koríko odò tí rú mìnìmìnì</i>	A River plant that is evergreen
10. <i>Ògún peḷú eḍá ibínú-</i>	Ogun's nature is hot tempered
11. <i>Ògún peḷú eḍá ti ńdani-</i>	Ogun has a nature of betrayal
12. <i>Ògún peḷú eḍá tí kíí gbọ̀ràn</i>	Ogun has a nature that never listened
13. <i>Yemoja, Ògún onirè kò fọkàn tán ọ</i>	Yemoja, Oun of ire does not trust you
14. <i>Ògún lolólùfẹ́ kàà kiri ayé; Ilésà, Òndó, Àkúré, Èkítì, Ilé-Ifè. Níbi gbogbo, ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ wọ̀n ni kòmò, tí mo sì tí jẹ olùsọ́ fún. (Pp 28)</i>	Your ogun has lovers littered all over the land; Ondo, Akure, Ekiti, Ile-Ife, all over, and most of them I know and have been body guard to. (Pp 28)

Each repetition of phrases like “*Ògún peḷú eḍá ti ńdani*” (Ogun has a nature of betrayal)” or “*Ògún peḷú eḍá tí kíí gbọ̀ràn*” (*Ògún* will not listen), “*Ògún peḷú eḍá ibínú*” (*Ògún's* nature is hot-tempered), serves to etch the idea of betrayal into *Yemoja's* mind, building emotional tension and undermining her confidence in *Ògún's* loyalty. The repetition of these phrases acts as a form

of reinforcement. Repetition in language has a psychological effect on the audience, making the message seem more credible or undeniable. Èsù understands the power of this technique and uses it not only to manipulate *Yemoja* but also to plant the seeds of doubt within Ògún's own mind. Through the repeated phrases, Èsù creates an almost hypnotic effect, forcing the listener to focus on the emotional weight of the accusation rather than the facts.

For example, Èsù's repeated statement, "Koríko odò tíí rú 'bínrin tèèrùn-tòjò," (A river plant that sees women everywhere he goes) works on multiple levels of semiotic analysis. It plants the idea of betrayal, making *Yemoja* question the trust she has placed in *Ogun*. As a deity of war, Ògún's trust is a powerful currency, and Èsù's manipulation of this concept through repetition alters the power dynamics between the two *orisas*. The repetition here is not merely for emphasis but also works to establish Èsù's control over the narrative, shaping how the characters perceive one another. The metaphoric comparison of Ògún to "Koriko odo", a nominal phrase, which is repeated three times for emphasis, is significant to the strength Ògún has when it comes to womanizing. The nominal expression "Koríko odò", meaning "riverplant" is a plant analogy, which suggests freshness and constant nutrients the plant derives from the river. Such a plant can hardly die because of the regular nutrients derived from its natural habitat. Èsù's adaptation of plant symbolism here is a further indication of his poetic prowess in convincing *Yemoja*. The season expression "tòjò-tèèrùn", meaning "rainy and dry seasons" or "Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter" is a semiotic signification of promiscuity, a poetic tool which Èsù deploys to persuade *Yemoja*.

Èsù's use of epanaphora serves more than just a narrative function; it is deeply intertwined with the play's central themes of deception, manipulation, and power. Èsù's poetics, as a trickster god, highlights the fragility of trust and human (or divine) vulnerability. Through the repetition of negative, divisive phrases, Èsù shapes the emotional landscape of the characters, emphasizing the theme that language—when used manipulatively—can alter perceptions and realities. The theme of betrayal is central to this scene and plays a crucial role in the development of the characters' relationships. Èsù manipulates the situation, presenting Ògún's actions in the worst possible light, and thereby deepening the rift between the characters. The use of epanaphora helps to exaggerate the perceived betrayal, making it feel inevitable and inescapable. This manipulation speaks to the larger theme of how language can be used as a weapon, capable of distorting truth and shaping destiny.

3.16 Thematic Implications of Èsù's Poetics

Èsù's rhetorical power, as demonstrated in this scene, also underscores the play's exploration of fate and free will. While the *òrisàs* are believed to control their fates, Èsù's manipulation of language shows how even the gods are vulnerable to the power of words. Èsù's control over language, particularly through repetition, reflects his ability to shift the course of events and influence the decisions of the gods, revealing the precarious nature of divine power. This is delineated in the excerpt below:

Yoruba Translation	English Translation
1. Èsù: Ògùn Awoo Awo Olúmokin Àre	Ògùn, the cult of Olumokin Are
2. Awonna-eji, Yannkan-nire	The Lord of Ire
3. Lákáadijo Osìn-molè	A mighty one who is the king of the Orisas
4. Òlómínílé f'èjè wè	One who has water for bathing but chooses blood
5. Òlómínílé f'èjè sanra	One who has water for bathing but chooses blood
6. A se ègbè fún ẹni tí ó wú ú	He supports whosoever he likes
7. A se ègbè fún ẹni tí ó fẹràn	He supports whosoever he wishes
8. A se ègbè fún ẹni tí ó n wa	He supports whosoever he seeks after
9. Koríko odò tí í rú mìnìjòjò	A river plant that is evergreen
10. Òrìsà tí alágbèḍe n fi obì kan	The deity a blacksmith must not worship with kolanut
11. Òrìsà tí alágbèḍe n fi obì bọ	a deity which a blacksmith must not worship with kolanut
12. Tí ọmọ aráyé n fi ojù di	A deity that people look down on
13. Ògùn... (Pp 22)	Ògùn ...

The deliberate repetition of Ògùn's praise chant in the expression "Òlómínílé f'èjè wè" (One who has water for bathing but chooses to use blood), in lines 4 & 5, is an intentional play of words on Ògùn's psychology. Esu knows the right word for every deity at any particular time. When he wants to deceive, he knows what to say to achieve his goal. In trying to bring *Ogun* down to listen to him, Èsù adopts the rhetorical device of epanaphora. He keeps cajoling *Ogun* through the repetition of certain cheering metaphorical expressions from Ògùn's praise chants, such as "Òrìsà tí alágbèḍe n fi obì kan" (lines 10 & 11). He describes *Ogun* here as a deity whom a blacksmith must not worship with kolanut. In *Yoruba* cosmology, the significance of kolanut cannot be overemphasized. It is more than mere seeds to the *Yoruba* clan. It is a spiritual artifact that is used for divination. It has four lobes, which determine the interpretation of the destiny of anyone. When divined, the number of lobes that is turned upward determines the fortune of a man. Hence, as significant as obi (African sacred kolanut) might be, it is still not sufficient enough to worship a deity like Ògùn, who is conceived as an overseer among the deities. At the enchantment of the reiteration of these powerful lines from his *oríki*, Ògùn abandons every other thing to listen to Èsù. By so doing, Èsù is able to achieve his goal of deception. He adopts his deceptive strategies to manipulate Ògùn's fate by not allowing him to marry *Yemoja*, a beautiful damsel. No wonder a popular *Yoruba* musician, Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey sang in one of his albums that Èsù should not come his way, he should go to another man's direction (Èsù *má se mí, ọmọ ẹlòmíràn ní o se*). Èsù, the devil, from *Yoruba's* perspective, is the cause of every human tragedy. All troubles are tied to his feet.

Similarly, in navigating *Ọbátálá's* destiny, Èsù adopts another deceptive strategy. *Ọbátálá* is often called *òrìsà ńlá* (a powerful and big deity). He occupies a special dignified position among the *òrìsàs* of *Yorubaland*. But when Èsù wants to use him to achieve his purpose of having a round of sex with *Yemoja*, he rebrands his poetics. This is seen in the excerpt below:

Yoruba Translation	English Translation
Èsù: 1. Ènì kan ló lè wò ó sà̀n	Only one man can save you now.
2. Oṛẹ̀ mì, Òrìsà rí́lá.	My friend, a mighty deity.
3. Ní sùúrù, jẹ́ kìn kẹ́ sí	Wait, let me call him.
4. Ọ̀bàtálá mí,	My Ọ̀bàtálá
5. Òrìsà rí́lá mí,	a mighty deity of mine
6. Ikú tí í bá gbé ilé f'ọ́lá ran 'ni!	The death that enriches if it stays at home
7. Ikú tí í bá gbé ilé f'ọ̀rọ̀ ran 'ni!	The death that enriches if it stays at home
8. Aláṣẹ! Ò sọ enìkan sọ̀sọ̀ dígbà ènìyàn,	One with authority that turns one man to two hundred men
9. Aláṣẹ! Ò sọ enìkan sọ̀sọ̀ dí rún	One with authority that turns the fortune of a man around
10. Sọ̀mí dí' rún, sọ̀mí d'ígba	Make me multiplies, make me a millionaire
11. Sọ̀mí dọ̀' tálé-légbèje ènìyàn	Make me an extremely wealthy man
12. Òrìsà tó ga jù ènìyàn lọ	My Orisa bigger than man
13. Tí ó n dàgbà lójojúmọ̀	That grows everyday
14. Òrìsà tí ó tóbi tí kò ségbé	A deity that grows so big, it cannot be carried.
15. Bàntà banta nínú ọ́lá	A deity that flourishes in dignity
16. Bàntà banta nínú ọ̀rọ̀	A deity that flourishes in wealth
17. Bàntà banta nínú iyí	A deity that flourishes in radiance
18. Ó sùn nínú ọ́lá	A deity that rejoices in wealth
19. Ó tí inú ọ́lá dídè	He came from the household of riches
20. Ó tí inú ọ́lá s'ọ́lá	He went from wealth to riches
21. Bàbá rí́lá, ọ̀kọ̀ Yémowó	A big deity; the husband of Yemowo
22. Èmi ni Èsù	It is I Esu,
23. Ọ̀bàtálá mo pè ọ̀ (Pp 32)	Ọ̀bàtálá, I call you.

The use of epanaphora here in the above excerpt is quite striking and cajoling. The *oríkì* expressions “Ikú tí í bá gbé ilé f'ọ́lá ran 'ni!!”, “Aláṣẹ! Ò sọ enìkan sọ̀sọ̀ dígbà ènìyàn”, “Sọ̀mí dí' rún, sọ̀mí d'ígba”, “Bàntà banta nínú ọ́lá” and “Ó tí inú ọ́lá dídè”, are poetic baits that Èsù deploys to win Ọ̀bàtálá's heart. These expressions are repeated many times to keep their rhythm in tune with the message. He describes Ọ̀bàtálá as 'death', which makes one rich. In Yoruba's worldview, 'death' ends all things. The day one dies is the day he goes to rest from the troubled world. Thus, after death, no achievement again. Meanwhile, Èsù asserts that in Ọ̀bàtálá's case, death enriches and does not destroy. Èsù further sees Ọ̀bàtálá as “Aláṣẹ”; someone who says something and it is done. He opines that Ọ̀bàtálá can make one person into two hundred people. He ends his poetic reverberation with the enchantment “Oti inu ala dide”. “Ala” here means riches. Ọ̀bàtálá is a wealthy deity. Apart from the power of healing that he possesses, it is believed he is the richest among the deities. Esu explores this attribute to convince *Obatala* to come to terms with him. Eventually, he manipulates Ọ̀bàtálá's destiny by stigmatizing him as an adulterer and strikes a strong conflict between him and Ògún.

3.17 Cultural and Philosophical Contextualisation

In the context of Yorùbá cosmology, Èsù's manipulation of language reflects his role as the mediator between gods and humans and his essential position in maintaining balance through disruption. This argument is manifested in the following excerpt from Yerima's *Yemoja*:

Yoruba Translation	English Translation
Voice: 1. Èsù, oṭá Òrìsà	The devil, an enemy of orisa/deity
2. Oṣètùrá l'orúkọ babá mò ó	Father calls you osetura
3. Oṣètùrá l'orúkọ iyá mò ó	Mother calls you osetura
4. Alágogo ìjà l'orúkọ iyá ñpè ẹ	Mother calls you One with the bell of war
5. Alágogo ìjà l'orúkọ iyá ñpè ẹ	Mother calls you warrior with the bell of war
6. Èsù òdàrà omọkúnrin idolọfin	The betrayer from idolofin
7. Ó lé sósó sóri ẹsẹ ẹlẹsẹ	You perch on the laps of a stranger
8. Ó lé sósó sóri itan onítán	You perch on the laps of another person
9. Kò jé, kò sì jé kí ẹnì nìjé gbé mi	He will not act and won't allow others to act
10. A kì í l'ówó láì mú t'Èsù kúrò	The rich must preserve Esu's own
11. Asòtún-sòsì láì ní'tijú	One who is shameless when manipulating
12. Èsù, apàkúta s'omọ oloṃọ l'énu	Who destroys an innocent person
13. Èsù, apàkúta s'omọ oloṃọ l'áso	Who destroys an innocent person
14. Ó fi òkúta dípò iyo (Pp 30)	Who replaces salt with stone

Èsù's actions in this scene mirror his mythological role as the trickster who tests the gods and forces them to confront their own flaws and contradictions. By causing discord between *Yemoja* and Ògún, Èsù is not only destabilizing their relationship but also testing the divine order. In Yorùbá thought, language is seen as a powerful tool with the capacity to shape reality. Èsù's ability to manipulate through speech reflects the belief that words can create and destroy, bind and unbind, reveal and conceal. The Yorùbá gods, while powerful, are also vulnerable to the influence of language, as seen in Èsù's interactions with them. His speech, filled with repetition and manipulation, highlights the role of language as a tool of both divine will and human deception. Epanaphora is widely deployed in the above excerpt. The poetic expressions "Oṣètùrá l'orúkọ babá mò ó", "Alágogo ìjà l'orúkọ iyá ñpè ẹ", "Ó lé sósó sóri ẹsẹ ẹlẹsẹ?" and "Èsù, apàkúta s'omọ oloṃọ l'énu" explicitly describe Èsù's attributes and show the significance of the rhetorical strategy of epanaphora in persuasion.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Èsù's use of epanaphora in *Yemoja* by Ahmed Yerima serves as a powerful tool for manipulating the characters and advancing the play's central themes of power, deception, and divine intervention. Through the repetitive structure of his speech, Èsù is able to control the narrative, plant seeds of doubt, and destabilize the relationships between the other òrìsà, particularly *Yemoja* and Ògún. His poetics reflect not only the manipulative nature of his character but also a broader cultural and philosophical commentary on the role of language in shaping destiny and fate. This study highlights the significance of rhetorical devices, specifically epanaphora, in the construction of Èsù's character as the trickster god, whose language is both a weapon and a tool for maintaining balance through disruption.

The repetition in Èsù's poetics underscores the thematic exploration of betrayal, trust, and the fragile nature of divine relationships. By analyzing Èsù's poetics through the viewpoint of Yoruba cosmology, the study illuminates the complex interplay between language, power, and mythology, revealing how even divine beings are vulnerable to the influence of words. Ultimately, Yerima's portrayal of Èsù's manipulation through language is not only a critical

aspect of *Yemoja's* plot but also a reflection of the broader themes within *Yoruba* thought, where language holds immense power to shape both human and divine realities. The study of Èsù's epanaphora serves as a reminder of the potency of words in both creating and unraveling the fabric of relationships, fate, and cosmic order. Through his use of repetition, Èsù demonstrates that language, when wielded strategically, can manipulate not only perceptions but also the course of events, revealing the complex and sometimes deceptive nature of power. Through this linguistic strategy, Yerima offers a profound commentary on the power of words and the fragility of trust in the divine world.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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