



When the Gods Are Invoked:

The *Egungun* and Carnival Masks in African and Caribbean Drama



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Abstract :

Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott are prominent dramatists whose dramaturgies, among other things, emerge from the theological beliefs of their communities. One of such theological bases revolves around the mask. The African mask just as the Carnival mask in the Caribbean is a symbol of great complexity and significance, because of its artistic beauty, social function and spiritual vitality.

This paper examines Soyinka and Walcott's theatrical presentations of the mask in **The Road** and **Dream on Monkey Mountain** as objects of artistic magnificence, cultural exuberance and (most especially) as tangible means

of connection between the different areas of existence. This is understandable from the perspective that human life, as imagined in the African and Caribbean communities, is part of a continuum stretching from the spirits of unborn children through bodily existence to the spirits of the dead in a cosmos that consists of interpenetrating and interdependent phases.

Drawing largely from Carl Jung's analysis of literary archetypes as playing an "essential role in refashioning the material universe into an alternative verbal universe that is humanly intelligible and viable, because it is adapted to essential human needs and concerns" (Stevens Anthony, 2006) and that a text's meaning is shaped by cultural and psychological myths, the study concludes that in the works studied Soyinka and Walcott do not only portray the artistic and cultural aesthetics inherent in the African and Caribbean masks, but they also depict them as a medium through which divine or supernatural powers coningle in human affairs to ensure order and serenity in society and the universe..

Keywords : mask, egungun, carnival, medium, order, universe