

**Li, Xin**

*School of Foreign Studies, University of Science and Technology Beijing  
China*

### ***Dream on Monkey Mountain as a ritual play***

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* is a masterpiece by the Nobel laureate Derek Walcott. Many critics analyze it as a dream play in the western tradition while it can be categorized as a ritual play when put in the context of Afro – Caribbean cultural tradition.

On the one hand, it uses spirit possession to structure the play. Part I and Part II can be regarded as separate rituals initiated by the possession of the white goddess. The ritual atmosphere is established by the use of African drum, song and dance, and mask as in an Afro – Caribbean religious ritual. The structure corresponds to the cyclical time view in African cosmology instead of the Judeo – Christian concept of linear time. The cyclical structure is to question the Western progressive concept of history, which is a thematic concern of the play.

On the other hand, in content the play stresses the balance and reciprocity between human and nature in African cosmology. First of all, the main characters all bear animal names, which not only displays the colonial stereotype of the inferiority of the colonized but also stresses their spiritual connection to nature. The transformation of the tree to coal and then to fire or diamond is another important metaphor. Humans, like coal, must experience transformation through interaction with the earth and the immediate environment.

The clash and integration of the Afro – Caribbean religion and the Western play brings about the new genre of West Indian ritual play. West Indian playwrights including Derek Walcott uses this genre to reflect on their cultural legacy and their new identity after independence. The emergence of the genre shows the strong creative potential of Caribbean culture and Caribbean people.