

## Salaka Sanou

Sanou Salaka is Associate Professor in the Department of Modern Literature, School of Literature, Arts, and Communication, University of Ouagadougou. He is also director of the Ouagadougou University Press.

# Literature and mask: a comparative study of their functioning as institutions

## Literature and mask: a comparative study of their functioning as institutions

The way literature functions as an institution is known and has been thoroughly investigated. This has allowed some theoreticians to define the institution and to show how, as an autonomous field, the literary field produces values that are transmitted through certain codes. In Africa, beyond its artistic dimension, the mask is both cultural and cultic. In its social milieu, it is a social reference, a regulator of social life. Among the Bobo people of Burkina Faso, it is a socializing structure *par excellence* for individuals. An observation of the functioning of literature and the mask reveals striking similarities, which led the author to wonder if, like literature, the mask could not be considered as an institution? To answer this question, the author approached the two phenomena theoretically so as to establish a parallel between their operations. He concludes that the mask is an institution like literature, and as such, it may be studied from that perspective. **Key words:** Burkinabè literature, sociology of literature, burkinabè mask, cultural institution.

The title of my study may appear curious or as lacking interest, depending on one's knowledge about the mask. In the field of literary studies, Jacques Dubois (1986) has established the conviction that literature functions as an institution. But what bearing does this have on the mask?

My study may arouse curiosity in the way it approaches the mask: indeed, if the mask is seen as a mere art object, useful only for adorning living rooms or for exhibition in museums, then obviously, we may wonder how a mask may be studied as an institution. But beyond curiosity, we may also wonder about the interest of such a study, given that for the knowledgeable, the mask is like a human being whose life is regulated and linked to well-established ritual practices. For them, the mask as an institution is evident, and therefore this study may well state the obvious.

I have decided to bridge the two positions, first to clarify the situation for the curious ones, and second, to synthesize the profane and sparse sets of knowledge. With this, I hope to gather relevant facts not just based on serious observation, but also supported by a proven theory. Taking the perspective of the sociology of literature, I have investigated the operation of literary production as an institution in

Burkina Faso, which has helped me identify the local literary actors and their respective roles (Sanou 2003).

However, beside this concern, and concomitantly, I have been interested in the mask, initially out of sentimentalism (I belong to a mask society), then as a true subject of research. This has led me to create a research group: *Groupe de Recherche sur l'Esthétique Littéraire et Artistique Négro-Africaine* (GRELAN, the Research Group in Black-African Literary and Artistic Aesthetics), based at the University of Ouagadougou.

I have noted similarities between the operation of the literary institution and that of the mask. Along with my research, it appeared that I had to systematize these observations, that is, to order and organize them to draw some conclusions that may serve as avenues for an in-depth study. This paper is part of the process. As a theoretical innovation, its contents may appear surprising. While it does not provide any new clarification on the actual nature of the mask in the African context, it does present the mask as a study object in a new light. Consequently, it appeared necessary to recall the characteristics and functioning of the literary institution, according to Jacques Dubois's study. Then, to clarify my approach, I deemed it important to explain the functioning and importance of the mask among the Bobo people of Burkina Faso (except for some details, they are the same as elsewhere in Africa). Finally, I present a synthesis of the characteristics of literature and the mask, on the basis of which I assert the existence of a mask institution, like the literary institution.

### **The literary institution**

Generally speaking, an institution implies recognition of a social sub-system by the State. The legitimacy consecrated by the state apparatus, making the sub-system a cog of social functioning and a part of its layout. However, semantically, the word institution may encompass the following four areas:

- Institution is the act of instituting something, meaning, making it perennial through codifying its operation mode. In this sense, it refers to "establishment," "foundation";
- Institution also implies that which is instituted; this is for instance the case with international organizations like the United Nations, the African Union, all of which may be referred to as institutions;
- Institution equally implies that which is established by people, the reduced model of a social system whose legitimacy is consecrated by the State. This is the case with families, schools, marriages, armies, etc. The main feature here is the functionality of the social system, that is, the role it plays and the mode of operation allowing it to play that role;
- Finally, institution may have a collective and didactic meaning. In this case, it

refers to *l'ensemble des structures organisées tendant à se perpétuer dans chaque secteur de l'activité sociale* ("the set of organized structures aiming to perpetuate each sector of social activity") (Grassin) which requires a clear distinction between the various social activities concerned. By way of example, we may list the judicial, literary, artistic institutions, etc. Institution here recalls the notion of system, this referring to the structure of a whole comprising sub-systems, each of which is a small scale duplication of the system.

Now, how did the notion of literary institution or the institution of literature come about? Without necessarily delving into the history of this relatively new concept, let us note that Harry Levin, an American scholar, coined the concept of literary life in his 1945-1946 article, "Literature as an institution", published in *Accent*. For him, institution cannot be separated from the concept of system. Therefore literary institution implies considering literature as autonomous practice, "a field", to use Pierre Bourdieu's term, maintaining links with the social elements organized and structured by a given society.

However, it is Jacques Dubois who undertook the first systematic study of literature as an institution in his 1986 book entitled *L'institution de la littérature* ("The institution of literature"). Reflecting on the process of the "institutional conception of modern literature," he identifies three scholars who set the theoretical stage: Jean-Paul Sartre (*Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* ["What is literature?"], *Situations II* ["Situations II"]), Roland Barthes (*Le degré zéro de l'écriture* ["The zero degree of writing"]), and Pierre Bourdieu with his production on the field of culture. "Departing from the idealistic philosophies on art, these three authors perceive literature as the product of a historic society, and study it in terms of class relations."<sup>1</sup> The rupture is three dimensional: rupture in the perception of the function of the writer, rupture in the practice of writing, and rupture in the perception of literature as a symbolic good.

Under this approach, three levels form the foundation of literary institution:

- The writer as a creator, a departure point for literary life. The writer is the level of creation, with its own systems of aesthetic codes and theoretical regimes, the knowledge of which helps to determine his/her role in the life of literature. Indeed the writer has an itinerary and a *habitus* in the field of literature, and these reveal "indices of acquired legitimacy and recognition [...], define the level of readability and authority that each writer holds." (Durand 2001: 34)<sup>2</sup>
- Publishing: the productions of writers would remain simple manuscripts sleeping in their drawers, and they would remain unknown and inaccessible to the public without the intervention of the publisher, acting as a mediator between the creator and his/her readers. The publisher is a crucial cog in the life of literature, which it influences through his/her editorial stance; this determining his/her choice of manuscripts and areas of intervention. Producer and

distributor of the book, the publisher has a system for sorting, analyzing, and assessing manuscripts as part of the production process, that is, *the materialization of the manuscript into a book and the distribution of the book along a circuit of "consumption."* Publishing is an activity straddling the cultural and commercial fields. This ambivalent position justifies and explains the particular organization and operation mode it may adopt, depending on its capacity. The description and analysis of these will not concern us here.

- Reading or reception of the literary work. The theory of literary reception originated from specialists like Jean-Paul Sartre or Robert Escarpit who have shown that the fate of a book is reading, a multidimensional activity. Literary reception refers to the aesthetic, social, cultural, philosophical, etc., codes allowing readers to have access to a literary work, its substance and meaning. The plurality of these codes, we may easily imagine, implies multiple readers and approaches to the literary text. This also explains the existence of multiple legitimating authorities, that is, *un rouage institutionnel remplissant une fonction dans l'élaboration, la définition et la légitimation d'une œuvre* ("institutional setups elaborating, defining, and legitimating literary works"; Dubois 1986: 82). Legitimizing a literary work means recognizing that it complies with a number of pre-existing criteria that are clearly defined or that are instinctively recognized by the authority concerned. Among the main legitimating authorities, there are literary exhibitions or revues, critics, academies, and schools; each of which plays a specific role in the life of a literary work. According to Jacques Dubois (1986: 87), "(1) the exhibition or revue supports the emergence of the work; (2) the critic brings it recognition; (3) the academy consecrates it through prizes and co-optations; (4) the school, through its programs and manuals, definitely integrates the work in the institution and safeguards its conservation."<sup>3</sup>

The literary institution is therefore the study of the operation of literature, based on a particular organization in which each actor plays a prescribed role in the life of the literary work. The sociology of literature, that is, the study of literature as historically instituted and a relatively autonomous social object, has sufficiently explained this organization, which, starting with the writer perceived as an individual trajectory, involves the entire production process of the literary work, and ends with reading as the final stage of literary creation. The sociology of literature has given a new dimension to literary studies, through considering literature as an autonomous practice, "*a field* whose links with social elements are organized and structured by a certain type of society" (Grassin, original emphasis).<sup>4</sup>

## The African mask

The word mask is ambiguous, and the way I use it here is quite different from its usual meaning in, say, spectacle arts. As a socio-cultural reality in Africa, the meaning of the mask corresponds in no way to the Western understanding of it. Further, the French word poorly captures this socio-cultural reality, for the term mask is reductive, generally considering the mask as a disguise. To better present the mask as a socio-cultural phenomenon in Africa, let us propose some definitions stemming from the way people use it.

The dictionary, *Le Grand Larousse de la Langue Française*, defines the mask in several ways: at the level of the human body, the mask may be a fake face or the actual appearance of the human face; at the level of plastic arts, it may be the reproduction of a human or animal face; and it may also be a simple object like an oxygen mask, a mound of earth, a steel shed, etc. Another word etymologically close to the mask is “masquerade”, which may also have several definitions: a masquerade may be an entertainment, a gathering or parade of disguised persons, a ridiculous getup or disguise, or a hypocritical attitude.

The mask may therefore be a disguise or a dissimulation with three characteristics:

- camouflage, that is, the disappearance, imaginary loss of one’s individuality, hence the notion of dissimulation;
- Putting on drag, meaning, imitating or adopting a particular or deceitful appearance. This leads to a metamorphosis for man;
- Intimidation, a device resulting in a hyperbolic fright among spectators.

All these definitions and classifications reveal that the concept of the mask is complex. Based on these, I will try to delve into the phenomenon of the mask in Africa, focusing on the case of Burkina Faso, looking at a particular ethnic group, the Bobo people, for whom the mask holds a central role in their social organization and operation.

Originally and fundamentally animistic, traditional African societies have always held hierarchical relations with God, the Supreme Being and Creator of the universe and its inhabitants. To reach this Supreme Being, man must go through a series of intermediaries, whose respective importance depends on their position vis-à-vis God. Among the Bobo people of Burkina Faso, the following top-down schematic order obtains: God (*Wuro*), the Ancestors (*Sompulala*), the Bush (*Sogo*), the mask (incarnation of *Do*), the village (*Kiri*, man’s dwelling place), and the other spiritual forces, inappropriately referred to as (collective and individual) “fetishes”.

Among the Bobo people, the mask holds a crucial place with respect to the role it plays in their social organization and operation. The mask belongs to the spiritual order: it incarnates their fourth spiritual power, *Do*. That incarnation originates in a myth stating the fundamental role of the other spiritual powers higher than *Do*. Of

the various versions of this myth, one indicates that the mask was revealed to human being (some versions say man, others say woman) in the Bush in the form of a bizarre, weird being; a being unknown and unfamiliar to human being. Upon noticing that, human being was scared by his appearance, the mask reassured him by explaining how human being could make him (mask) be useful to him (human being). In this originated the outing rituals of masks (always emerging from the bush) and its institutionalization, as well as the perception of the mask as a sacred being of the bush. To humanize the mask, human being linked him to *Do*, a spiritual power based in the village, the abode of human being.

From the previous, it appears that the origin of the mask is linked to the supernatural, particularly, to *divinities* that I shall here refer to as spiritual powers because the Bobo people are monotheists.<sup>5</sup> The mask is of a divine origin, being a direct product of divine willingness. This explains why the mask inspires awe and respect in human beings who see him as a mysterious and supernatural force.

As a symbolic expression of certain aspects of the supernatural, the mask is always identified (or tends to be identified) with the being that it represents. This clarifies why for traditional African societies, it is impossible to separate the mask bearer (the human being) and the disguise, that is, the outfit. There is a communion between the human being (the mask bearer) and the supernatural being he represents. The African mask confers a spiritual force whose power depends on what it represents in the eyes of the community. As a result, among the Gurunsi people of Burkina Faso, during or outside their performance on the stage, zoomorphic masks (buffalo, wart hog, hare, hyena, crocodile, lion, etc.) adopt the behaviours, attitudes and acts of the animal they represent. Therefore, beyond the sculptured representation of the animal, we may recognize its doings.

Under such conditions, the performance of the "actor", that is, the mask bearer necessarily influences the public, which willingly accepts this role metamorphosis. This results in the metamorphosis of the public itself, which, during the performance of the mask, operates in an ambience different from its habitual one: it is transported into the world beyond, the supernatural world where the mask belongs.

After presenting the different possible meanings of the mask, I shall now explore the nature and function of the African mask, based on the case of the Bobo people of Burkina Faso. The Bobo people are animists, and the mask holds a crucial role in the life and organization of their society. For instance, it is central in each stage of the life of individual beings. Starting from the life of the mask among the Bobo people, I shall study its operation, and then draw a parallel between this and the functioning of literature. I shall conclude that both the mask and literature operate as institutions.

## Nature of the mask

What does the mask represent among the Bobo people? An observation and analysis reveal that a Bobo mask has three dimensions: as a sacred being, a social being and as an art object.

### *The mask is a sacred being*

It may be surprising to some that the mask is referred to as a being and not as an object. The very nature of the mask provides the explanation. It is related to a religious cult, some scholars even maintain that this is religion for the societies harbouring masks. For the Bobo people, the mask cult is related to *Do*, the fourth spiritual power, as previously indicated. As a cult, the mask rests on three pillars, which are the mouth, secret, and mystery. The mouth must know when to silence the secret of the mask to preserve its mystery. This goes back to the myth about the revelation of the mask to human being: to bring the mask back to the village, human being pledged to reproduce the myth at each of its outings. As a result when the mask is to participate in a ritual, it must come from the bush, thus recreating the process whereby man "tamed" it by bringing it to the village. By way of recalling this origin, the Bobo people refer to the mask as *kan fra* (*kan* = bush, *fra* = being, object), that is, "bush being." And to show that this is a being, not an animate object, they also call it *son yeru* (*son* = man, person, *yeru* = soul), or else, "man's soul."

With regard to its origin and nature, the mask is always present during the key events of man's life: birth, death (funerals), celebrations, etc., which are all important socio-cultural events for society. I shall return to this below. It is important to observe the mask, not just during those occasions, but also during the process of its making. Indeed, because of its divine origin, the making of the mask or its outing cannot be performed without the rituals recalling its relations with human beings.

### *The mask is a social being*

The mask plays a crucial role in man's social life and in society as a whole. It is present at man's birth (social, not biological) through the three fundamental stages of his initiation. This initiation comprises symbolic acts involving the mask, and it is part of the individual's socialization process; it contributes to confer him/her a place and function in society.

Beside initiation, the mask is a key component of funerals among the Bobo people. It announces the death of an elderly person; it is present at his/her burial and funerals, following a specific ritual known by everyone.

Finally, the mask is at the heart of village rejoicing ceremonies, namely ritual festivals marking the different moments of social life: beginning of field work, harvest festivals, New Year festivals, etc. For each of these festivals or events, there is a specific mask.

### *The mask is an art object*

Despite its sacred and social dimensions, the mask remains an art object because an aesthetic concern always underlies its making. Indeed, the Bobo people conceive the mask as a standard of beauty; the saying *foro wé son yèro* (“to be beautiful like a mask”) perfectly indicates this.

For this reason, whatever its form, the making of a mask always requires much care, in terms of the choice of colours, and more particularly during its dance. This is so because beyond the particular circumstances requiring the presence of the mask among human beings, aesthetics is the most fundamental criterion for appreciating it: has it been made in compliance with the artistic norms? Does it dance well? Is it beautiful to look at? Among the Bobo people, the answers to these questions help to appreciate the work of those selected to make any given mask.

### **The mask as an institution**

I have already argued that though there are different versions of the mask’s founding myth, it has some fundamental principles: the revelation to human being in the bush, the unveiling of its nature to human being with the condition of observing a ritual, the taming, and man’s return to the village with it. Following from this process and the adoption of the mask by the entire community, it became necessary for the latter to perpetuate the myth through initiation rites and the key moments of human being’s life. This explains why the mask is so central in society, punctuating its life, daily as well as over time. Marking the principal stages of the individual’s socialization process, initiation rites involve three parts:

- Between 7 and 10 years of age, the child learns the secret and mystery of the mask. This revelation comes with a responsibility, and bears important psychological dimensions: the child is made to fight and floor the mask, following which the mask is revealed to him as a “disguised” human being. Following the revelation, the child receives the formal interdiction to reveal it to a woman. The sanction for failing to observe this is death. With this initiation the child completes the first important stage of his life: if a small girl, she starts learning household chores, reserved for women. If a boy, he starts following the men: he takes care of the chicken run and the cattle shed, and he is allowed to follow the masks, thereby enjoying his official status as an adolescent. Concerning the masks, for ten years, the child undertakes various tasks bearing on outing ceremonies: collecting materials for mask making, cleaning dancing spaces, picking firewood for night performances, etc.
- Between 17 and 20 years, the child undergoes the big initiation. This comprises physical, psychological, moral and ethical ordeals, which take place in the bush, the “source” of the mask, as a way of reminding humans of the suprem-

acy of the bush over the village. This ceremony exclusively involves adolescents who complete their status successfully, and who are therefore deemed apt and deserving to move into the second stage. It is the most important ritual for adolescents with regard to the status it confers them: initiates of the same age form an age class (the community itself is made up of various age classes from the village, with equivalents in the surrounding villages). Thus integrated in the community, the individual acquires some rights (the right to marry, to speak in public, to be independent in terms of acquiring materials, etc.). But this comes with duties as well: defending society, respecting the elders, submitting to their authority, etc.

- Two years after the big initiation, the age class moves into the third stage, which involves learning the language of masks. Because the mask is not a being, a human being is strictly forbidden to speak to it publicly in Bobo language. To cope with this, initiates who become adults, men, must be able to communicate with the mask, which, it must be noted, he is responsible for taking care of. The learning consists of mnemonic tests that help the initiate to learn the characteristics of each living thing on earth (animals and plants) through memorizing their foundational words. Along the mnemonic tests, there are physical endurance ones that last seven days. Over this time, the age class of initiates involved is cut off from the village and placed under the authority of its elders.

The importance of the mask in traditional Bobo society reflects in the way it shapes the three principal stages of the individual's life. An element of the individual's socialization and society's organization, the mask affects the individual and collective life of the community. It is the engine, the regulator of community life with respect to the norms and values it embodies and that allow society to identify and know itself, as well as to distinguish itself from others. In short, it allows the community to create an autonomous field. A study of this autonomy helps to relate the mask with literature as an institution, and requires a comparison of the two fields. To do so, I shall first investigate the autonomy of the mask's field. Then, I shall determine the main stages of the lives of literature and the mask. From this, I shall argue that the mask institution is reality.

To understand how the mask may function as an institution, it is helpful to recall that an institution is a set of norms applicable in a given area of activity, and which define a legitimacy expressed through a charter or a code. From this, I now want to see how, in the image of literature, the mask operates as an institution within the social structure; the place it holds in it, and how it relates to other social sets.

An institution may be considered and examined at three levels:

- The organizational modes, that is, the conservation of a group's elements, the integration of these into the production system, and the response to the group's

needs. Each institution therefore represents a specific sector of activities and practices organized in a peculiar manner.

- The individual's socialization is assured through imposing systems and norms, thus allowing for the reproduction of social relations and favouring the educational process. It is a space of ideological domination and subordination: the imposition of norms and systems occurs through a division of the social practices and creating conditions that allow for the possibility and implementation of those practices.
- The ideology obtaining in the institution automatically relates to a power, which is an executive force in the service of the dominant classes operating through a repressive apparatus and an ideological one.

In light of these considerations, it is possible to assert that the mask is an institution, in terms of an autonomous organization, a socialization system, and an ideological apparatus.

As an autonomous organization, a mask society operates on norms addressing society from the grassroots to the summit: a mask society excludes women, from puberty to the end of period of their fecundity. It organizes society in terms of age classes, following a pyramidal system, and regulates the community's life, following an individual and a collective calendar.

As a system of socialization, the mask organizes men in terms of age classes, based on each person's initiation date. The individuals initiated on the same date form an age class. Initiation confers some rights as well as it imposes duties, observation of which is crucial to the life and survival of the group.

Acting as an ideological apparatus, the mask transmits society's values from age class to age class and from generation to generation. None may trample or transgress the rights and duties of a fellow within his age class, or those of each age class without consequences. The importance of the sanctions varies, depending on the seriousness of the fault.

Having thus shown the operation of the mask as an autonomous field within which norms and values are transmitted according to codes known and accepted by all, I now want to compare literature and the mask in terms of artistic creation. To do so I have divided the process of literary creation and the life of masks into six stages, each corresponding to a key moment in the life of a work of art.

- *Stage 1: The author of the artwork.* The point here is to identify the creator, to examine the process of creation. This stage requires a detailed consideration of the mask to better understand its nature and, especially, its creation mode. Because it belongs to the community, which is by nature collective, the creation of the mask is more a collective undertaking than an individual one, unlike the case of literature.

- *Stage 2: Realization of the artwork.* After identifying the creator (the artist), the next stage involves a study of the shaping of the artwork, the manner in which it is realized, the process of its creation by the author.
- *Stage 3: Production of the artwork.* This stage has to do with controlling the artistic creation through the canons and criteria governing its realization. It also concerns that which allows the work to be considered as artistic creation.
- *Stage 4: Dissemination of the artwork.* An artwork cannot exist for its own sake. It must be disseminated for it to be known and appreciated.
- *Stage 5: "Consumption" of the artwork.* Dissemination aims to allow the work of art to circulate. This must eventuate in its "consumption," meaning, its appropriation by the public for which it is destined.
- *Stage 6: Legitimizing the artwork.* This is the last stage, and it concerns recognition, through a number of structures, of the work of art as complying with the creation canons. It also involves an analysis of the operation of those legitimating structures, as well as the conditions of the legitimating process.

Based on the presentation the life stages of a work of art, the comparative table below helps us to assert that the mask operates like the literary institution.

LITERATURE	MASK
<p><b>Stage 1: Author</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• writes based on an individual decision;</li> <li>• chooses the theme and genre freely;</li> <li>• may also write commissioned works.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stage 1: Author</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is anonymous, sometimes collective;</li> <li>• always acts under a collective decision, sometimes under commission;</li> <li>• undergoes rituals before starting work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 2: Manuscript</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concerns the materialization of an idea chosen freely;</li> <li>• the only constraints are moral, ethical;</li> <li>• must observe genre specific rules.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stage 2: Elaboration – realization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• realization done in compliance with collectively adopted, imposed and permanent canons;</li> <li>• artist's freedom is controlled;</li> <li>• work may be collective, involving several artists.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 3: Publishing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• controls and checks conformity with genre specific canons and norms;</li> <li>• makes the finished work available to the public.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stage 3: Ritual sacredness process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• controls and checks conformity with canons, norms and rites;</li> <li>• integrates work into artistic (spectacle) production circuit through preliminary rituals: ritual sacredness process.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stage 4: Dissemination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• makes the work available to the public;</li> <li>• appropriate structures: bookstores, libraries;</li> <li>• work is permanently available, except if out of print.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stage 4: Production of spectacles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• makes the work available to the public;</li> <li>• appropriate structures are conventional events and rituals (death, funerals, celebrations, initiations, etc.);</li> <li>• availability of work is controlled by the rituals pertaining to it.</li> </ul>

---

**LITERATURE**

---

**Stage 5: Reading**

- works circulate freely;
- readers consume freely;
- works are appreciated freely, individually, collectively, and by specialists;
- appreciation canons are multiple and varied;
- work is permanent in essence because it is always available, except when out of print.

**Stage 6: Legitimacy**

- institutional structures: awards, academies, teaching, criticism;
- normative appreciation occurs after creation of the work;
- specialized and individual criticism.

---

**MASK**

---

**Stage 5: Artistic appreciation**

- according to the artistic realization of the mask and its artistic representation during dancing ceremonies;
- individual performance of the mask is appreciated according to canons known by all;
- appreciation is limited in time, depending on the circumstances of the mask's outing ceremony.

**Stage 6: Legitimacy**

- plenitude of the mask reached during performance: public's applause, use of the mask's language to address it;
  - artistic production and criticism are immediate and simultaneous;
  - specialized, collective and individual criticism
  - ritual events require a methodical organization of the production;
  - appreciation canons are known by all and common to masks of same kind;
  - life of a mask is cyclical: masks are renewed in a permanent manner, depending on outing ceremonies;
  - a mask has more to do with idea and concept than the object itself, which may deteriorate and therefore be renewed.
- 

**Conclusion**

Literature is a field of artistic creation operating as an institution whose actors and structures are clearly known. With the sociology of literature, now an established field of literary and sociological studies, it has been possible to show the mechanisms of this operation.

Based on the attainments of this method and my personal experience in the sociological approach to the mask, I have tried to investigate the extent to which the mask could be considered as an institution, just like literature. To do so, first I defined the literary institution, and then I examined the mask through considering its nature and functions among the Bobo people of Burkina Faso. By looking at the place and function of the different actors and structures involved in the life of literature against those participating in the life of the mask, I have been able to establish a similarity between the operation of literature and that of the mask.

In this final stage of my study, I want to re-assert my conviction that beyond the spectacle and rituals involved in its outing ceremonies, the mask is an institution like literature: its actors and structures, including the roles of these, are known. Claude

Lévi-Strauss often said that “like myths, masks cannot be interpreted in and by themselves, like separate objects; each type of mask has its own myths, whose aim is to explain its legendary or supernatural origins.”<sup>6</sup>

Translated by Jill Daughtery

#### Notes

1. “En rupture par rapport aux philosophies idéalistes de l’art, ses trois auteurs saisissent le littéraire comme produit d’une société historique et l’appréhendent à l’intérieur des rapports de classe” (Dubois 1986: 9).
2. “les indices de la légitimité et de la reconnaissance acquise [...], définir le degré de lisibilité et d’autorité détenu par chacun” (Durand 2001: 34).
3. “1° le salon ou la revue supportent l’émergence; 2° la critique apporte la reconnaissance; 3° l’académie engage, par ses prix ou ses cooptations, la consécration; 4° l’école, avec ses programmes et ses manuels, intègre définitivement à l’institution et garantit la conservation” (Dubois 1986: 87).
4. “un *champ* dont les liens avec les éléments sociaux sont organisés et structurés par un certain type de société” (Grassin, original emphasis).
5. The expression “spiritual powers” is to be preferred to “divinities” since the Bobo people are monotheist rather than polytheist (see Sanou 1995).
6. “pas plus que les mythes, les masques ne peuvent s’interpréter en eux-mêmes et par eux-mêmes comme des objets séparés; à chaque type de masque se rattachent des mythes, qui ont pour objet d’expliquer leur origine légendaire ou surnaturel” (Lévi-Strauss 1975: 70).

#### Works cited

- Caillois, Roger. 1978. *Les Jeux et les Hommes. Le masque et le vertige*. Paris: NRF, Gallimard.
- Casanova, Pascale. 1999. *La République mondiale des Lettres*. Paris: Seuil.
- Chanady, Amaryll. [O]. L’institution littéraire et l’exclusion de l’autochtone en Amérique latine. Actes du colloque *Repenser la culture*. <[www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/vol2/chanad-f.html](http://www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/vol2/chanad-f.html)> Accessed: 30.04.2005.
- Dubois, Jacques. 1978. *L’institution de la littérature*. Paris, Bruxelles, Nathan: Labor.
- Durand, Pascal. 2001. *Introduction à la sociologie des champs symboliques. Les champs littéraires africains*. Paris: Karthala.
- Grassin, Jean-Marie .ed. [O]. Institution. *Dictionnaire International des Termes Littéraires / International Dictionary of Literary Terms*. <[www.ditl.info](http://www.ditl.info)> Accessed: 02.05.2005.
- Le Moal, Guy. 1982. *Les Bobo. Nature et fonctions des masques*. Paris: ORSTOM.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1975. *La voie des masques*. Genève: Editions de l’Art Albert Skira.
- Millogo, Louis. 1988. Pour une symbiose des genres artistiques. La sortie des masques chez les Bobo: un art total. *Annales de l’Université de Ouagadougou*. Série A. Sciences humaines et sociales, Numéro spécial. Décembre, 75-88.
- Nao, Oumarou. 1996. Innovation et évolution dans l’iconographie des masques chez les Bobo méridionaux du Burkina Faso. *Annales de l’Université de Ouagadougou*. Série A. Sciences humaines et sociales. VIII: 71-104.
- Sanou, Salaka. 1994. Le spectacle et sa fonction sociale. *Cahiers du Cerleshs* N° 11: 134-147.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995. La fonction sociale du masque chez les Bobo de Tondogosso. *Cahiers du Cerleshs* N° 12: 237-255.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. Le masque entre tradition et modernité chez les Bobo de Tondogosso. *Annales de l’Université de Ouagadougou*. Série A. Sciences humaines et sociales. XIII: 197-211.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003. Rapport de synthèse en vue de l’Habilitation à diriger les recherches. Limoges: Université de Limoges.
- Sawadogo, Raya Benjamin. 1979. Fonction et esthétique des masques mossis de la Haute-Volta. Thèse de doctorat 3<sup>ème</sup> cycle. Université Paris I.