THE AMBIVALENT FIGURES OF FIRE IN BURNING GRASS BY C. EKWENSY: BETWEEN MYTH, IDEOLOGY AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS.

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Résumé :

Dans *Burning Grass* le feu est utilisé comme sujet de composition littéraire en tant que "personage » animateur de l'intrigue. C'est le feu qui marque le mouvement généralisé des pasteurs peuls vers les verts et frais paturages des rives du fleuve Niger, sujet du récit de C.Ekwensy. Investi de sens symbolique, le feu littérarisé, en dehors de ces usages matériels quotidiens, sert à représenter la vie, la réflexion et les émotions comme la passion, la jalousie ou la colère. Enemi ou monstre qui menace la vie humaine, le feu est aussi un ami sans lequel la vie serait impossible. Il y a également un feu culturel qui est produit de croyances culturelles, mythiques et animistes.

Mot clés : symbolisme – ambivalence – feu interne – feu culturel/ littéraire – autoréferentialité – Phoenix – Empédocle.

Abstract:

In *Burning Grass*, fire is used as the subject of literary composition. As such it becomes the character animating the plot of the narrative. It is the kick-off of the general move of herdsmen to greener and fresher herbs on the banks of the Niger river, which is the subject of Ekwensy's narrative. Fire also has a symbolic meaning in addition to its literary functions and material uses: it represents life, the thinking process, emotions and feelings like love, jealousy or anger. Fire is alternatively an enemy or a monster and the friend for human beings whose lives are unconceivable without its uses. We also have a cultural fire which is the product of the cultural, mythical and animist beliefs.

Keywords: symbolism – ambivalence – internal fire – cultural/literary fire – autoreferentiality – Phoenix – Empedocles.

Introduction

Of the four principles of life, fire is, to our mind, the one whose effect and uses are most manifest to humans. The latter experience this igneous principle in its various phenomenological manifestations. The Ancient Greeks considered it as the dominating principle of their cosmogony as it was regarded as more fundamental than water, air and earth. Generally studied from the perspective of pure science or at best from that of psychology or psychiatry, the cultural and social implications of these principles are often disregarded. In the specific case of fire, it has been addressed by social and cultural anthropology.

In the natural philosophy of the Ionians, fire was an autonomous force, an anthropomorphic being, i.e an intimate being endowed with human qualities. Fenelon contended that Fire is "the beginning and the end of everything" while Heraclites had it that "all things originate from fire and in fire do all things meet their end." (in K.Becker, 2016: 19) In language and literature, it is invested with a literary function which takes it beyond the practical uses and references. Societies' beliefs and systems of representation are made of its figures, principles, images and symbols.

Despite this central position of fire in humans' lives, it has not always been given the theoretical attention it deserves particularly in literary theory. This may be a consequence of its pervading presence and familiarity to humans which makes the critical distance necessary for such an intellectual inquiry difficult. When fire is being studied, this is often done at the level of its material principles by scientist who neglect its metaphoric, cultural or imaginative references.[1] Fire's intrinsic ambivalent nature can also explain the difficulty of making a systematic study of such an elusive matter. It is at the same time destructive and regenerative. It implies a series of concrete images (flame, ember, lightning, hearth, heat versus opposite images like darkness, cold, etc) and a plural symbolism whose elements often contradict one another. This chief paradoxical and contradictory symbol deserves an in-depth analysis.

A study of the literary uses of the igneous substance and a theory on its imaginative uses are therefore a challenging task. Through *Burning Grass* by Cyprian Ekwensy, a native from the southern part of Nigeria, we are taken around the viatoric pulsion of a nomadic people, the

[1] The image that we are familiar with is the idea of violence, destruction as we see in novels like Fire Next Time, Heart of Darkness, Fire in Beulah, London is Burning, etc. In Umberto Eco's *Le Nom de la rose*, libraries are burning as the symbol of the destruction of knowledge and innovative ideas. Celine's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* is about villages burning as a way of symbolizing the perverted humanity in war.

Fulanis of northern Nigeria. In this study, we have identified several figures of fire and many other calorigenic themes which we intend to study from the perspective of cultural and anthropological subjectivity. After studying the literary function devoted to fire in the economy of the narrative with a poetics of the flame that runs through the narrative, we shall focus on the figure of the external fire and its practical uses and manifestations, then the internal fire which is at the level of mythology and cosmogony. After investigating this profound duality and ambivalence of the fire, we shall end by an incursion into the cultural fire, that is, fire as viewed and understood by local culture.

The patterns of the fire and the flame will be analyzed at their symbolic level. A symbol is to be understood in its general sense of a signifier (material form of the sign that can be seen, heard, etc) that refers to a signified (mental concept). Referring to symbolism implies going beyond the literal sense of the use of these patterns of fire to a figurative meaning, a process that is the responsibility of the reader and critic as the necessary step to the interpretation of the images of the writer's imagination. Fire is therefore to be understood as a symbolic object with a strong heuristic content. For the sake of concision, we shall not make any distinction between the symbol and the rhetorical devices such as metaphor, allegory, metonymy etc. Symbolism in its very nature carries with it some intrinsic ambivalence. It is therefore pertinent to use its motifs for the analysis of the equally ambivalent figure of the fire. It also implies a series of qualifying adjectives which sometimes contradict one another: bright or luminous, hot/burning, warm, soft or mild, passionate, dry, etc As it can be seen, fire is often given disparate symbolic labels.

The aim of investigating these various figures of fire will be based on the theoretical assets of French philosopher and scientist Gaston Bachelard who is one of the pioneer thinkers to have made a systematic study of this cultural and heuristic legacy in imaginary creations such as poetry, legends and mythologies in his seminal books *La psychanalyse du feu* published in 1949 and *Fragments d'une poétique du feu* in 1988. Although our corpus is fictional and our study concerned mainly with aesthetic categories, we shall not refrain from having recourse to scholarly literature such as philosophy, psychanalysis, mythology, and even chemistry as the assumptions of these literatures often influence writers. This holistic approach conforms with the plural symbolism of fire and the traditional context in which it is used. It has to be understood sometimes as an instrument of an affirmative tradition, i.e asserting the cultural values of a given class but also as a device of a critical tradition. Fire is not only an objective phenomenon, a

manifestation of nature, a tangible reality, but it is also a diegetic reality, a symbol which is the product of the imagination which conveys some meaning that demands to be interpreted. The literary fire is to be mainly understood as a discourse, a being of language and thought.

I. The literary function of fire in the economy of the narrative.

1. Fire as the trigger of the development of the plot

The symbolical investment that fire goes through, in addition to its dialectical and ambiguous figures, elects it as a privileged topic of literary creation. Its paradoxical and contradictory symbolic meanings are the main cause of writers' recourses to it. It is through such topics with a high ambivalent flavor which escape the domains of homogeneity, coherence, logic or positive realism that African literature has progressively been inventing itself and its autonomy by departing form the militant discourse of a literature at the service of politics as was the dominating trend of some literatures in the early 60s when *Burning Grass* was first published. Ambiguities, paradoxes, illogicalities are integrated into artistic systems of creations and help free literary creation from naive "realism". These ambivalent images of the fire which are particularly suited to convey oniric and subjective discourses are in turn conducive to literary imagination. Fire becomes the symbol of the assertion of the autonomy of literature from ideological and political discourses. Its ambivalent symbolism is used as an escape from censorship of political and nationalist discourses. Social or political problems are addressed through the transition of the symbolism of fire. The diegetic fire is no real fire. Between the two there is a gap that art accounts for.

By the choice of such a dialectical or symbolical image, this *coincidentia oppositorum*, the writer has given free rein to his literary imagination or creative liberty. By the use of fire which is given these different figures of ambiguities, contradictory valorisations (Bachelard 1949), illogicalities, paradoxes, symbolism and mythology, the writer has created a specific literary language.

Fire and its connected images and modes has such a pervasive presence in *Burning Grass* that the critic is entitled to conceive of it as one of the main protagonists of the narrative if not the main agent of plot development from a structuralist perception. It is indeed the main animating principle of the plot to which it serves as a starter or a cause. It gives sense to the characters' actions. In the diegesis, it consumes the space, objects and even threaten human beings. In this

particular case, the description of the battle between human beings and this enemy is the driving force of the plot. It is a test to characters's courage when cattle raiders set fire on Sunsaye's camp after harnessing their victims to ropes. In this case, extinguishing fire becomes a valorizing act. But like in any confrontation, fire can become an ally for one side against another one. In this last case, setting fire on the enemy's camp intending to cause them harm becomes an act of heroism in the best promethean tradition of a domesticated fire at the service of human beings. When it is not controlled by human beings, it disturbs the natural order and can become an instrument of intimidation and abuse. It is therefore used to solve contradictions and antagonisms between human communities.

The burning of grass in the region marks a shift of season and signals the move of herdsmen towards the banks of the Niger river. This goes alongside with other activities like hunting parties. The plot is woven around these unending treks through the desert and the different activities linked to these bush fires. Around the central image of fire which can justly be considered as the "macronarrative", other events or subplots can be regarded as peripheral events and the relating of their details as micronarratives" (Ricoeur 2000: 315) Thus the usual literary categories of time, space which have their linguistic signs are conveyed through expressions in connection with fire and its different images or modes. Miles or kilometers and temporal linguistic signs give way here to diurnal or nocturnal significants. People are on the roads "for three nights" (Ekwensy 1962:53), the distance between Dokan Tora and Sunsaye's camp is rendered as "a day and a night" walk (Ekwensy 1962: 21)

The burning of Old Chanka causes its inhabitants to move from the old camp to a new one with a new set of activities. Even when social and political issues are addressed in the narrative, it is through a debate around the topic of fire. The criticism of the colonial policy which was the main focus of many fiction works of the 1960s is addressed here in an original approach with the discussion on the bush fires. The colonial authorities have decreed a law against the local people's habit of brush burning as a protective measure against the destruction of the natural environment. The same authorities, on the other hand, have decided to burn down whole villages or camps as another protective sanitary measure. In fact, to combat the tsetse flies which are main vector of the malaria disease, the colonial authorities have decided to burn the camps infected by the mosquitoes. Fire is therefore used by the colonial authorities as an act of culture and development. It helps fight a hostile nature responsible for diseases. For the local people, grass

burning in dry season is a regulating principle of the traditional way of life. It signals the transition of seasons and a shift to a new set of activities**.** But the lack of communication between these authorities and the local people in a context of colonial policy results in conflicts which could be avoided by improving their relationships and means of communication.

So the important question of the political relations between these two bodies appear as a subtheme of the literary topic of fire. Fire, as mentioned earlier, with its dialectical symbolism comes to the rescue of the literary field in its quest for a relative autonomy from other fields. (P. Casanova 2008, P.Bourdieu 1992) It is used here not only as an object but also a subject of the narrative which borrows its dynamism from its uses, images and manifestations. With the recurrent references to the images of fire, i.e. heat, sun, and other motifs of the "light", we are more than justified to identify a poetics of the flame and the light in the whole narrative. This narrative recaptures the harsh climatic conditions of northern Nigeria and the daily life experiences of the Fulanis. Fire is not only used as a trigger of the development of the plot; it also serves some purely technical literary goals.

2. Fire as a narrative device

Poets and narrators often use the fire images as a technique in their attempt to create the illusion of reality and give some logic to their narratives. A realist narrative contrary to epic narratives and other fantastic tales has some rules of logic and coherence. A character is expected to have an identity, a background, a psychological motive for acting. He/she must grow in a logical way. Readers must know not only his social personality but also his inner motives. One of the literary devices used to reach that goal of "realism" and literary referential credibility in *Burning Grass* is the flame. In front of the flame, in several sequences of the narrative, characters often forget about themselves, their immediate environment while having an intent look into the flame. This look takes them far from their immediate environment and the storyline is forgotten for the moment of that intent look. They become thoughtful and the whole physical scene disappears and gives way to the inner feelings of the characters. This can be referred to as a "poetics of the reverie".[2] The fire is therefeore used by the narrator to reveal the true personalities of the characters which would remain hidden to the reader thus depriving the narrative of some clues in understanding characters' developments. These inner feelings could not be conveyed in a realistic way by another character or by a homodiegetic narrator. The flame which becomes a

[2] In reference to G. Bachelard's posthumous book *The Poetics of Reverie*, Beacon Press, 1960.

narrative device theferore contributes to the realistic turn of the narrative. The realistic turn and credibility of the novel is achieved through this device as the reader is allowed to see the character grow physically, socially and psychologically. This empedoclean fire helps an inward movement of characters and recalls a similar function attributed to the windows, doors and hearths by P.Hamon which are used to start a description of the physical environnement of the story or the inner feelings of the characters. (collectif Littérature et réalité 1982: 155)

The phoenix whose mythic link to the igneous substance and principle Bachelard has established is a powerful literary symbol. For the French scholar, the phoenix is a "being of poetic language", (1988: 77) a being of literay discourse which also rises from its ashes. Writers and poets often recall this figure in an autoreferential/representative analogy of their professional activity. The creative potential of the figure of fire inspires the genius of the writer and the work of art. The web of fire images found in craft word, chemistry or science are often used in allusion to the writers' work which uses these images or terms to describe the process of the material fire, fiction or poetic composition. The ideal literary or poetic world/word is obtained by burning away the gross material language and world. Like any artist who gets the best out of the gross and vulgar, the poet or writer transforms the material world into an ideal one, the vulgar language into an ideal one. The fire images help get the best out of anything by burning away what is evil and gross.

Beyond these literary functions useful for the unfolding of the narrative, its dynamism and the development of the plot, the next move is to focus on the practical and metaphorical uses of the fire.

II. The different uses of the fire

The field of pyrological symbolism as it appears in *Burning Grass* can be divided into two main classes or axes: the axis of the material or phenomenological symbolism and the axis of the internal or calorific symbolism. But we also have intermediary symbols which allow a bridge between the material fire and the internal or calorific one.

1. The material fire

The material fire is a fire that is visible, radiant and external. This external figure is a phenomenological manifestation of fire in its different uses. When fire is used as a substance, it serves humans' purposes. It is used for cooking (Ekwensy 1962: 6, 7, etc.), hunting beasts out of

their hiding places (Ekwensy, 1962: 114), burning away some diseases out of an infected area (Ekwensy 1962: 35) or practicing slash-and-bum farming technique. It is a technique used to help young sweet shoots of grass push out with the early rains to the benefit of the cattle who will happily graze. (Ekwensy 1962: 114)

Lacking the basic modern facilities of electric lighting, members of the Sunsaye family usually sit round a big fire every evening to chat, tell or listen to stories intended for the education of the younger ones. It is no surprise that the terms of hearth or fireplace are synonymous with the notions of family, household, home, etc. It is around the fireplace that the family shows its unity and expresses its sense of solidarity. The fireplace is therefore the symbol of comfort, care, solidarity and love. It is an invitation to rest and relaxation (Ekwensy 1962: 6) After the hard daily chores of the rural life, sitting around the fireplace is a favorite moment of the day. This environment is conducive to light discussions on a variety of topics, chatting before going to bed. (Ekwensy 1962: 39) Diners and night talks occur around big fireplaces or hearths. Having left his family for weeks, Sunsaye feels homesick at the slightest sign that reminds him of the family life. “When last did I sit by the fire like this, eating food cooked by a woman?” (Ekwensy: 80) The rapport of this community to fire and light is rather empedoclean than promethean, that mythic ancestor of technics and technology. They prefer the low heat of wood fire, the natural fire and light to the “aggressive” modern electricity facilities found in the city.

Like alcohol and the cigar whose effect we shall analyze later on, the evening soup around which the family gathers, warms the whole being and the pit of the stomach. This positive effect of the soup shows the convergence of two experiences of the fire: the objective heat and the internal (intimate) one. The external heat takes place inside the body to which it communicates its heat. The casual talks and other entertaining and educative stories often end the days and people doze off while the stillness of the night gradually descends on the camp. Every evening, the family reunites around the fireplace to recount the events of the day. For the Fulanis, ending one’s day around the fire with embers giving way to ashes is a sure sign of happiness. “At night when they gathered round the fire with Shaitu, and Leibe, and Rikku, each telling what they had seen and heard since they parted, the old man knew some of his former happiness.” (Ekwensy, 1962: 117) The moments around the firelight are conducive to dreams and rest as when Sunsaye can’t help dreaming while “staring steadfastly at the fire, his mind for the moment in dreamland.” (Ekwensy 1962: 80) Fire becomes the symbol of comfort, of love, of the loved ones’ warmth.

These moments spent around the firelight are conveyed through a set of words and images of conviviality, a "poetics of the nestle."(Bachelard 1988) In this nomadic society where the Fulanis are usually on the move leaving behind loved ones for an adventurous life in the desert, the fireplace in a family household becomes the cherished image of the sedentary and domestic life that their activitities render impossible. Sitting around the fire place, the whole family recounts their daily experiences. Such a mode of life around fire in the countryside connotes a quiet, relaxed and comfortable life. In this narrative as in other literary works, the themes of intimacy, of cozy warmth are conveyed through such images of the members of the family around the hearth. This picture is a recurrent motif of *Burning Grass*. Resting around the fire is conducive to some ataraxia, a state of profound peace and happiness as evidenced by Sunsaye's happiness when back home relaxing round a blazing log fire with loved ones after dinner.

As is clearly shown in the discussion between Rikku then Sunsaye and Kantuma, the Fulanis prefer natural life in camps and villages to the towns with their unnatural mode of life. (Ekwensy, 86, 105). The country life with human warmth and solidarity is preferred to the artificial city life with its aggressive electrical lightning and behaviours.

This empedoclean image of fire symbolically recalls an original happiness that takes humans back to the maternal womb which is characterized by affection, protection, warmth, etc. The calorific happiness is part of human nature and can be considered as the origin of social life as it appears in the need to be together, take care of one another. Bachelard speaks of a "thermic sympathy" (G.Bachelard 1949). If the light is believed to stay on the surface of things, the intimate heat goes deep into the bodies of human beings. Burial ceremonies are a symbolic representation of eternal rest, a comeback to maternal womb, that source of warmth and security, from which human beings originate. In a nutshell, fire symbolizes family life, home and human comfort. This cultural conception of fire stands for sedentary and domestic life which are the prerequisite for a peaceful society.

Looking into the flame triggers imagination to work as in the Greek mythology of Empedocles. The dream subsequent to the contemplation of fire is the symbolic act of thinkinga and meditating. For Bachelard, this dream in front of the flame is of a different nature from the other dreams. The scenes and acts of mental processes which derive from the fire gazing carry with them a philosophical thought which aims at a better knowledge of the universe and of

oneself in an introspective inquiry. This fusion of firebeholders with the fire has a cosmic resonant. Humans become one with the universe.

Most entertaining events in the context of *Burning Grass* usually take place at night when people are discharged of their daily chores. These happy moments are therefore organized around "a huge camp fire" (Ekwensy: 71) as it is the case with the wedding of Molere and his European bride. (Ekwensy 1965: 71-72) It is during these nocturnal happy celebrations that young boys and girls often date and start their love affairs in the dark corners some meters away from the firelight. Such affairs need some privacy. The narrator refers to these moments as "lovers' nights" (Ekwensy 1962:72) during which lovers chat passionately and hold hands affectionately. Such a scene echoes several myths which link love, wedding ceremonies to rituals of fire burning. (J.Frazer 1930, G.Bachelard 1949: 66)

Such is the mode of existence of the Fulani people who need little to appreciate life. They have an unsophisticated life style. Contrary to the urban mode of life they loath, the Fulanis live in harmony with their natural environment and reject the modern way of life with its modern facilities which alienate their freedom. The traditional wisdom has a proverb that speaks for the choice of their lifestyle: "Allah drives the fly for the tail-less cow." (Ekwensy 1962: 86)

Fire also plays a protective role against cattle thieves, flies and the dangerous beasts that roam the savannah for fresh meat. Rural communities with no electricity facilities fear the night and its darkness for nobody "knows what lurks in it. [Certainly] all evil things." (Ekwensy 1962: 38) Being in charge of the cattle in such a hostile environment, the Fulanis are regularly exposed to "danger from man, beast and nature" (Ekwensy 1962:14) They have therefore developed over a lifetime a natural instinct that makes them feel and sense danger even in the night. When there is no fire lit by men, thunder storms and the natural light of lightning that flashes over the veld help uncover the thieves (Ekwensy 1962: 55) Fire and light in the diegesis disclose negative attitudes or practices that are at night. In the narrative, characters who have things to hide live in places that are hardly lit. The lighning discloses the presence of cattle raiders to Rikku. "Evil things" which are carried out under the cover of the night are disclosed by the light, that mode of the fire. The streets of Kontago where Rikku is held hostage are "very dark" (Ekwensy:110) The whole operation of his liberation is conducted at night, a night of adversity and tragedy.

As part of the material symbolism, fire is sexualized as a male principle and the flame stands for erection. The lightening, fire and sparks belong to that order of male principle. The

narrative is animated by a series of heroic or warlike attitudes and instruments which suggest the virility symbolism. Swords, daggers and horsemen, when added to avenging flames against the enemy establish the link between fire and virility. This is illustrated in the closing chapter where Sunsaye sets out on a perilous adventure to release his son Rikku. Such an image of the fire as violence precedes the calm and peaceful nights around the firelight with its ataraxic rests.

As a principle of life and physical existence, many societies regard fire as the dominating principle of their cosmogony. It is often presented as an autonomous force, an animated or anthropomorphic being. It is also the symbol of the transformation of substances, of eternal metamorphosis, of birth and death.

Fire as a substance is narrated as conveying a purifying and healing principle. Against diseases, flies that pester humans and the cattle, fire is used to protect humans and cows. It is used to separate the positive from the negative. To protect the local people, the colonial authorities have found no other option but to burn the infested camp and build a new camp a distance away from the first one. In jewelry, fire is used to separate precious metal from other non-valuable substances. Revealed religions acknowledge this potential of the fire to burn away what is evil in human beings. In the same way, the bushfire is a typical practice which serves to burn away the dry and dying grass as a condition to allow the new shoots of green grass to grow. This purifying effect of the fire echoes its uses in various other social domains like science, medicine or justice. Medical officers, Bachelard reminds us, fought against impurities, bad air by fires that were often fragrant or perfumed (G.Bachelard 1949: 176). In Justice, the fire ordeal has prevailed in many communities. It is sometimes considered as God's judgement and the culprit must walk across a pyre without being hurt by fire to prove his/her innocence.

The purifying potential of fire which is generally found in most religious hermeneutics has a special resonance for writers. The capacity to turn what is raw, coarse and rough into a polished and subtle substance is of a particular symbolic use for the writer who has to transform a vulgar language into a poetic or artistic one. Art is traditionally conceived of as victory over the disorder and disharmony of the "real" world. Artists use this purifying image of fire in an autoreferential note to suggest an aesthetic refinement of their artistic practice. Fire and light become synonyms with literary practice and creation whose role is to reveal the social deficiencies in an artistic way, to make something beautiful of the vulglar. We have a similar conception in Christianity in which the candle burns eternally to symbolize the presence of the

divinity and keeps the devil (which is the being of the darkness) at bay. To these material conceptions of the fire is coupled an "internal fire."

2. From the internal fire to the internal heat

The image of a calorific or internal fire can be summarized and reduced to three main polarized symbols: the erotic symbolism, the emotional or psychic symbolism and the chromatic one.

Fire, with its complex and dialectical figures, is at the same time subject and object. The heat which is one of its modes is a sign of life in the human body. It is an indicator of vital intensity. There are levels in the intensity of the "intimate fire". While we have hot or highly passionate or immoderate feelings, we also have calm or moderate ones with less spectacular demonstrations of internal feelings. This in no way implies that the body can do without the fire. There is no life below a certain level of body heat. For the purpose of our study, we will be concerned with the phenomenological occurrences of the internal heat which is used to measure or assess human feelings. The internal fire has specific characteristics and meanings.

Indeed fire is not merely the substance that can be reduced to its external manifestations and uses. If literature is usually the domain of imagination, symbolism and imagery, then it is easy to see that such an internal conception of fire is ideally poetic and literary. These imaginary and literary conceptions of fire borrow from established myths and systems of belief to the point of being taken for granted in their meanings. Such a fire can be labelled as cool fire as it does not convey its earlier connotations of physical violence and destructions. It has an existence inside the bodies or sense organs. Ashes contrary to the flame are the symbol of love, solidarity, human warmth. But they sometimes hide bad feelings which continue to simmer despite the apparent peace.

Fire is the metaphoric or symbolic expression of violent and immoderate emotions. More than being the condition of life itself, it is particularly useful in conveying feelings. We have several literary clichés which have become part of the usual and conventional language. Thus Rikku is consumed with the flame of jealousy when Hodio runs away with Fatimeh and loses any interest in life to his parents' exasperation. (C.Ekwensy 1962: 7) As for Sunsaye himself, he promises fire to those who abducted his son. "The boy they have captured is my own son, Rikku, and hear me well, there is already fire in that town." (Ekwensy 2002: 96) In the opening lines of

the novel, Shehu's servant threatens Sunsaye's family with his boss's unending wrath. The internal heat produced by this internal fire stands for the various passions that the person or the body feels. To be passionate is rendered synonymously with several established expressions like to be "all fire and flame", "fired up". The fire image evokes passions like love, hatred, immoderate desire or any intense emotional reactions. These go from jealousy, wrath to disproportionate ambition, cruelty or fiery temper. The victim of such passions is literally internally burnt, consumed by the flames of strong negative feelings. We have a clear case of the projection of a natural phenomenon on the psychic life, an interiorisation of an external phenomenon. In this case, emotional life is explained by the symbolic analogy with the fire. G.Bachelard calls such a process the "lived fire" (le feu vécu) and evokes the man who becomes a "living fire" (G.Bachelard 1988:6-8) This association of psychic life with the external phenomenon of fire is described with a set of words which conveys the level of the passion. From embers, firebrand, smouldering to flames, we have the different steps of the development of a passion. These steps are literary signs foretelling the development of the events in the diegesis.

As an aspect of that analogy of psychic life and natural phenomenon, we have the analogy between fire and love, a recurrent image in literature as it is seen with ancient greek lyric poet Sappho's poetry, Euripides's play Medea, Virgils' Aeneid in which Didon is consumed with love for Aeneas, Racine's Phedre in which the incestuous love of the hero for Hyppolyte is referred to as an "evil flame". (to limit ourwelves to far fetched literature to show that it can be traced to a long and universal tradition). Love is expressed through passion, passion through heat. We speak of the flame of love (G.Bachelard 1988: 51) which reminds us of the greek mythology of Prometheus. According to the French scientist and philosopher's explanation, the greek hero is a strong and virile lover rather than a philosopher. The revenge of the greek gods is the revenge of jealous divinities. (Bachelard 1949:51)

Sexual arousal and its fire implications become clear once it is included into some mythologies or legends. Reality comes to the rescue of imagination, imagery and helps to their decoding. Caresses often kindle the caressed body just like the way fire is produced by a gentle rubbing of two bits of wood or stones. Fire is the result of two bits of wood of different (sexual?) natures. (Bachelard 1949: 59) If the passion of love takes the image of a fire burning in the eyes, it is because fire is the result of an excitation that has sexual allusion. But fire understood as passion can die as suddenly as it came. Rikku who loved Fatimeh is soon not sure to want to live

with her. Fire can sleep or die so can love and passion. It can also burst out in a violent form like passion. All affective gestures of human contact can be interpreted as sexually encoded, as a need to rekindle or bring some fire to the loved one.

Sexual images and metaphors link fire with sexuality, passionate feelings like love and affectivity. In Greek and latin mythologies, the divinity of Love, Eros (Cupid) is often represented carrying a torch in addition to his bow, both instruments being symbols of the love wound. As a consequence, the psychophysiological motivation results from a thermal heating of the body. The body heating process which subsequently ends in sexual intercourse echoes the rhythmic rubbing of bodies through caresses, coitus, courtship dances, etc. Although we have no explicit references to sexual acts in *Burning Grass*, we have allusions to erotic experiences of shared warmth that Bachelard labelled as "novalis complex" which is this "synthesis of the stimuli towards fire which is a consequence of the gentle rubbing, that need for shared warmth."[3] (G.Bachelard 1949. My translation) The French scholar even suggests that sexual intercourse might have inspired science in the technical mechanism of fire production in lighters. J.Frazer's myths and legends back up the poetic dreams of warm caresses that are closely associated to the fire. By some allusions, Fatimeh in *Burning Grass* is a sensual and tantalizing woman. The French word "allumeuse" for English "tease" or "loose woman" conveys this mythic link between fire and sexuality.

All these immoderate feelings equated with fire can "consume" human beings with the symbolic internal flame. In the narrative, fire images abound with natural elements like the sun, heat, thunder, lightning, etc. In the opening paragraphs, when Fatimeh, the slave girl, runs away for safety, she is pursued by a "dark-visaged" man. Such a description is more than physical. The compound adjective has some judgmental description. The next sentence to this description comes to confirm what has been said. The man thus described is "frowning and cursing, brandishing a koboko." (C.Ekwensy 1962: 1) Villains in the narrative are usually labelled with this negative connotation of the word "darkness". When he is upset, Shehu's face darkens. (C.Ekwensy 1962: 106). The analogy of the fire and its modes like the light and heat is not merely mechanical or purely imaginative. Scientifically light and heat can be produced by other sources and not all fires produce these phenomenon. This analogy is therefore to be understood at the levels of the metaphor, mythology and symbolism. As it can be seen, phenomenological fire

[3] « synthèse de l'impulsion vers le feu provoquée par le frottement, le besoin d'une chaleur partagée. » G.Bachelard, 1949.

with its destructive or negative potential is therefore opposed to the internal fire with its psychanalytical symbolism. The internal fire does not burn those who experience its occurences but rather incenses their sense organs.

Death, diseases and feelings like anger, hatred, fear, etc use such combustible expressions. Their opposites of life, happiness, courage, etc are also expressed in this incandescent lexis. When Hodio wants to frighten Shehu with his magic, "the baduhu", he gazes at the villain with an intensity that disarms the latter of his brutal force. The narrator describes Hodio as "gazing with fire into the eyes of Shehu." (Ekwensy 1962: 49-50) As a consequence, "Shehu was weakening" (Ekwensy 1962: 50) and ran away. The same Hodio is shown talking passionately to his father about his future plan. "He talked with real fire …" (Ekwensy 1962: 50) which means he speaks with conviction, passion and force. To talk with no fire would be an unconvincing and lifeless speech. Fire is life and to talk without fire is almost like not talking. Parts of the body like eyes, the mouth, the face and the belly are sites of some internal fire.

Darkness is less a colour in itself than the lack of light. It culturally connotes what is evil, satanic, grim, hopeless, etc. As for its contrary, i.e. light, whose modes are radiance, luminosity, sparkling, it is used to express contradictory values and feelings. If light is associated with positive feelings, darkness is associated with negative ones like sadness, fear, apprehension etc in the narrative. Thus when Rikku is awaken by some strange noise in the cattle park, he expresses his fear that his friend Belmuna with whom he was supposed to watch over the cattle might have been harmed, abducted or killed by the cattle raiders. Such an unhappy possibility is translated into the combustible and chromatic idiom of fire/light and darkness. When "[h]e heard the patter of feet as the [cattle raiders] fled [,] [a] sudden sinking feeling in the stomach darkened his spirit." (Ekwensy 1962: 55) The stomach is the site of emotions and communicates fear and sadness to the mind. The boy blames himself as his carelessness may have caused the worst. The understanding of things is rendered by the word 'enlightenment' whose root is made of the word 'light'. The light is also the symbol of rationality, comprehension, clarification and creative genius. Fire or light are sometimes used as metaphors of spiritual and intellectual achievements and activities. They are therefore associated with illumination and sublimation. Through all these images, fire becomes the symbol of cultural evolution and progress in sciences and arts. Promethean mythology is all about that interpretation of fire as the symbol of creativity, imagination and inspiration.

Death, misfortunes (sickness, blindness, etc) or lack of understanding are metaphorical images of darkness. Jalla boasts that his "father makes darkness for his enemies" (Ekwensy 1962: 49), that he himself gives "darkness to his enemies." (Ekwensy 1962: 66) Although all through the narrative we are never given any clue to decode the exact meaning of this "darkness", the context helps decode it as something gloomy, somber, deadly, fatal, disastrous or catastrophic for the enemy. Hodio, the other son of Mai Sunsaye, also boasts and frightens his enemies with his *baduhu*, that talisman which has the reputation in the savannah lands of being "the Giver of Darkness." (C.Ekwensy 1962: 49) It seems that these expressions are ethnic expressions that are transliterated into English with no further explanation. The recurrent references to this particular word leaves the readers with implicit clues as is evidenced here: "Come into the well that gives darkness to the eyes and confounds the senses. Come into the darkness that weakens the limbs." (C.Ekwensy 1962: 49) The reputation of the Fulanis of being experts of magic ultimately undermines the courage of their enemies.

To give light to a person is not only giving him life but also intelligence. Artistic inspiration is given a literary existence through images of fire and light. There is a religious ring to this conception and the writer becomes some sort of a priest of a cult. The fire motif therefore has an artistic significance. This positive conception of the light as opposed to darkness is ideal to convey the process of artistic production which is, according to some mythic conception, caught between unexplained and sudden inspiration and the vacuum or despair of lack of inspiration. Writers and poets often use this image to evoke their own artistic experience in composing a literary work. This implies refining the usual language, creating a new literary language on the ruins of the ashes of the communicative language.

Contrary to the figure of darkness or lack of light, life is the very manifestation of fire. As seen in the preceding paragraph, he who gives death or any other misfortune gives darkness. On the contrary of that, he who gives life gives light. The French language renders this belief in a more vivid way. The verb "to die" or "pass away" is translated by "s'éteindre". The English terms "late", "deceased" or departed are rendered into French by the word 'Feu' which precedes the name of the departed. Breath and fire stand for life. Jalla's allusions to his father being under the spell of the sokugo charm which makes the latter wander aimlessly meets with the old man's reproach of being rudely handled. "Jalla, what is it you talk about so? D' you refer thus to your

own father who gave you light?" (C.Ekwensy 1962: 25) To "give light" is not only to give life but also comprehension and intelligence.

When a person is happy, this is conveyed through verbs and adjectives that suggest the manifestation of fire/light in parts of the characters'bodies. The narrator describes Fatimeh's first appearance in the Sunsaye's family with synonyms of the light. She has "twinkling eyes", "she radiate[s]" (C.Ekwensy 1962: 101) But she is soon worried by the information Sunsaye gives about Rikku who is held captive by Kontago. The bad reputation of that woman and the fear Fatimeh feels at hearing that news is suggested by the latter's look: "Fatimeh's eyes flashed" (Ekwensy 1962: 101) Her happiness is shown in the "delight in [her] eyes" (C.Ekwensy 1962: 116) but its contrary of unhappiness or concern is equally conveyed through an incandescent and combustive idiom. The eponymic grass burning in the corpus shows an equally ambivalent and symbolic meaning.

3. Burning the grass or the fire of herders and farmers.

As we saw in the first part, grass burning in the dry season is the main indicator of season shift and is responsible for the collective move of the cattle and the herdsmen southwards to the banks of the Niger River. The season shift marks a change in the activities of the nomads. But more than a mere seasonal practice with its practical uses, this moment is a cultural ritual with a symbolic meaning. The burning of the grass presents an ambivalent cultural figure that is worth studying in addition to the narrative function we studied earlier.

Signs and symbols are culturally and contextually encoded. Their most powerful meanings are therefore decoded culturally. In literature they add to that cultural perspective a personal one as symbolism is often in the eye of the beholder. The first thing that can be said about fire is that it is a force that commands respect. The ability to control fire is a powerful sign of culture, knowledge and mastery over the natural forces that haunted past generations.

Fire in culture can represent one thing and its contrary. The literary fire also carries this ambivalent figure. Like in other cultures and their systems of representation, it is at the same time positive and negative, destructive and reconstructive, life and death, good and evil, etc. Both Christianity and Islam seem to acknowledge its potential for destruction and renewal. While it is the living manifestation of the divine presence, the idea of a hell fire is to burn away what is evil in humans. This ambivalent figure is recaptured in *Burning Grass* with the burning down of Old

Chanka as a way of fighting the tsetse flies responsible for the deadly disease of malaria. Fire is a force that bridges opposites. Allusions to the phoenix mythology can be found in the narrative of Ekwensy. In the greek myth, fire is the symbol of eternal metamorphosis of the wolrd and nature. This idea is based on the transformative potential of fire which safeguards the perpetual renewal of the material/natural world. It is this conception which is conveyed by the Fire Bird of the mythology. (G.Bachelard 1988: 64) When the phoenix cacthes fire, it is rebuilt afresh with a new vigor. It thus becomes the symbol of universal resurrection.

Despite the colonial administrative formal prohibition of bush fires, the Fulanis find it hard to comply with this law. This ecological decree goes against their habits and seasonal calendar. If this practice goes against the protection of the natural environment and destroys its resources, for the Fulanis, it is an agrarian technique to renew the grazing field. Like in the greek myth of the phoenix which comes back to life after burning, the Fulanis believe that is the best way to prepare the next season. These illiterate people will keep these agrarian practices that are considered a threat to nature's survival. Their empirical observation and knowledge of nature says a difference thing. The Fulanis value nothing more than their cattle. As a consequence, the dry season must prepare the soil before the first rains by burning the dry grass:

> They burnt the grass so that with the earl rains the young sweet shoots of grass would push out and the cattle would graze with joy. It was their way and although the forest Conservators had told them it was a bad thing for the trees, they would not stop when the season came round. (Ekwensy 1962: 114)

Besides its purifying principle which consists in separating and destroying the material impurities (dead grass, for instance), fire brings homogeneity by separating things that are of opposite natures: death and life, disease and good health, etc. The brush fire burns away bad and dead grass and brings nutrients to the soil. It does so by communicating to the soil a secret virtue and nutrients. It is worth recalling the Antic Roman poet Virgil who is quoted by Bachelard writing thoughts about fire which echo some considerations in *Burning Grass*. They reveal the dialectics of the fire whose uses, which often contradict one another, show clearly the non-scientific, the animist beliefs in the valorizing image of the fire. Fire indeed purifies, and dries the irrelevant or useless humidity, infiltrate underground streams and bring these saps to the roots of young shoots of grass and trees. By drying the soil, it tightens the veins of the earth and thus closes them to big rains that bring about droughts. It also closes these veins to shining rays of the sun. (Virgile in Bachelard: 176) When Old Chanka is burnt by the Bodejo (the white man), fire is used to dry the stagnant water surfaces, combat mosquitoes which carry the disease.

If Prometheus is regarded as the mythic founder of civilization, it is because fire is the symbol of culture. The ability of man to master and control fire is an important step to human autonomy and freedom. Knowing how to use the fire and putting it at the service of people is the beginning of civilization. It symbolizes cultural progress. The Fulanis attitude of ignoring the decree of the colonial administration has a note of a refusal of a cultural domination. This disobeying of the law stands for a cultural assertion.

Fire becomes a symbol of cultural resistance and independence in *Burning Grass*. The same way Prometheus tamed the fire as a starting point in human culture, by using it to transform natural life into culture, in the diegesis, keeping the brushfire tradition echoes this cultural mythical revolution. We can therefore justify the opposition of the Fulanis by the myth. Figuratively, fire represents human revolt, liberation from political and social constraints, spiritual and rational emancipation. (Becker, 2016: 16)

In so doing, the nomads assert their cosmogony and claim for an emancipation of their cultural beliefs. While the colonial administration has a negative view of the fire which destroys the nature, the Fulanis have a valorizing image of it. Ironically, the burning of Old Chanka by the Bodejo confirms their option. Fire destroys the diseases and bad odors. It therefore has a purifying power. It purifies whatever it burns. It destroys bad herbs, diseases and even crimes are punished by the vengeful flames lit by the victims. Sunsaye thus promises fire to his town enemies Shehu and Kontago who have abdutcted his son (Ekwensy : 96). Fire's destructive potential is also used in the domain of literature to punish the unethical behavior of some characters in the narrative. After the tyrannical reign of Sunsaye's opponent, it is poetic justice that Ardo is chased from the village and his camp burnt down. Fire's destructive potential thus serves to redress the wrong and establish a more humane and peaceful society.

At the level of nature, fire is therefore the condition of its renewal and rejuvenation. The ashes produced by the flames serve as a fertilizer to the land. Carbonate and other cow manure are useful for this natural rebirth. Cattle smoldering dung is thrown into the fields to nourish the fire. This animist vision of the fire lead them to regard ashes as excrements of the fire which are used as a manure to the soil. This conception of the positive role played by fire is supported by some scientific assumptions which establish that brush fire is very useful for nature's renewal.[4] In agrarian cultures, slash-and-burn farming has reminiscence of the erotic symbolism of fire. This

[4] https://www.nature.org consulted the 9th June 2017.

farming technique emphasizes the close relation between the "diptych" fire–fecundity. The only organized or natural fertilizer available to this rural community is made up of the ashes produced by the burning of grass. If in mythologies backed up by calorific symbolism, fire is the symbol of the sexual act and its product, i.e the child which is the symbol of fecundity, in the narrative, agricultural product and the renewal of grass are the product of the fire and the earth.

There is also a mythological justification for the grass burning. The conception of the ashes as fertilizer and its uses as cattle feeding have a sexual allusion (G. Bachelard 1949: 64) supported by local mythology. Ashes which are the remains of fire fecundate both herds and farms. The two faces of fire both as a monster and a friend also have a cultural meaning worth adressing.

III. The cultural fire

In addition to its narrative functions, symbolical and practical uses, fire has a cultural existence whose decoding has little need of logical or rational constructions. *Burning Grass* offers several poetic images which can be well understood only within the cultural frame of reference. This cultural background is the objective root of these literary figures of the fire.

Here we shall focus on the metaphoric and animist conception of the fire. Fire is taken as a substance and given human qualities. There seems to be a cool fire and another vibrant, violent fire. If life is not conceived of without a certain amount of fire and heat, death is the lack of fire and its calorific qualities. A body that shows no sign of a certain amount of heat is a dead body. But beyond a certain level, it becomes symptomatic of a diseased body. The body regulates the heat and keeps it at a normal level. When Sunsaye places his hands on his child's neck, it is "warm and throbbing." (Ekwensy 1962:8) While the body is hot, the sick person feels cold to the point of showing signs of a trembling body. Rikku's lips are trembling while his neck is burning. After being bitten by the tsetse fly in Old Chanka, the old man himself ultimately has fever. The description also shows that while his body is hot, he is shivering.

> A vein was throbbing in his head. … He placed a hand against his brow and noticed that it was very hot. The fever had come. … In less than an hour he was on his back, wrapped in the thickest clothes. He was shivering and blubbering in his delirium … (Ekwensy 1962: 44)

We have two types of fires: a pure and an impure one. (G.Bachelard 1949: 178-179) Fever is a sign of the presence of an impurity in the fire of the blood. The normal fire that the blood contains is pure. It is a living fire which is responsible for life. It is the last substance to get

corrupted in human body. (G.Bachelard 1949: 178) Fever with its impure fire and abnormal heat in the blood shows a disfunctioning of the human body.

In the closing lines of the narrative, the old man has a fever which is a consequence of the strenuousness of his wanderings' over the veld. Before his subsequent death, he is "boiling hot and delirious" (C.Ekwensy 1962:118) The same calorific substance which is the evidence of life becomes the indicator of a failure in the functioning of the body system. It is the sign of death. The boiling body can precede a cold body, that is a dead body. The flickering flame that the old man is observing in the earlier paragraph is the symbol of the precarious existence of humans which can be extinguished at any moment.

Breath can be considered as a calorific principle as it has a hot content of air and humidity. In many cosmogonies, life was breathed into the inert body of the mythic original ancestor of human beings. Fire therefore symbolizes death and life. From what precedes, we can contend that there is an impure fire/heat and a good or normal one. The impure heat (pain or disease) can be sweated away but it can also stay in the body and death will subsequently follow. (C.Ekwensy 1962:73)

This ambivalent figure of fire can also be seen in its importance in African philosophies where vital forces can be increased or decreased by one's action or with the help of supernatural forces. Man's death is usually considered as a decrease of his vital forces. The more vital forces you have, the more powerful you are.

Contrary to women who are believed to embody so called female principles, men are believed to embody male ones such as the active elements which are substantiated by the fire: strength, courage, virility etc. The fire burning in a man is supposedly stronger than that burning in a woman. That is why, according to G.Bachelard interpreting myths, women embody a cold and humid nature which is supposed to be responsible for their shy and temperate nature. There are even hints that alcoholic or other hot beverages are means of increasing that internal fire. Fire which belongs to the male principle is characterized by its dryness. It is no wonder that alcohol has an incandescent property and can burn under certain circumstances. The beverage burns the tongue and the throat (G.Bachelard 1949: 145) and communicates its fire to the eyes and other senses. Life being assimilated to fire, the alcohol men drink adds to the natural heat or fire and makes their eyes red. (C.Ekwensy 1962: 89) In the history of literature, spices and alcohol have been used as literary motifs as they are conducive to artistic inspiration. For the poets of the

Romantic and Symbolic Movements, this conception is conveyed through the ideology of "artificial paradises"[5] which takes men out of the unsatisfactory real life.

Another illustration of the animist beliefs is the humanizing of natural phenomena which consists in attributing human qualities to fire for what concerns us in this study. The firelight around which Sunsaye's family sits is described as "dancing" (C.Ekwensy 1962:7). It is the ability of human beings to see beyond the mere flame that is responsible for its ability to make them dream. Rikku describes "the red heart" of the "glowing fire" (C.Ekwensy 1962:15) that is burning down a hut of his father's camp. This image translates the pain he feels to see their camp being burnt down by cattle thieves. In another sequence, the narrator accounts for "tongues of fire" (C.Ekwensy 1962: 92) that can be seen from afar. Elsewhere in the narrative, he refers to a firelight that is "dancing" (Ekwensy : 81) on the patterns of the hides of the cattle. Later on, he accounts for "circles of light" that "danced before [Sunsaye's] eyes".(C.Ekwensy 1962:95) The flickering flame that dances in the wind is premonitory of the end of Sunsaye. His life flame is flickering. Such a fusion of the gazer of the flame with the object of his stare has some hints of the empedoclean mythology[6].

Such an animist conception echoes the scientific postulate that fire is related to quantum physics. Literally every object (human and material objects) emits light in their environment. If we do not see the objects (humans included) glowing, it is because they glow in infra-red. Body temperatures are too low to glow in visible spectrum. When the temperature is taken to a higher degree and the combustion of such objects is clean, these produce a blue light like the one we see when a candle is lit. Fire, it is assumed, is the result of atomic transitions of various elements rather than a substance, of the combustion of organic material and oxygen.[7]

These images of dancing or playing flames (C.Ekwensy 1965: 15) have remained deeply impressed in Sunsaye's memory. The evocation of the memory is important as the real flames are no useful source of poetry. These poetic or literary figures either stem from the beholder's eyes, memory or imagination. In such imaginary realities, flames acquire qualities usually seen with

[5] French poet Charles Baudelaire, in his classic work on opium and wine, often invokes wine, opium and hashich as inspiring poetic muses. Artificial Paradises, Citadel Press Book, translated by Stacy Diamond, 1996 (from *Les paradis artificiels*, 1860)

[6] In the Greek mythology, Emepdocles throws himself into the fire of Etna. Such a death has hints of man's cosmic reconciliation. The choice of this death is backed up by his conviction that we live eternally as we become one with the cosmos.

[7] CH 4 + 2O2 _____ CO2H2O. (in int.search.myway.com what is the chemical formula of fire? 07 April 2017)

human beings: a fire can be asleep, cool and calm. But it can also become angry and tempestuous. All such conceptions which have become a constitutive part of normal speech are only a consequence of beliefs repeated over time.

Conclusion

The recurrent references to fire, calorigenic images, diurnal and nocturnal figures in the narrative has presented the Fulanis' comprehension and uses of fire. Through the literary images and poetic evocations, fire has become a powerful component of literary discourse and can be seen as assuming the status of a quasi-character or protagonist of the narrative. Ekwensy's expert use of this substance and its images has certainly established fire as a literary object or cliché. When most writers chose to address issues of a political tenure, the Nigerian writer chose to address an issue that could be considered as a light one, an ecological issue in a context where urgencies were the nationalist fight. Ekwensy is even more entitled to be considered as a pioneer as he chose the topic of nomadism as early as the 1960s. Such a topic has become the favorite theme of several writers in a context of globalization and massive immigration. It has become common place to speak of migrant writing, literature of exile, literature of immigration etc. Ekwensy has fused the subject of nomadic life with such a sustained narrative technique that we hardly realize that he himself is no Fulani and comes from a region whose natural environment shares so little with the almost desertic region of northern Nigeria.

Several images and figures abound in the narrative. The friendly fire is set against the unfriendly fire. The same fire that warms also burns, cooks, consolates but also destroys people and objects. Fire brings light but also flames. There seems to be a competition between Prometheus and Empedocles. Night fires are given positive values or negative ones whether it is the fire used by the enemy to burn a camp or the night fire around which the family is assembled with its comforting warmth which reminds us of the "Novalisian" intimacy Bachelard often evokes (1949: 65). In the same way, the natural fire can be the reassuring promethean torchlight or the brutal lightening of a thunderbolt that burns houses. There are several figures of the fire which go from the intimate fire of artistic or mystical dreams, the phenomenological fire of agrarian rituals, to the purifying fire and its images of light and warmth. Fire connotes love, intelligence, and other positive feelings but it also serves as the sign of expression for bad feelings and destructive actions. In addition to all these figures, against the simplistic image of

what sciences say about fire, this principle and substance is the very manifestation of a true poetics at the service of human imaginative creativity.

Through fire, we have been presented with a human community, its main social and economic activities but also its belief systems and imaginary conceptions. It is also their language and art that we are familiar with after reading that novel. Once again this novel proves that it is not in science that we get a better access to a community. Literature has this potential of presenting the realities of a community with its human flavor and touches. It is the merit of the writer to have fulfilled this mission of literature: serving as a bridge between human communities. Symbols by their very nature have something universal in their functioning. When to that we have a dialectic and ambivalent substance like fire and its different modes, we have an ideal motif for literature.

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