ART AND FIRE SYMBOLS IN *AYI KWEI ARMAH'S FRAGMENTS:* AN ANALYSIS OF THE PREDICAMENT OF BAAKO

Aurélien Gondo Dro
Université Felix Houphouët Boigny

Abstract:

The relationship between art and the fire symbol in *Fragments* is highlighted through the predicament of Baako. As a romantic artist, Baako appears as an exceptional figure committed to bearing light for salvation purposes. In fact, after his stay in the West, regarded as the world of the gods, the artist comes back home endowed with sapience and knowledge metaphorically perceived as light or fire intended to be shared. However, the light bearer is confronted with the hostility of an unenlightened community whose cavemen's expectations are below the visionary gleam. The artist is constrained to loneliness and relinquishes his vocation.

Keywords: Fire, light, art, symbolism, romanticism, knowledge.

Résumé :

Le rapport entre l'art et le symbolisme du feu dans *Fragments* est mis en relief à travers la situation difficile que traverse le personnage de Baako. En tant qu'artiste romantique, Baako apparaît comme une figure exceptionnelle qui s'engage à apporter la lumière pour le salut. En fait, après son séjour en Occident, considéré comme le monde des dieux, l'artiste revient doté de sapience et de connaissance métaphoriquement perçue comme la lumière ou le feu destiné à être partagé. Cependant, le porteur de lumière est confronté à l'hostilité d'une communauté ignorante dont les attentes de caverne sont en deçà de l'éclat de la vision. L'artiste est contraint à la solitude et abandonne sa vocation.

Mots- clés : Feu, lumière, art, symbolisme, romantisme, connaissance.

Introduction

Aesthetic, and specifically art, has always been a value unique to all human beings and communities. This pivotal, ontological and civilizational phenomenon could be defined, according to *Merriam-Webster*[14], as "The conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects". As for U. Eco," Art is the human way of setting sensible or intelligible matter for aesthetic purposes (my translation)." *(*1965: 230). Art, whose main components are literature, music, sculpture, film, dance, drama, and architecture, is in the final analysis, the expression of feelings and ideas according to aesthetic principles.

Like any complex cultural phenomenon, art is hand in glove with symbols. As a matter of fact, the different forms of artistic expressions, whether plastic, pictorial, visual or written aim all at generating meaning and, therefore, often resort to symbols whose semantic elasticity remains an asset.

In fact, a symbol is not a mere linguistic sign. As Henry Lefebvre puts it, "Symbols are part of the lexicon, but they have something that words, vocabulary, and concepts do not have. They enable philosophical thought to reach, or at least, aim at what slips away: the original and the final, the absolute stemming from the relative, God and the devil (my translation)" (quoted by Mohamed Larbi Bouguerra*, Symbolique et culture de l'eau*, n°5: 64.). Symbols are, therefore, a crossroad of meanings, "a locus" (Mohamed Larbi Bouguerra*, Symbolique et culture de l'eau*, Ibid).

However, among all symbols, those linked with the four elements of the universe, are regarded by Bachelard as 'the hormone of imagination (my translation)" (in G. Durand 1992: 31). More specifically, water, the air, the earth, and above all fire, remain the most meaningful. The last element, fire, which is the focus of our paper, is regarded by Heraclitus as the primal one at the origin of all matters. This could be defined as "the phenomenon of combustion manifested in light, flame, and heat"[15]. However, it would be simplistic to restrict fire to its combustion qualities.

As a matter of fact, an isomorphism may be established between a number of natural phenomena and fire. First of all, fire is isomorphic with light. It is the light or at least stems from

[14] *https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/**art***
[15] *https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/**art***

light. This is the reason why Gilbert Durand states that fire is "an ignited extension of light (my translation)" (1992: 155). As for Novalis, light is simply "the genius of the ignited phenomenon (my translation)." (In G. Durand 1992: 196). Light is, therefore, the source of fire with which it is one.

Fire also refers to knowledge. The ignition phenomenon is in fact a symbol of the intellect. It is consubstantial with knowledge and sapience. It is assimilated to illumination. Gilbert Durant underlines this effect that fire embodies through these words: "the most important stage of intellectualization" while "increasingly taking man away from animal condition (my translation)."(1992: 197.) Hinduism, Buddhism, Yoga, and the Tibetan Tantrism also regard the inner fire as a source of knowledge and illumination. Gilbert Durant therefore aptly asserts that fire is "a mere symbolic spiritual light substitute (my translation)" which could be said to lead humanity to progress. (1992: 196).[16]This is the reason why great artists and seers like Homer and Tiresias, the prophet of Apollo, are said to be blind.

This symbiotic relationship between fire and knowledge subsequently leads to the isomorphism of fire and the celestial. The divine, which is in fact the omniscient par excellence, is manifested luminously. The flames, the ones of the divine as well as those of hell, always refer to a supra-terrestrial reality. This is the reason why The Upanishads refer to God as the "gleam" (G.Durand1992:164) and the ouranian deities are described as luminous and sunny. Fire is therefore the archetype of the transcendent; it is God manifested. Fabre-Tournon Florence stated in this regard, in "Images, lumière et sensations dans la littérature romantique allemande" that "Light fascinates because, linked to the gaze and therefore to thought not to say God, it seems to hold the secret of the alliance of the spiritual and the material, of that hidden unity of the universe (my translation)".[17]

Being isomorphic with light, knowledge and the celestial, make fire a substitute of the word. The Word is, in fact, made of an ignited substance. In the Bible, for instance, fire is associated to the Word of God (Isaiah, VI, 6-7, Exodus III.2, New International Version). In the Saint John Gospel, the word is also linked to the light that "shines in the darkness" (John I, 1-18,

[16] Auguste Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty bearing a torch, The torch of the Olympic games, works of arts making reference to the brand like Séry Bailly's *A moi les tisons survivants* (2016) all share the idea of light as deep knowledge and values underlying the walk to human progress and salvation.
[17] http://www.cairn.info/revue-imaginaire-et-inconscient-2002-1-page7 htm.

New International Version). Likewise, the Upanishad texts associate word to light and fire. It is even the ignited nature of word that accounts for its powerfulness revealed by all the Holy Scriptures. Gilbert Durand has rightly underlined that "The word is constitutive of a certain being following an order of rectitude whose archetype is light. (My translation)" (1992: 176).

Fire is, thus, a multilayered symbol. Its consubstantiality with light, knowledge, the divine, and the word makes it an exceptional meaning generator that enables to convey ideas, values, myths, and ideologies of different kinds. This is the reason why Bachelard states that "Fire is thus a privileged phenomenon that can account for everything (my translation)". (1949: 20). He regards it as one of "the universal principles of explanation". (1949: 20).

Such a fruitful symbol could not escape the judiciousness of artists of various trends namely sculptors, architects, musicians, film-makers, writers, and painters who incorporate it into their work either as a stylized, pictorial, plastic or diegetic element. African writers like Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, and above all, Ayi Kwei Armah have had recourse to it. Regarding Armah, he uses the fire symbol in his novels, mainly in *Fragments*, the book we are interested in here, to describe the difficulties of the artist Baako in liberating a community fascinated by materialism.

How does Armah succeed in using the fire symbol and the inherent light to portray the artist Baako's salvation, bringing out the project of the enslaving of the people?

Through the fire or light symbol (the development above makes them interchangeable), we are going to try and analyse, on the one hand, the convictions of Baako and his light bringing attempt, and on the other hand, the resistance of the crowd to the message conveyed by the artist.

This study is based on theories developed on art and mainly on romanticism. In addition, concepts related to mythocriticism are explored, specifically those elaborated by Gilbert Durand and Gaston Bachelard respectively in *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (1992) and *La psychanalyse du feu* (1949). Moreover, Lucien Goldmann's approach to sociocritism also highlights our development.

I. Onipa Baako : The Attempt of a Romantic Visionary to Bring Light.

Baako appears in *Fragments* as an enlightened character. Holding knowledge out of the reach of the mortals of his community, he feels that he is vested with the power to bring light to his people in dire need of salvation. He is therefore seemingly a visionary in the genuine romantic

tradition. To carry out our in-depth of this character, we need to briefly present the concept of romanticism.

The term romanticism emerged at the end of the 17th century and was coined by the Schlegel. It could be defined as an attitude or intellectual orientation that prevailed in literature, music, architecture, and painting in western countries throughout the 18th and the 19th centuries. Romanticism was, in fact, an expression of revolt against the socio-cultural and political environment of that era dominated by reason promoted by Enlightenment and the bourgeoisie.

The romantic phenomenon was three-dimensional. First, it was libertarian because romanticism rejected all forms of tyranny and conventions. They mainly opposed the rules of classicism governing literary creation.[18] Their motto was, as V. Hugo stated, in *Dictionnaire des literatures de langue française*, "liberty in art, liberty in society (my translation)" (1984:1994). The second main feature was their particular interest in nature. They admired nature which was regarded as spiritual:

> The landscape was, on one hand regarded as an extension of the human personality, capable of sympathy with man's emotional state. On other hand, nature was regarded as a vehicle for spirit just as man; the breath of God fills both man and the earth. ("Unmasking the bourgeoisie: the romantic Era"[19].

Nature was therefore a central theme in romantic literature. The third feature was the interest in the exotic. Dissatisfaction with the current state of the society and the quest for freedom led romantics to look for relief in distant places and time. They resorted to settings and themes related to the Middle Age, folk culture, national and ethnic origin.

The questioning of the social order subsequently led romanticism to praise the self as a free and creative consciousness. They elevated imagination to the status of supreme reality, "The land of fantasy," regarded by Rousseau as "the only area worth inhabiting in this world (my translation)". (*Dictionnaire des literatures de langue française*, 1984:1996). Better still, imagination was seen as "a gateway to transcend experience and spiritual truth" (*Encyclopedia Britannica)*, intended to be shared for salvation purposes, but it could only be accessed by exceptional genius. That visionary hero, able to bridge two worlds, is supposed to be endowed with knowledge and sapience or light. This is the reason why R.K. Raval has stated that light is a "vital constituent of romantic poetry" (2000: 93).

[18] That is to say rationality, imitation of beautiful nature, harmony, balance, determined allegorical repertoire,etc.
[19] https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist255/jkr/romanticism.html.

As a true heir to the romantic tradition, the artist Baako in *Fragments* seems to have a fire burning inside him. For instance, during his stopover in Paris, when he was visiting tourist sites mainly the Champs de Mars, he had a "feeling of inner lightness" (A.K.Armah 1974: 50).This is in fact the consciousness, better still the knowledge of the power of the west and its enslaving potential.

The unveiling of that truth or aletheia akin to light was only made possible by Baako's trip to a seemingly ghost-like world. A number of intimations in *Fragments* confirm this view of the artist as a genius from an alien world developed by romantic poets like Hugo, Baudelaire, Nerval[20], Rimbaud and many others. For instance, before the departure of Baako, Naana reveals that "Nothing was left out before he was taken up into the sky to cross the sea and to go past the untouchable horizon itself."(Armah 1974: 3). She could also imagine Baako: "roaming in unknown, forbidden places, just born there again after a departure, and a death somewhere. He had arrived from beneath the horizon and standing in a large place that was open and filled with many winds, he was lonely. (A.K.Armah 1974: 10)

Baako is represented here as a being that is no more sharing ordinary human features. He seems to have become a spirit living in a strange world, "entombed at a place where the sky meets the earth", to use the expression of Benjamin C. Ray. (quoted by J. Johnson1992: 208).

The idea of a being from an alien world is reinforced by Efua, Baako's mother's confiding in Juana: "He will be coming from over there, or out of the sky, in a plane."(A.K.Armah 1974: 34). Indeed, the artist is perceived as a "sky-dweller"(J. Johnson, 1992: 211) enjoying the status of "an ancestor" or "a god" (J.Johnson1992: 209).

Considered as the world of knowledge, it is described as white, bright, and luminous. There was an "amazing brightness" according to Naana, (A.K.Armah: 11) around everything at the airport and in the new world. The roads Baako could see during his stay in Paris were "radiating" (Armah:50) and the fountains had 'white water" (Armah: 50) and the air at the airport in Paris where Baako stopped was filled "with a surfeit of whiteness" (Armah: 38); the girl at the Lazy Dolphin was wearing a "bright yellow miniskirt" (Armah: 49). Brightness looks like a feature of the realm of the gods. Although the gleam in Armah's symbolism often refers to corruption and death, it could also be "associated with an alien and ghostly world." (J.Johnson,

[20] Nerval, for example, stated : " I could not see without shivering right through these ivory or horny gates that separate us from the invisible world (my translation)" in Jean-Louis Joubert,1988, *La Poésie*, Paris, Armand Colin.

1992:216). Whiteness is, above all, in the romantic view an attribute of the supernatural world. V. Hugo, for example, believed that there is an ideal world that is radiant (J.Joubert 1988:21) while C. Baudelaire put forth that "splendours located beyond the grave (my translation)" could be caught sight of. (J. Joubert, 1988: 21.), hence the art theories presenting inspiration as a gift of the gods, the Muses that can only be invoked by exceptional figures, that is the artist.

This "spiritual light" (G.Durant 1992:196.) from an alien world naturally bestows the artist Baako with a visionary power. For example, while swimming with Juanna, Baako reveals that he "was trying…to get hold of something" (A.K.Armah:122) but "it slipped off again" (Armah: 123). This comes as a surprise to Juanna who cannot see anything at all as she is not part of the world of the artist. Art appears here, as Dylan Thomas has said, as "the movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision" (P. Stoicheff: .3). This is a clear illustration of the theme of "poet seer" cherished by romantics, the "aristocracy of the spirit (my translation)" (J. Joubert, 1988: 31)

Endowed with the light that expands his consciousness[21] and enables him to see his people's "need to be rescued not only from the abuses of those with power but also from the destructive tendencies within them" (J.Johnson, 1992: 211), Baako, like some romantic artists[22], feels vested with the power to enlighten and save his fettered community. He is committed to humankind. He intends to transform the world, as R.K. Raval has said about the romantic movement, through "the radiance of [his] inner light" (2000: 93).

This sense of commitment, inherent to the light bearing condition, is hinted at in *Fragments.* At the airport in Paris, for example, Baako inadvertently comes across an aluminum globe on which he can read: "POINT DE RENCONTRE RENDEZ VOUS POINT" (Armah: 39). He even clearly voices that feeling during his stopover in Paris:

> And within himself what he was aware of was vague: an unpleasant but not at all sharp sensation that everything he had done in about the last half year had been intended as a postponement, a pushing away of things to which he felt necessarily called. (A.K.Armah 1974: 51).

[21] The extent of the knowledge disclosed to Baako brought about a disease called "consciousness expansion effect" (p. 102) and some malaise on his return trip. (p.40). This confirms the theories developed by the romantics, following Plato, about the state of the artist being visited by the light of divine presence.

[22] One outstanding example is the case of the romantic artist Lord Byron, who was involved in the struggle for Italian nationalism and the liberation of Greece from Ottoman rule. Poets like William Wordsworth were supportive of the French revolution.

Baako seems to be possessed by that "ghost of a missionary"(A.K.Armah 1974: 80) his teacher Ocran later noticed.

Bringing light for salvation purposes, as a romantic, Baako understands, complies mainly with two requirements. First of all, the artist feels that refraining from materialism is an essential condition if he wants to succeed in his project. This is the reason why, contrary to Brempong who returned home with a lot of luggage, Baako has only papers, which astonishes the customs officer and the stewardess (on pages 54 and 56). This partakes of the romantic distrust in commodity. Indeed, the proponents of this movement think that the mind or imagination has to be kept away from the heaviness of consumption regarded as a grave for ideals. As R.K. Raval has aptly put it, "Liberty of the self paves the way for the ascendancy of inner light, without which the mind continues to be dominated by the slavery of the senses."(2000: 98).

Once shielded against the thralldom of lust, Baako undertook to cast his inner light on the world intended to be transformed. He did so through books and above all films because, as he told his former master Ocran, "it's a much clearer way of saying things to people here" (p.80), in a society where many people are illiterate. This is all the more true as all the artifacts by Baako deal with critical issues about his society. His script entitled "The Root", for instance, portrays a community enslaved in a violent process in the history by the West (A.K.Armah 1974: 145-146). Colonisation and its disrupting impact are emphasized here.

As for the second script, "The Brand" (Armah: 149-150), it focuses on the exploitation of the African people by their own mimicking elite supposed to be the "brand plucked from the burning" (Armah: 147) but who have become accomplices of colonizers. The resignation and impotency of the victimized masses is highlighted.

The third area of interest of Baako is the fascination of his community by the cargo. Fully aware that diseases are affecting his people mostly materialism and its subsequent dependence and sterility, he tries to investigate the issue through the cargo cult.[23]In that cult, there are two different worlds. "The human being once dead is in this burial considered as having been exported to the other world. A return is expected from his presence there" (A.K.Armah 1974: 157) in the form of blessings intended to improve the material living conditions of those still alive. This cargo worshipping parallels the situation of the "been-to"[24]. "The been-to" is

[23] The cargo cult was practised in The New Guinea between 1870 and 1950.
[24] This refers throughout *Fragments* to people who have been to western countries.

supposed to be dead, but it is: “a beneficial death, since cargo follows his return. Not just cargo, but also importance, power, a radiating influence capable of touching ergo elevating all those who in the first instance have suffered the special bereavement caused by the been-to’s going away”. (A.K.Armah 1974: 157)

The “been-to” is perceived as a “transmission belt for cargo”(A.K.Armah 1974: 157): he is expected to provide his community with commodities, which relieves them of the endeavour of working and producing. Sterile consumption, dependence, and slavery become therefore the only way out.

This deep concerned of the artist with the wellbeing and salvation of his community that emerges from his works is described in religious terms. For example, when the family discusses the right date for the outdoor ceremony of Araba’s baby, Baako calls their attention on the necessity of casting aside material considerations in the ritual, which irritates Efua who let out these words:”we don’t need you to preach at us” (p.88). This religious metaphor is all the more relevant as the artist’s light-bearing effort and commitment to human kind characteristic of romanticism have a kinship with the missions of religions: save humanity through the gift of light that is knowledge, truth and life. These values of light, truth, and life are therefore intertwined and conveyed through the work of art. This is the reason why R.K. Raval has rightly underlined that “distinctive concepts of Romantic philosophy and literature act as displaced or reorganized theology, or assume a secularized form of devotional experience”. (2000: 94)

Besides, Baako’s salvation call irradiates his immediate environment. First, when he gives a lift to one of the women who comes to welcome Brempong at the airport and cannot go back for lack of money, she says: “I thank you very much, Owura. You have saved me.”(Armah: 60) Likewise, Araba whom he assisted providing a taxi and giving his blood at the hospital tells him: “And in hospital you gave me your blood” (Armah: 85). She also adds “The child too. You gave him to me” (Armah: 85). This clearly points to the fact that the artist is not only a savior, but he is also a supporter of the marginalized and the oppressed, in line with the romantic tradition. The light inside already reflects his community.

Besides, the artist’s light bearer vocation presupposes enthusiasm and hope, right in the romantic tradition. Suffice it to mention the scene on the beach between Baako and Juanna. As a matter of fact, as the two friends lie on the beach, Baako seemed absentminded and revealed Juana who was questioning him: “I was trying …..to get hold of something. It was like a growing

happiness, or the beginning of a good understanding which would vanish easily in a moment" (Armah: 122-123). The presence of the divine entity inspiring the artist and which cannot easily be seized brings about genuine excitement. The principle of joy, R.K.Raval has explained in his comment about the romantic poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, is associated with light and the mind possessed by "visionary gleam" sees the whole world of nature as full of joy" (2000, p.96). This is in fact the "sacred passion" (J.Joubert, 1988: 31), the enthusiasm that romantics, following Plato[25], have identified as a sign of the divine presence enabling great work of art.

Clearly, Baako is a true romantic visionary. As a chosen being, he is able to access a world where light, consubstantial to knowledge, better still sapience, abounds. The truth about the enslaving of his community and the destructive forces entombing their dignity was disclosed to him. Fully aware of his light bearing vocation, Baako, like Prometheus, crossed the threshold between the alien world of light constituted by the West and the supernatural world and undertakes to save his people through art, mainly books and films. The foundational values of romanticism are instrumental in carrying out Baako's light bringing initiative: vision, freedom from lust, attachment to truth and life, acceptance of the principle of hope, enthusiasm.

II. The Torment of the fire-bearer

The endeavour of the artist Baako as a fire-bearer has been thwarted. Indeed, the eyes of those who have been for a long in the darkness have been dazzled by the brightness of the light casted by Baako. Like romantics, Baako encountered misunderstandings that are twofold: at the level of the family and then the elite or establishment.

As far as the family is concerned, they regard Baako as a failure. They are not able to understand Baako's refusal to embark on cargo worshipping. The family's grievances are summarized in the conversation that can be heard in the crowd surrounding Baako when he was arrested:

> "It was books, they say".
> "And he was clever in school."
> "A been-to, returned only a year ago. His mother waited a long time, and now this happens to her."
> "He was very quiet."
> "Is it true that he was a graduate?"
> "Yes, and a been-to."
> "We saw him walking to take the bus every morning, so we were not so sure."

[25] This may be one of the reasons why Plato distrusted artists and recommended cautiousness about them in his ideal City.

> "A graduate all right. Hundred percent."
> "Strange, he didn't have a car."
> "They could have at least given him a bungalow." (A.K.Armah 1874: 173)

The book symbolizes here the light intended to illuminate the community but it rather incurs the hostility of those very people whose needs it fails to meet, that is to say car, accommodation and other mere material objects. Baako has become a source of anger and even sorrow to his family, above all his mother who perceives him now as an eagle that refuses to soar (Armah: 174) and, better still, a wall: "The thing that filled my mind suddenly was that you were part of my world, one of my walls" (A.K.Armah 1974: 177). His quest for ideals stands in the way to their happiness.

These communities who prefer their "cooking pot" to "Apollo Belvedere" (G.Plékhanov, 1975: 16) are in fact victims of what Book Adams calls the "economic sensibility" (quoted by Leroi Jones, 1963, p.230). That phenomenon make people, according to Lucien Goldmann, "think the access to all values from the point of view of mediation with a propensity to make money and social prestige absolute values and not simple mediations enabling access to qualitative values" (1964: 47).

Together with the family, the elite felt antagonized. As a matter of fact, the establishment represented in the novel by Asante-Smith, the director of Ghanavision, and Baako have conflicting views about the nation's history and culture. When Baako presents his different scripts that is to say "The Brand" and "The Root" dealing with exploitation and slavery, Asante-Smith is infuriated and responds: "Look, we're a free, independent people. We're engaged in a gigantic task of nation building. We have inherited a glorious culture, and that's what we're here to deal with"(A.K.Armah 1974: 147). He then adds: "I know what the trouble is with you. You're too abstract in your approach to our work. For instance, what you've just said has nothing to do with our people's culture – all this slavery, survival, the brand."(A.K.Armah 1974: 147) The official sees the artist as disconnected with the realities of his country. Baako's bright insights into the life of his community offend the elite's comfortable and self-congratulatory darkness. The artist is in fact seen as a threat to the material interest of the establishment. Asante-Smith behaves here like the type of official the romantic poet Lord Byron calls, according to Stephanie Forward, "intellectual eunuch" and "bungler".[26]

[26] http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-romantics#sthash.yHPPFGAx.dpuf:

The seemingly insurmountable contradiction between Baako and his community, recalls the tense opposition between the romantic and the 18th and 19th western society, results in a break in communication. He realizes the impossibility of bringing light to his people, to illuminate their fettered imagination. He reveals this to Juanna:“ I know what I'm expected to be…It's not what I want to be” .(A.K.Armah 1974: 103). Later on, he confesses to Naana: “I was trying to say things in my mind, to let other people see” (A.K.Armah 1974: 154). The use of the present perfect continuous indicates the stopping of the attempt, which could be analysed at two levels.

First of all, he resigns from Ghanavision and decides to burn his scripts. The narrator describes the scene in these terms:

Taking the script that lay uppermost on the pile, he tore it up and placed the pieces on the fire. The papers curled, turned brown, then became a flame.

> He dropped the stapled sheets whole onto the coals and waited till they were consumed and their charred remains floated up, single bits suspended in the air, drifting downward into the dust of the yard. (A.K.Armah 1974: 145)

The artist's work that embodies the light of his imagination has been burned up. This marks the end of Baako's endeavour. The incineration of the papers rather than throwing them away in a dustbin means entrusting that knowledge, regarded as sacred by romantics but trivialized by his ignorant community, to the “purifying flame (My translation)” (G.Durant, 1992: 196) of the fire.

Then, Baako has to face the fury of his family. Unable to understand his illuminated ideas, his people decide that he is insane. His uncle tells him: “You're sick. You must rest here till we take you to get help.” (A.K.Armah 1974: 169) They later chase him in the streets of the city and catch him in an inhumane way:

> While his wrist were being bound, a man in sandals was called to stand on his fingers so he would not scratch while the knots binding his legs and arms were made tight enough to keep him from breaking loose again. (A.K.Armah 1974: 173)

The capture is a violent one. Baako is being treated as if he were an animal, better still a dangerous madman.

The views of Baako's family about the artist and his activities become apparent through the words uttered by the crowd stoning him in the streets: “Thiiiiief”, “Stay far from him. His

---

the English Foreign Secretary, Viscount Castlereagh, was denounced as an 'intellectual eunuch', a 'bungler'(p.6).

bite will make you also maaaad". (A.K.Armah: 170) As a matter of fact, Baako is supposed to owe to his community whose heavy expectations he cannot meet. This makes him a crook and a useless person like any artist in the capitalistic society, as Leroi Jones has stated[27] (1963: 230). In addition, the abstract nature of his visionary work which cannot live up to the trivial material expectations of darkened minds infuriates his people who regard him as insane.

The attitude of the family and the crowd victimize Baako and it may account for romantics hatred for the masses. The romantic Russian poet Pouchkine, for example, reproaches social masses with being frozen in vice.[28] (G. Plékhanov 1975:9-10) As for V. Hugo, he regards elites and ordinary citizens as "the crowd" (J.Joubert,1977: 31) while P. de Ronsard perceives them as "vicious souls" (J.Joubert,1977: 31) because they are supposed to be deprived of the favour of the Muses and enslaved by their material needs.

The vocation of fire bearing has never been easy. Those who dare steal fire for the good of humanity have to be prepared to face the consequences of their action. From Prometheus to the romantics, fire bearers have always been confronted with adversity: while Prometheus was cast down into Tartarus and returned to the rock for punishment by the eagle, a number of romantic artists have to face the hostility of their community. Suffice it to mention two outstanding examples: Lord Byron was reproached with being "mad, bad and dangerous" and quitted Britain in 1816 while Bysshe Shelley was sent down from Oxford and suspected of madness for advocating atheism and criticising monarchy, according to S. Forward in her essay about romanticism.[29]

The main concern here seems in fact to be imagination. Plato has emphasized the unfathomable nature of this phenomenon. Imagination, a sign of divine presence, according to Plato and later on the romantics, may bring about delirious states that could be a source of trouble. The artist, regarded as an oracle, is thus a controversial character: he is at the same time, in the words of A. Rimbaud, "a seriously ill person, the big criminal, the big cursed - and the supreme Scholar" (J. Joubert, 1977: 22). All the oppressors of artists, and mainly romantics, may be disciples of Plato who recommended, in La République, to expel the artist from the ideal city as we can see in *Fragments.* (Plato, 1981:53)

[27] Leroi Jones remarks that in capitalist societies the artist is put on equal footing with the bohemian and regarded as mere crook and enemy of the community.
[28] Cf Pouchkine's poem ″La foule ″ excerpted in Georges Plékhanov, *L'art et la vie sociale,* trans. Bataul Plékhanov, Paris Editions sociales, Moscou, Editions du Progrès, 1975, p.9-10.
[29] http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-romantics#sthash.yHPPFGAx.dpuf

As a consequence of the pervasive fury, Baako is now withdrawn from social life and confined in an asylum. Like the first generation of romantics who turned in on themselves and praise the individual and his/her genius as a response to the rigidity of the renaissance era and the collateral damage of industrialization, Baako relinquishes expanding his salvation. Juana provides a maxim that applies well here: "adopting a narrower vision every time the full vision threatens danger to the visionary self". (A.K.Armah:31)

Seemingly, Baako has retired into himself. He is in a sphere where loneliness and quietness prevail far from the frenzy going on around him. This is illustrated by the description of Baako's state of mind when he was being chased after: "What succeeded the hearing of those sounds was the clearest daylight, he thought, the neatest sunlight he had ever seen. It was as if there was absolutely nothing, not even air, between him and anyone, any other thing around, and all the distance to the sky was filled with light." (A.K.Armah: 170-171).

This excerpt is a clear indication of Baako's return to the illuminated world he is part of as a romantic artist. He seems to be cut off from the material world and enjoying a supernatural world of beauty where he is at peace and in harmony. Baako is therefore physically confined but spiritually free.

The trend highlighted at this stage of the plot is the one of the first generation of romantics, with poets like William Blake, Wordsworth, Lamartine, etc who refrained from social and political commitment and had no fire bearing concern. They felt an attraction towards suicide and had a pervading feeling of impotency, annoyance, and disgust in front of reality, hence the theme of the "dying poet" by C. H. Millevoye describing failed artists who come to grips with oblivion and madness.

Baako and the romantics' stance is all the more logical as some art theoreticians, mainly G. Plékhanov, have stated that the tendency of art to withdraw from social life "emerges and becomes stronger where there is a hopeless disagreement between artists and the social environment around them (my translation)" (1975: 38). This accounts for the fact that all the aesthetics developed in the West since the 18th century, that is the Nouveau Roman, realism, impressionism, symbolism, cubism, surrealism, etc, were a reaction against the society.

Besides, although he is, deep in his heart, a romantic artist, Baako shows features of the Lucien Goldmann's problematic hero. As a matter of fact, his attempt to promote authentic

values through light ends up in guiltiness. His conversation with Juana in the asylum reveals the bitterness he feels: “You can’t go back anywhere with nothing in your hands. It’s a mistake - not a mistake, an insult” (p. 190), “They are right, I’m crazy” (Armah: 190), “Who needs what’s in a head?”(p.190) Baako’s fate is equated with a symbolic death (K. H. Peterson, 1992: 225). The hero of the light has a pervasive feeling of remorse. This is an illustration of the theory developed in by L. Goldmann who points out that “most of the novels with problematic heroes in the history of literature end up with a conversion where the hero recognizes the pointlessness of his efforts and of his prior quest”. (L.Goldmann 1964: 128-129).

In a nutshell, Baako’s light bearing vocation earns him a great deal of misunderstanding akin to the one encountered by romantics in their commitment to enlighten mankind. He is unable to live up to the expectations of his community and the elite who both seem dazzled by the light illuminating their cavern like lust. Ultimately, Baako gives up his quest and finds solace in a seemingly romantic supernatural world although confined in an asylum.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, the relationship between art and the fire symbol in *Fragments* is enlightened through Baako’s predicament as the story unfolds. Baako appears thus as a genuine light-bearer in the romantic mould. Like romantics who regard the artist as an exceptional figure chosen by the gods, the Muses, to convey a salvation message to mankind, Baako feels a vocation to lead his community out of darkness. Endowed with a “visionary gleam” (R.K.Raval, 2000: 99) that burning fire or light unveiled to him during his stay in the West serving metaphorically as the world of gods where sapience abounds, the artist undertakes to cross the threshold between the two world in order to save his community.

However, Baako’s light bearing endeavour is thwarted by the fiery of the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries. He infuriates on the one hand his family, who is prevented, by the fascination for the cargo cult, from understanding his status and the missions that derive from it, and on the other hand the elite, who feel their entrenched power structure may be jeopardized by the artist’s gleaming ideals. Like many romantics and light bearers, Baako is persecuted by the unenlightened community and constrained to live on the margin of his society, in an asylum, far from his missionary enthusiasm. The artist eventually turns on himself. Light has failed. Nevertheless, this loneliness paradoxically gives the artist the feeling that he is blessed and part of a blissful and spiritual world permeated by light.

The blending of a story with a romantic overtone and the light or fire imagery in an African setting gives a strong emotional and intellectual value to the message conveyed by *Fragments.* First, this reveals the "futility of endeavour for the African intellectual who is attempting to discover a model of progress for his society". (J.Johnson, 1992: 206). It also is an indictment of social and political practices in Africa. But beyond that, Baako's plight emphasizes the need for knowledge, transcendence, and liberty that have to be appropriated by Africans for development purposes.

Bibliography

- Anonymous: ("Unmasking the bourgeoisie: the romantic Era" at https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist255/jkr/romanticism.html, retrieved on December 10th, 2016.
- ARMAH, Ayi Kwei,1974, *Fragments*, 2nd Edition, London, Heinemann, A.W.S.
- BACHELARD, Gaston, 1949,*Psychanalyse du feu*, Paris, Editions Gallimard.
- BOUGUERRA, Mohamed Larbi, *Symbolique et culture de l'eau,* Les rapports de l'Institut Veolia Environnement, N°5, Paris.
- DURAND, Gilbert, 1992, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire,* Paris, Dunod.
- ECO, Umberto, 1965, *L'œuvre ouverte*, Paris, Seuil.
- FABRE-TOURNON, Florence, "Images, lumière et sensations dans la littérature romantique allemande", *Imaginaire et Inconscient*,1/2002,p.7-15, http://www.cairn.info/revue-imaginaire-et-inconscient-2002-1-page7 htm, retrieved on December 18,2016.
- FORWARD, Stephanie, "The Romantics", *British Library*, at http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-romantics#sthash.yHPPFGAx.dpuf, retrieved on December 15, 2016.
- GOLDMANN, Lucien,1964, *Pour une sociologie du roman*, Paris, Gallimard.
- JOHNSON, Joyce, 1992, "The Promethean Factor in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest*?", in Derek Wright (Ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Ayi kwei Armah,* Ghana, Three Continents Press, pp. 204-216.
- JONES, Leroi, 1963, *Blues People : The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed from it,* New York, William Morrow and Company.
- MADELENAT, D., 1984, "Romantisme", in J.P. Beaumarchais, Daniel Couty, Alain Rey (Eds), *Dictionnaire des littératures de langue française*, Paris, Bordas.
- PETERSEN, Kirsten Holst, 1992, "Loss and Frustration:an Analysis of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*", in Derek Wright (Ed.) *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah,* Ghana, Three Continents Press, pp.217-226.

- PLATON, 1981, *La République*, Livre VII, traduit par Bernard Piettre, Fernand Nathan.
- PLEKHANOV, Georges, 1975, *L'art et la vie sociale*, traduit par Batault Plékhanov, Paris, Editions Sociales, Moscou, Editions du Progrès.
- RAVAL, R.K.,Winter 2000, "Light as a Romantic Positive in Wordsworth and Coleridge", *Colleridge Bulletin,* New Series 16, pp.93-101.
- STOICHEFF, Peter, " Relationship between Light and Literature" at http://www.usask.ca/english/fac/stoicheff_peter/w-light_literature.html, retrieved on December 9, 2016.
- The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016, "Romanticism", *Encyclopedia Britannica,* inc *at* https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism, retrieved on December 12,2016.
- The Editors, *Merriam-Webster Dictionaries*, Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, at https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/art retrieved on December 12,2016