Art and the Symbol of Fire in *Fragments by Ayi Kwei Armah:* a Study of Baako's Predicament

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Abstract

The relationship between art and the symbol of fire 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 perçu 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

Aesthetics, or art to be specific, has always been unique for all human beings and all communities. According to *Merriam-Webster*[1], art is defined as "The conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects". U. Eco defines art as being" the human way of setting sensible or intelligible matter for aesthetic purposes [My translation]." *(*1965, p. 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 like hand in glove with symbols. In fact, the different forms of artistic expressions, whether plastic, pictorial, visual or written all aim at generating meaning and, therefore, often resort to symbols whose semantic elasticity remains an asset.

In fact, 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 allow philosophical thought to reach, or at least, capture what slips away: the original and the final, the absolute stemming from the relative, God and the devil [My translation]". (Quoted in Mohamed Larbi Bouguerra*, Symbolique et culture de l'eau*, p.64.). Symbols are, therefore, a crossroad of meanings, "a locus" (Mohamed Larbi Bouguerra, *Symbolique et culture de l'eau*, p. 64).

However, among all symbols, those linked with the four elements of the universe, (water, air, earth, and fire), which G. Bachelard considers to be 'the hormone of imagination [My translation]" (quoted by Gilbert Durand, 1992, p. 31), remain the most meaningful, with a special emphasis on fire. Fire, the focus of our paper, is regarded by Heraclitus as being primordial because it at the origin of all matters. This could be defined as "the phenomenon of combustion manifested in light, flame, and heat"[2]. However, it would be simplistic to restrict fire to its combustion qualities.

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 light. Thus, G. Durand believes that fire is "an ignited extension of light (my translation)" (1992, p.155). Novalis also believes, light is simply "the genius of the ignited phenomenon [my translation]." (Quoted by Gilbert Durand,1992,p. 196). Light is, therefore, the source of fire with which it forms a unity of sort.

Fire also refers to knowledge. In fact, it is a symbol of the intellect, and illumination. One may even say that it is consubstantial to knowledge and sapience. Thus, Gilbert Durant notices that fire marks: "the most important stage of intellectualization" while "increasingly taking human beings 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. G. Durant therefore aptly asserts that fire is "a mere symbolic spiritual light

[1] *https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/**art***
[2] *https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/**art***

substitute [My translation]" which could be said to lead humanity to progress. (1992, p. 196).[3]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 divine. The divine, which is in fact the omniscient par excellence, is manifested luminously. Flames, whether it is of divine kind or from hell-fire, always refer to some supraterrestrial reality. Thus, the Upanishads refer to God as the "gleam" (Gilbert Durand,1992, p. 164) and the ouranian deities are described as luminous and sunny. Fire is therefore the archetype of the transcendent; it is the manifestation of God. F. Fabre-Tournon states 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]".[4]

Being isomorphic with light, knowledge and the divine, make fire a substitute of the word. The Word is, in fact, made of an "ignited" (G. Durand,1992,p.196) 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, 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. G. Durand rightly notes that "The word is constitutive of a certain being following an order of rectitude whose archetype is light [My translation]." (1992, p. 176).

Fire is, thus, a plurisemantic symbol. The consubstantiality of fire with light, knowledge, the divine, and word makes it an exceptional purveyor of meaning necessary for conveying ideas, values, myths, and various ideologies. This is why Bachelard states "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 [My translation]".(1949, 20).

This fruitful symbol could not escape the judiciousness of some artists namely sculptors, architects, musicians, film-makers, writers, and painters, who incorporate it in their works either as a stylized, pictorial, plastic or diegetic element. African writers like Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, and above all, Ayi Kwei Armah use it in their works. Armah uses the fire symbol in his novels, mainly in *Fragments* (1974), to describe the difficulties confronted by the protagonist, Baako in liberating a community from their fascination with material things or possessions.

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

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

Through the fire or light symbol (the development above makes them interchangeable), I will analyse, on one hand, the convictions of Baako and his attempt to enlighten and on the other hand the resistance to the message that the artist conveys.

This study builds upon theories on art and more specifically on romanticism. Besides, this paper will draw from mythocritical concepts particularly those elaborated by G. Durand in *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (1992) and Gaston Bachelard *La psychanalyse du feu* (1949). I will also use Lucien Goldmann's approach to sociocriticism.

1. Onipa Baako: Romantic Visionary's Attempt to Bear Light

In *Fragments,* Baako appears as an enlightened character holding some form of knowledge out of the reach of the members of his community. Also, he is one who feels that he is vested with the power of bringing light to his people in dire need of salvation. Therefore, he is a visionary of sorts in the genuine romantic tradition. Thus, to better understand the depth of this character the concept of romanticism needs to be briefly presented.

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. Romanticism rejected all forms of tyranny and conventions. The romantic writers mainly opposed the rules of classicism governing literary creation.[5] Their motto was, as V. Hugo stated, in *Dictionnaire des littératures de langue française,* "liberty in art, liberty in society [My translation] " (1984, p.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"[6].

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.

[5] This is to say rationality, imitation of beautiful nature, harmony, balance, determined allegorical repertoire, among others.
[6] https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist255/jkr/romanticism.html.

Subsequently, the questioning of the social order leads romantic artists to praise the self as free and creative consciousness. They elevated imagination to the status of supreme reality, "The land of fantasy," (D.Madelenat, 1984, p.1996) regarded by Rousseau as "the only area worth inhabiting in this world [My translation]". (D.Madelenat, 1984, p.1996).Better still, imagination was seen as "a gateway to transcend experience and spiritual truth" ("Romanticism" in *Encyclopedia Britannica),* intended to be shared for salvation purposes, but it could only be accessed by exceptional figures or genius. The visionary hero who bridges up two worlds is also supposed to be endowed with knowledge i.e, light. No wonder why R.K. Raval noted that light is a "vital constituent of romantic poetry" (2000, p.93).

As a true heir to the romantic tradition, the artist Baako in *Fragments* seems to have a fire burning inside him. He is, in fact, consciousness of the power of the west and its enslaving potential.The unveiling of that truth or aletheia, which is akin to light was only made possible by Baako's trip to a seemingly ghostly world. A number of intimations in the novel confirms the view that the artist as a genius from an alien world developed by romantic poets like V. Hugo, C. Baudelaire, Nerval[7], A. Rimbaud and many others. For instance, before the departure of Baako abroad, Naana says 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."(p.3). Also, the old lady imagines 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. (p. 10)

Baako is shown here as someone who no longer shares ordinary human condition. He seems to have become a spirit in a strange world, "entombed at a place where the sky meets the earth", to use the expression of Benjamin C. Ray. (Quoted by Joyce Johnson,1992, p.208). Baako's being like an alien is reinforced by Efua, his mother's conversation with Juana: "He will be coming from over there, or out of the sky, in a plane."(p.34). Here, the artist is seen as a "sky-dweller"(Joyce Johnson, 1992, p.211) who enjoys the status of "an ancestor" or "a god" (Joyce Johnson, 1992, p. 209).

This different world, this knowledge-bound world, is described as being white, bright, and luminous. There is an "amazing brightness", according to Naana (p.11) around everything at the airport and in the new world. The roads Baako sees during his stop-over in Paris are "radiating" (p.50), the fountains have 'white water" (p.50), and the air at the airport is filled "with a surfeit of whiteness" (p.38); the girl at the Lazy Dolphin is wearing a "bright yellow miniskirt" (p.49). Brightness looks like a feature of the realm of the gods. Although gleam in Armah's symbolic imaginary often refers to corruption and death, it may also be "associated with an alien and ghostly world" (Joyce Johnson, 1992, p. 216). Whiteness is above all in the romantic view an attribute of the supernatural world. Victor Hugo, for example, believes that there is an ideal world that is radiant (J. Joubert, 1988, p. 21) while C. Baudelaire thinks that "splendours located behind the grave" could be apprehended (J. Joubert, 1988, p. 21). Hence, art theories having inspiration as a gift of the gods, the Muses that can only be invoked by exceptional figures, like the artists.

This "spiritual light" (Gilbert Durant, 1992, p. 196.) [My translation] from an alien world naturally bestows on the artist Baako the power or strength of a visionary . For

[7] For example, Nerval states: "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.

example, while swimming with Juanna, Baako reveals that he "was trying …to get hold of something" (p.122) but "it slipped off again" (p.123). This came as a surprise to Juanna who cannot see anything at all as she is not part of the world of the artist. According to Dylan Thomas, art appears here as "the movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision" (Peter Stoicheff, p.3). This is a clear illustration of the theme of "poet-seer" cherished by romantics, the "aristocracy of the spirit ". (J. Joubert, 1988,p.31) [my translation].

Endowed with the light illuminating his consciousness[8] and allowing him to sense his people's "need to be rescued not only from the abuses of those with power but also from the destructive tendencies within them" (Joyce Johnson, 1992, p. 211), like some romantic artists[9] Baako appears to be 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*,p.93).

This sense of commitment inherent to the light-bearing condition is hinted at in *Fragments.* In fact, at the airport in Paris, Baako inadvertently comes across an aluminum globe with the following words: "POINT DE RENCONTRE RENDEZVOUS POINT" (p.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. (p.51).

Visibly, Baako is captured by that "ghost of a missionary"(p.80) as his teacher Ocran later notices.

Bringing light for the purpose of salvation Baako understands mainly complies with two requirements. First of all, he feels that refraining from material possessions is an essential condition for the success of his project. This is why, contrary to Brempong who returns home with a lot of luggages, Baako only has loads of papers, which the customs officer and the stewardess find quite surprising(p.54 and 56). This partakes of the romantic distrust of commodity goods. In fact, the romantic writers and thinkers regard material possessions as being detrimental to great ideals and therefore are intent upon saving the mind or imagination from the harm they create.. R.K. Raval aptly puts it as follows: "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, p.98).

Once shielded against the thralldom of lust, Baako casts his inner light on the world intended to be transformed. He achieves this goal by means of books, and above all films, because as he tells his former teacher 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 made by Baako deal with critical issues in his society. For instance, his script entitled "The Root", portrays a community that has been enslaved in history by the West in a violent process (p.145-146) known as colonisation, which undoubtedly has had some

[8] The extent of the knowledge disclosed to Baako cause a condition called "consciousness expansion effect" (p. 102). It also caused him some malaise on return flight (p.40).

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

disrupting impact on the continent. His second script, "The Brand" (149-150), focuses on the exploitation of the African people by their own mimicking elite, the accomplices of colonizers. The powerlessness of the victimized masses is highlighted.

One other area of interest in Baako's story is the fascination of his community by the cargo, loads of possessions. Fully aware that materialism and its attending dependence and sterility are the disease affecting his people, Baako investigates the issue through the cargo cult, which was practised in the New Guinea between 1870 and 1950. According to the believers in this cult, there are two different worlds. In fact, "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" (p.157) in the form of blessings intended to improve the material living conditions of those alive. This cargo worshipping parallels the situation of the "been-to"[10]who are supposed to be dead. However, their condition 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. (p.157)

The "been-to" is considered to be like a "transmission belt for cargo"(p.157); he is expected to provide his community with commodities relieving them of the effort of working. Thus, sterile consumption, dependence, and slavery become the only way out.

The artist's extreme preoccupation with the wellbeing and salvation of his community is described in religious terms. For example, when the family discusses the right date for the outdooring of Araba's baby, Baako calls their attention to not taking into account material considerations during the ceremony. This irritates Efua. She says,"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 humankind, typical of romanticism, have a kinship with the missions religion is said to accomplish, that is, save humanity through light (knowledge), truth and life. These values are therefore intertwined and conveyed through art. This is why R.K. Raval underlines that "distinctive concepts of Romantic philosophy and literature act as displaced or reorganized theology, or assume a secularized form of devotional experience". (2000, p.94).

Besides, Baako's call of salvation irradiates his immediate environment. First, when he gives a lift to one the woman who welcomes Brempong at the airport and yet falls short of money to go back to town, she says: "I thank you very much, Owura. You have saved me."(p.60) Likewise, Araba who he assists by providing a taxi and giving his blood at the hospital tells him: "And in hospital you gave me your blood" (p.85). She also added "The child too. You gave him to me" (p.85). All this points to the fact that the artist is not only a saviour, but also a supporter of the marginalized and the oppressed, which is in line with the romantic tradition. The light inside already reflects his community.

The artist's potential as a light-bearer here evokes enthusiasm and hope. Once again this is reminiscent of the romantic tradition. Suffice it to mention the scene on the beach between Baako and Juanna. In fact, when the two friends are lying on the beach, Baako looks absentminded and reveals Juana who asks him question: " I was trying …..to get hold of

[10] This refers throughout *Fragments* to people who have been to western countries.

something. It was like a growing happiness, or the beginning of a good understanding which would vanish easily in a moment" (p122-123). The fact that an unfathomable divine entity inspires the artist brings about genuine excitement. The principle of joy, according to a comment R. K. Raval makes about the romantic poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge , is associated with light and mind possessed by "visionary gleam" sees the whole world of nature as full of joy" (2000, p.96. This is "sacred passion" (J. Joubert, 1988, p.31) [My translation], the enthusiasm that romantic writers, following Plato[11], identify as a sign of the divine presence making great works of art possible.

Visibly, Baako is a true romantic visionary. As a chosen one, he is able to access a world where light, consubstantial to knowledge, better still sapience, abounds. The truth about the enslavement of his community and the destructive forces entombing their dignity is disclosed to him. Very well aware of his light-bearing mission, Baako, like Prometheus, crosses the threshold of the alien world of light made of the West and the supernatural world, and attempts to save his people with art, books and films, to be specific. The foundational values of romanticism are instrumental for Baako to proceed with his light-bringing initiative in carrying: vision, freedom from lust, attachment to truth and life, acceptance of the principle of hope, enthusiasm.

2. The Torment of the Fire-bearer

The mission of the artist Baako as a fire-bearer has been thwarted. Those who have been for some time in the darkness are dazzled by the brightness of the light Baako irradiates. Like romantic authors, Baako encounters a twofold misunderstanding: the family and the elite or establishment.

Baako's family regard him as a failure because family members are not able to understand his refusal to take part in cargo worshipping. The crowd surrounding Baako when he is arrested shouts and his family's grievances can thus be summarized in the following conversation::

> "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 say him walking to take the bus every morning, so we were not so sure."
> "A graduate all right. Hundred percent."
> "Strange, he didn't have a car."
> "They could have at least given him a bungalow." (p. 173)

The book symbolizes here the light intended to illuminate the community; however, it rather brings upon itself hostility of the people whose needs it cannot meet, that is, providing car, accommodation and other mere material objects. Baako becomes a source of anger and

[11] Maybe, this explains why Plato used to distrust the artist and warned against them in his ideal City.

even sorrow for his family, and all the more so for his mother who perceives him now as an eagle refusing to soar (p.174). He is like a wall: "The thing that filled my mind suddenly was that you were part of my world, one of my walls" (p.177). His quest for ideals stands in the way to their happiness.

The communities that prefer their "cooking pot" to "Apollo Belvedere" (G.Plékhanov, 1975, p.16) are in fact victims of what Book Adams calls "economic sensibility" (Quoted by Leroi Jones, 1963, p.230). This makes 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 values that are qualitative" (1964, p.47).[My translation]

Together with the family, the elite feels antagonized. 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, i.e., "The Brand" and "The Root" dealing with exploitation and slavery, Asante-Smith is infuriated and thus 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"(p.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."(p.147) The official sees the artist as disconnected from the realities of his country. Baako's bright insights into the life of his community offends the elite's comfortable and self-congratulatory darkness. The artist is seen as a threat for 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".[12]

The seemingly insurmountable contradiction between Baako and his community, which 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, that is, illuminating their fettered imagination. He reveals this to Juanna :" I know what I'm expected to be…It's not what I want to be" .(p.103). Later on, he confesses to Naana: "I was trying to say things in my mind, to let other people see" (p.154). The use of the present perfect continuous indicates the halted attempt, which can be analysed at two levels.

First of all, he resigned 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

[12] http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-romantics#sthash.yHPPFGAx.dpuf:
the English Foreign Secretary, Viscount Castlereagh, was denounced as an 'intellectual eunuch', a 'bungler'.

> suspended in the air, drifting downward into the dust of the yard. (p. 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 the ignorant community to the "purifying of the fire" (Gilbert Durant, 1992, p.196).(My translation).

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." (p.169) They later chase after 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. (p.173)

The arrest is violent. Baako is treated like an animal, a dangerous madman.

The views that Baako's family holds about the artist and his activities become apparent with the crowd stoning and shouting at him in the streets: "Thiiiiief", "Stay far from him. His bite will make you also maaaad". (p.170) Baako is supposed to owe to his community whose heavy expectations he could not meet. This makes him a crook and a useless person like any artist in the capitalistic society as Leroi Jones has stated[13]. In addition, the abstract nature of his visionary work which cannot live up to the trivial material expectations of darkened minds infuriates Baako's people who regard him as insane.

The attitude of the family and the crowd towards Baako here may account for romantic writers' disaffection for the masses. V. Hugo regards elites and ordinary citizens as "the crowd" (J.Joubert,1977,p.31) Ronsard sees the social masses as "vicious souls" (J.Joubert,1977,p.31) because they do not have the favour of the Muses and because they are enslaved by their material needs. The romantic Russian poet A. Pushkin, vividly voices the grievances of romantic artists against the social social masses in his poem entitled "The Poet and the Crowd":

> Go away! The poet blameless
> Doesn't see in you a bit of sense!
> Proceed to stone in sins, shameless
> His lyre could not save your race!
> Like coffins, you're by soul rejected.
> For all your foolishness and hatred
> From ancient times to present days

[13] Leroi Jones explains in *Blues People: the Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed from it,* (p. 230) , that the artist is put on equal footing with the bohemian and regards as mere crook and enemy of the community.

You had the prisons, axes, canes;
Enough for you, oh, slaves demented!
From noisy streets of yours, lamented,
They sweep off trash – the useful deeds! –
But having left their service, wholly,
Altars and sacrifices, holy,
Aren't they your priests who sweep the streets?
Not for the wordy agitation,
Not for the gold or bloody ways,
We have been born for inspiration,
For charming sounds and for prayers.[14]

The masses are reproached with being so frozen in vice that art cannot relieve them.

Fire-bearing as a mission has never been easy. Those who dare attempt to bring fire to 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 is 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. It is worth mentioning two outstanding examples: Lord Byron and Bysshe Shelley, two romantic writers. According to Stephanie Forward, the former is accused of being "mad, bad and dangerous" and subsequently left Britain in 1816 while the latter was sent down from the Oxford city and suspected of madness as a consequence of advocating atheism and criticising monarchy.[15]

Here imagination is of an extreme importance.. Plato emphasizes 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 a seer, is thus a controversial character. In the words of A. Rimbaud, the artist is at the same time, "a seriously sick person, the maximum security criminal, the big cursed and the grand erudite " (J. Joubert, 1977, p.22) [My Translation]. All the oppressors of romantic artists are arguably the disciples of Plato who recommended, in *The Republic*, to excommunicate the artist from the ideal city. (Plato, 1981, p.53) The same is true for the artist in *Fragments.*

As a consequence of the pervasive fury of the community, Baako is now withdrawn from social life and confined in an asylum. The first generation romantic authors secluded themselves and praise the individual's genius as a response to the rigid sociocultural norms of the renaissance era and the collateral damage of industrialization. Like them, Baako gives up his project of bringing salvation to the masses. Juana's maxim comes right to point here. She says, "adopting a narrower vision every time the full vision threatens danger to the visionary self". (p.31)

Visibly, Baako withdraws from society and stays to himself. He now lives where loneliness and quietness rule, that is, far from the frenzy around him. Baako's state of mind is illustrative in this regard, chiefly when people are running after him. The scene reads as follows:

[14] http://www.poetryloverspage.com/yevgeny/pushkin/poet_and_crowd.html
[15] See http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-romantics#sthash.yHPPFGAx.dpuf).

> 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" (pp. 170-171).

This excerpt is a clear indication of Baako's return to the illuminated world; this is where he really belongs. He is cut off from the material-bound world and dwells in a supernatural world of beauty where he enjoys peace and in harmony. Though Baako is physically confined, he remains spiritually free.

This stage of the plot highlights the tendency of the first romantics. These are poets like William Blake, Wordsworth, Lamartine, among others, who refrained from social and political commitment and did not bother with the concern of bringing fire/light to those in darkness. They were attracted to suicide and had an overpowering feeling of uselessness, boredom and disaffection vis-a-vis the real world, hence the concept of the "dying poet" developed by Millevoye who finds failed artists to be mired in oblivion and madness.

Baako and the romantics' stance is all the more logical as some theorists like G. Plekhanov who deem the tendency of art to withdraw from social life "emerges and becomes stronger where there is a hopeless disagreement between the artists and their social environment"(1975, p.38) [My translation]. All the aesthetics developed in the West (Nouveau Roman, realism, impressionism, symbolism, cubism, surrealism) since the 18th century is a reaction to society.

Besides, although a romantic artist, Baako looks like Lucien Goldmann's problematic hero. His attempt to promote authentic values through light ends up in guilt. His conversation with Juana in the asylum reveals his bitterness as these lines illustrate: "You can't go back anywhere with nothing in your hands. It's a mistake - not a mistake, an insult. […]They are right, I'm crazy. […]Who needs what's in a head?"(p.190).

Baako's fate is a symbolic death (K. H. Peterson, 1992, p.225). The hero of the light is pervasively remorseful. This is illustrated by the theory of Goldmann. This critic points out that " most of novels with problematic heroes in the history of literature end up being heroes that recognize the uselessness of their efforts and their past conquest" . (L. Goldmann, p.128-129).

In a nutshell, Baako's mission as a light-bearer turns him into someone who is misunderstood. This is what the romantic authors faced in their commitment to humankind. Baako is unable to live up to the expectations of his community and the elite who both seem dazzled by the light irradiated by the artist. Ultimately, Baako gives up his quest and finds solace in a seemingly romantic supernatural but confined world, the 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, p.99) that burning fire or light unveiled to him during his stay in the West serving metaphorically as the world of gods where knowledge 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". (Joyce Johnson, 1992, p. 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.

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