

THE MYTH OF *IYI UNE* AND OBIKE'S CREATIVE INPUTS IN *EKE UNE*

1. INTRODUCTION

When Emmanuel Obike in the preface to his poetic work, *Eke Une* appealed to the planners of Igbo studies to accept his work and most importantly include it as examination text at a level higher than school certificate, little did he know that today his epic poem would attract many a scholar's research interest at the tertiary education level.

Published in 1977¹ by the University Publishing Company, Onitsha, *Eke Une* remains till date the only epic poem in the corpus of *abu ederede Igbo*. It is a poetic work which due, perhaps, to its uniqueness has attracted the attention of a number of scholars whose focus on the work ranges from the desire to probe into the background of its conception as a poem (Nnabuihe, 1990; 1999) to attempts to highlight its taxonomy, its central theme, its myth or give a more plausible interpretation and meaning of the poem (Ugonna, 1982; Okebalama, 1986; Ikwubuzo, 1998; Nnabuihe 1999; 2004(a), 2004(b)).

According to Ugonna (1982), *Eke Une* is not "an original Igbo Ballad" as erroneously described by the author, Emmanuel Obike but "indeed an inspiring epic poem which has contributed immensely to the growth of *abu ederede*. Nnabuihe's (2004 (a) and (b)) later publications reveal though that the error of describing *Eke Une* as 'ballad' was committed by Nsofor and Ogbalu who edited the work and not the author himself who was convinced that it is an Igbo epic, hence the incongruous sub-title of 'Igbo ballad' and 'epic poem' which the work bears on its cover page and in the preface respectively.

Ugonna also asserted that the poem "explores an intricate myth – the symbolic relationship in Igbo mythology between the boa, the rainbow and the river goddess, *momiwota*, and that its central story is the tragic love affair between Ulku, a human hero and Mami, a water goddess who along with her father make an unrealistic demand on Ulku to give his sister, *Ojigogo* to *Eke Une* in exchange for her (Mami). This impossible demand leads to the epic battle in the narrative.

Okebalama's (1986) observation – which we agree with – is that the love affair between Ulku and Mami 'is not all that is contained in the epic'. Even the myth identified by Ugonna is not only the mythical element in

the work. Nnabuihe (1999) examines the motifs in the poem that could qualify *Eke Une* to be classified as both traditional poetry and modern poetry but concludes that it is more appropriate to adjudge the work as a modern Igbo epic which is embellished with traditional motifs. He also comments on the myth of the *Une* and the allegorical elements of the poem.

As if he does not want to leave any aspect of the poem untouched, Nnabuihe in two additional published articles (Nnabuihe, 2004 (a); 2004 (b)) casts further critical glance at *Eke Une*, examining the poet's language use and portrayal of the hero attributes in some of the characters found in the epic poem.

Ikwubuzo's (1998) study on myth in Written Igbo Literature identified the myth in *Eke Une*. *Eke Une* has indeed attracted a wide range of interest and will no doubt continue to engage the attention of scholars who would like to analyze the work from other perspectives. This present paper takes a further look at the poem with the aim of appraising the poet's exploitation of his local myth in his creative work, and how through his creative inputs he has gone beyond the ambit of his traditional background – his traditional myth – to create a “new myth” and even explore a number of themes to address some issues that are features of contemporary society.

The paper presents the traditional base of the work, that is, the myth itself, and how this myth provides thematic source material for the poet. It proceeds to appraise the poet's creative inputs from which we have identified some of the themes of the poem discussed here.

2. The Myth Of *Iyi Une* & Obike's Creative Inputs In *Eke Une*

The reptile, Crocodile, is a deity in Isieke Ibeku² to whom the origin, the appearance and disappearance of *Iyi Une* (*Ùnè* Lake) is attributed. As the aetiological myth goes orally among the people of Isieke Ibeku, beneath the *Ùnè* Lake inhabits a deity, personified by a crocodile, which in their local dialect is called an *Qbammiri*. It is this creature that ‘vomits’ the water when it emerges from its burrow, *onuoba*, and swallows up the same when it is due to retire to its burrow.

As the water is ‘vomited’, its level rises above all the surrounding trees and overflows its bank, spreading to different parts of Isieke villages. And whenever the crocodile returns to its abode, the site of the Lake becomes desiccated following the “swallowing” up of the Lake by the retiring crocodile. The mysterious appearance and disappearance of the water make the people regard the lake as sacred and worship its god. It is

said that many years ago, the forefathers of Isieke Ibeku, in a covenant with the deity, hemmed the Lake in with sacred *Nturuḱpa* trees. The Lake appears and disappears till today. Let us now examine how this local myth is utilized in Obike's poetic work.

3. The Myth of *Iyi Une* as Thematic Source Material for Obike

According to Ikwubuzo (1998:87), "a people's culture colours and shapes their literary creation. There is a correlation between literature and the cultural environment in which it is created and used. A people's mythological tradition is part of the culture that influences their literature." Not only does culture provide the material or background on which society's literature draws, it, according to the Herskovitses (1958:70), sets or defines for the artist "the limit within which he may juxtapose certain themes or call on certain characters to enact stated roles." In *Eke Une*, we notice Obike's incorporation of the element of the appearing and disappearing of the Lake water as related in the oral myth. The deity, *Éké* is portrayed as having 'vomited' the Lake water in the remote past:

Eke na-ehi egwurugwu
 Nke na-agboputakwa daiḿon n'abali,
 Chi ndi ala ma (sic) Isieke,
 O bu gi mere ka mkpekere akpakoro
 Ghaa baghara vughuru
 N'ugwu Ameke.
 Ee, n'afọ tingbam ka i chere onu,
 Osimiri na akpakoro
 Ewee ribido nne, ribido nna,
 Wee ribido Umuahia nke m.

(*Éke* that forms the rainbow
 Which also vomits diamond at night,
 The god of my people Isieke,
 It is you who caused the fossils
 To fill everywhere
 On Ameke hill.
 Yes, long long time ago, you opened (your) mouth,
 Then ocean and fossils
 Submerged mother, submerged father,
 And then submerged my own Umuahia).

In the following excerpt, we notice where the deity retires, carrying along with it the Lake water (indicating the disappearance of the Lake water). This leads to re-emergence of dry land where the birds come to pick up food and hunters set trap:

Ugbu a agụ ịla mba
 Aguola Eke Une na Ada ya Nwaanyi,
 Ịla mba a bu iga ozuzu ike
 Nke ha na-aga kwa afo
 Site n'idaaba n'okukoro a na-akpo
 Onuoba ma o bu isi une
 Onuoba anaghi ata ngwangwa;
 O bukwa site na ya ka
 Eke puru isi n'Une baa
 N'osimiri ozo di n'ime ala,

Eke Une anyara ada ya n'olu
 Wee lara azu azu were odu
 Dakpuo n'onuoba,
 O wee seputa olu ya sahee onu
 Ma lee mmiri Une na-ezeba:
 Kpim, kpim, kpim,
 N'ala afo eke ka ha na-aba.

Ma mgbe Une tasiri
 Onuoba tasikwara,
 E wee hu nkwo nta di otutu
 Ka ha na-erughari n'ebe
 Ahia ndu na-eto,
 Na-achọ iburu awo

Ugbu a ala akoro une,
 N'ebe a ahia ndu di,
 Aghowo ebe ikwa onya;
 Lee na ya a tusara ogho
 Bu ihe ntuta ndu na nkwo nta,
 Wee liekwara ha okupam na eso
 Nke na-eme ka aka ju umu okorobia;

(Now the desire for retirement
 Has been expressed by Eke Ùnè and 'his' daughter;
 This retirement means going for a rest
 Which they proceed on yearly
 By falling into a hole that is called *Ọba's* burrow or the
 source of Ùnè
 The source of Ùnè does not dry up quickly;
 It is also from there that
 Eke is able to enter, through Ùnè
 To another ocean beneath the ground,

....

Eke Ùnè hangs his daughter on its neck
 And with backward movement
 Falls into the Crocodile's burrow with its tail,
 He stretches his neck, opens his mouth
 And behold the Ùnè water flowing:
Kpim, kpim, kpim,
 Down the Eke's belly as they go in

....

But as Ùnè dries up
 And the Crocodile's burrow also dries up,
 Many hawks are seen,
 Hovering over the green plants,
 Trying to catch toads

....

Now the dry land of Ùnè,
 This place that had green leaves,
 Has become a scene for setting traps;
 See, in it cotton are spread
 Which are traps for doves and hawks,
 An iron trap and glue are also spread for them
 Which make the young men's hands to be full of catches).

As can be seen from the above excerpt, the poet recreates the incidence of the disappearance of the lake. The deity is portrayed as having swallowed up the lake water after retiring into its burrow. After this retraction, there is a period of dryness on the bed of the Lake and green grass sprout on it.

According to the myth, it is believed that whenever the Lake re-surfaces, it is the deity that vomits it. In the following excerpt, the deity is again portrayed as 'vomiting' the water:

Mgbe anyanwụ na-ada
 N'elu ahihia ndu ahụ
 Eke wee malite igbo agboq"
 "Koho, koho ghoo ghoo!"
 mmiri Une we si ya n'onu na-aputa;
 n'echi ya une agbajue
 wee na-ebugharaikwa ndi no
 n'ugbo ogwe osisi.

(When the sun is setting
 On top of the green leaves
 Eke starts to vomit:
 "Koho koho ghoo ghoo!"
 Une water starts pouring out from his mouth:
 The next day Une gets filled up
 And keeps the people
 In the canoe afloat).

Apart from the animal deity, other elements found in the poem that could be associated with the oral myth are the *Nturukpa* trees, which are very predominant at the site of the lake, and Isieke Ibeku, the locality which commonly features in the poem.

4. The Poet's Creative Inputs

Outside the elements that are incorporated into *Eke Une* from the oral myth, virtually every other conception of the myth – its themes, characterizations, symbolism and narrative technique – is definitely the creation of the poet. This is done to the point that the story Obike narrates in his poem could hardly be identified with the story as related above. To a large extent, he introduces innovations. There is, for instance, the substitution of the deity's original name *Oba* (Crocodile) with *Éké* (Boa). The choice of this character, we think is to make it fit into the activities ascribed to it in the myth.

Following his innovations and new introductions, the following mythical elements are also discernible: the mythical battles involving the deity and his daughter, a hunter, the people of Isieke Ibeku, and a young lad, Ulku; the invincibility of the deities (god and goddess), the hero, the

rainbow and the myth that a river goddess, *mamiwota*, could endow someone with some powers and wealth.

Besides, the hunter's heroic exploit, the activities of the birds and the hunters on the dry bed of the Lake, and the idea of the deity having a daughter, are all the poet's creative additions because these elements are not features of the original tale. Even the dramatization of the creature's downward drift into the ground is the poet's innovation. And lastly but not the least, the incidence of love affair between *Ulku* the human hero, and *Mami*, the water goddess and the daughter of the deity, is also the poet's creation.

Through his creative ingenuity, the poet is able to fashion out a 'new myth', one which is distinct from the short narrative of mythological belief extant in the consciousness of the people of *Isieke Ibeku*. His attempt at a more elaborate construction of the context culminated in the creation of a single extended narrative unparalleled in *Igbo* poetry. The observation made of *Soyinka* by *Irele* (1982: 96) can be aptly applied to *Obike*:

The personal elaboration of elements drawn from tradition into a new pattern of meanings attest to a desire on the writer's part to give originality to his work as well as a more important artistic preoccupation.

With the 'new myth' *Obike* created, he addresses a number of topical issues by exploring a number of themes that can be elicited from the work. Let's examine some of these themes

i. The Themes of Conflict and Reconciliation, and the Invincibility of the Deity

The removal of a diamond that belongs to the deity, *Éké*, by a hunter from *Isieke Ibeku* precipitates a battle between the river deity and the people of *Isieke Ibeku*. As the hunter makes away with the diamond, the *boa* in *Ùnè* notices and pursues him. There is commotion as the *boa* begins to swallow the people. Babies' screaming rends the air and the people plead for leniency. The conflict is shown in the following incident:

Mgbe Eke nke nọ na mmiri
Hụrụ mụtụ mụtụ,
O wee zikpere chụba ya.
I gebe ntị,
Kata kata na-ada.

I lebe anya.
 I hụ ka ọ na-elo
 Ndi ime obodo si n'ura teta.
 Ugbu a, akwa
 Na-azu n'elu na-azu n'ala si:
 "Eke na-eyi ọkụ daiṃon;
 Ọ bughị anyi; ọ bughị anyi,
 Haa m o! Haa m o!"

(When the boa which is in the Lake
 Notices the movement,
 He then pursues him.
 If you listen,
 Commotion is perceived.
 If you watch,
 You see him swallowing
 The people that wake from sleep.
 Now, the screaming of children
 Fill the air saying:
 "A diamond-laying boa
 We are not the ones; we are not the ones.
 Leave me oh! Leave me oh!")

The elders of the community offer pacifying sacrifice and make a covenant with *Éké Ùnè* urging 'him' to keep off their territory. The community blames and mocks the hunter but takes measures to protect the diamond which is now the source of light and joy to the entire community. But *Éké Ùnè* does not honour the covenant. The hilarity that attends the community's possession of the diamond is short-lived as *Éké* re-launches attack on the people, sending them to their heels. The battle rages on and *Éké Ùnè* defies all repulsive moves by the people of Isieke, and remains irresistible.

Fagged out by the battle, the people make another pacifying sacrifice. But to their surprise, *Éké* devours not only the sacrificial ram but also the presenter as shown in the following excerpt:

Ike mgbu na ọgụ agwula ha;
 Ndi Isieke Ibeku;
 Ha ewee buru ebule n'isi,
 Gaa n'une ichuru eke ahụ
 Aja udo;

Isi wee buo ha.
 Eke seputara isi ojoyo ya
 Ma lee, o kpurula ife ncha;
 Ma ebule ma aka na-enye ebule!

(Tired of wrestling and fighting
 The people of Isieke Ibeku
 Carry a ram on their head
 Proceed to *Unè* to perform to the boa
 A sacrifice of peace;
 They become elated
Éké extends his ugly head
 Behold, he swallows everything:
 Both the ram and the hand that presents the ram!)

Having been completely overwhelmed, the people hastily invite France to offer them military assistance. They are asked to bring their plane to bomb *Éké* but with a promise that their victory over *Éké* is to be reciprocated with a gift of diamond. The decision and action of the people are conveyed in the following report:

Umụ nna m,
 Mgbe ihe a turyu ha n'onu,
 Weere oso kpokue France
 Ha rioro ha ka ha weta ugboelu
 Ka e were bombua eke ahụ
 Ha kpebikwara na ndi French
 Na ndi Isieke ga-eme
 Gbanwere gbanwere:
 "Ugbo tugburu eke na-ehi egwurugwu
 ya rie oriuna daimon!"

(My kinsmen,
 When this overwhelmed them,
 Quickly decided to invite France
 And begged them to bring aircraft
 To bomb the boa
 They also decided that the French
 And the people of Isieke
 Would make an exchange deal:

"The plane that kills the rainbow-causing boa
Let it have the diamond light!")

The bombardments and other measures by the French fighter to suppress *Éké* are met with stiff resistance. *Éké* causes wreckage of two planes to assert his invincibility. But peace is restored only when the last plane returns the stolen diamond to *Éké Ùnè* deity. The fight ends. *Éké* and the people reconcile as the following excerpt indicates:

Udo udo ka o wetara
Bụ ugboelu ikpeazu!
Si n'ime une welite isi lee
Ọkụ daịmọn na-erudata;

....

"Eke nwe ụlọ, sahee ọnụ ụzọ ama gi.
Were ma kwachiekwa,
Kwee anyị ka anyị tuọrọ gi ume!"
Okwu agwu, ọgụ ebie
Eke na mmadụ agbaala orikọ.

(Peace, peace, is what it brought
The last plane!
From *Une*, raise your head and see
The diamond-light coming down;

...

"*Éké* the landlord, open your entrance door
Receive and then shut,
Allow us to breathe!"
It is all over, the war ends)

The clause "allow us to breathe" is an expression of surrender. It highlights the intensity of the conflict and the suspense generated by it as the people fight to suppress the deity, which remains indefatigable and invincible till the end.

In another incident, when the love affair of the sea goddess, Mami, and the human hero, Ulku, comes to an end as a result of some disagreement, Mami and *Éké Ùnè*, her father launch an attack on Ulku and his sister. The attack ushers in another protracted clash, which, like the preceding one, is havoc-ridden and greatly felt by the entire community. All the instruments and agents of war used against the deities

could not subdue them. The clash continues until 'father and daughter' (the deities) make their final retraction into the lake

Nnabuihe (1999) has discussed the symbolism of this war motif in *Éké Ùnè*. He attempts to interpret some of the episodes in this epic as allegories of the events of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. In other words, the nature of the conflict, the kind of weapon used and the military assistance solicited suggest that Obike uses the myth as a metaphor with which he highlights the socio-political and economic conditions in the Nigerian society during the civil war.

We also view the war motif in the incidents highlighted above as the poet's artistic device to demonstrate the myth of invincibility and irresistible power of the deities. The struggle in which the god of *Ùnè* is involved and the inability of the people to subdue it are the poet's dramatization of the belief in the invincibility and irresistible power of the deities.

In the myth of deities across cultures, the mythical figures are usually portrayed as invincible and irresistible. In Greek and Hebrew traditions, the gods or God are/is often given the portrait of invincibility, and man has always failed in his attempt to resist their power.

In Igbo thought also, it is strongly held that nobody can resist the power of the deities which are also believed to be invincible. The depiction of the gods as being engaged in wars is a common motif in some world mythologies. Those of Greeks, Romans, Hebrew, Yoruba among others, are examples. In the wars, the gods either fight with men or fellow gods. The clash of the titans in Greek mythology involves the gods.

We could say that one of the artistic objectives achieved by the poet in the use of the deity motif drawn from Igbo myth is to affirm the universal notion that gods are more powerful than mortals. This awareness can instill in the readers, some fears and make them not to see the Igbo deities as being weak and inept. The poet's attitude in the manner he has utilized this mythical phenomenon is that of restatement of its validity.

ii. *The Theme of Suppression, Appropriation and Foolishness*

The second mythical battle, which involves Eke Une and other animals, also projects a theme of conflict but of a different dimension. Unlike the conflict of the first battle, this appears to be a commentary on human struggles and conflicts that are generated by the drive for survival and acquisition of material things.

The incident highlights on the one hand, the desire of the strong to suppress the weak as manifested in Eke's attack on the deer (Okpo). Eke Une attacks and kills the deer when the former is on hunting exercise:

Ọ hụla anụ mpi agriga
 Ọ bu okpo mpi agadaga
 Ọ bukpọọ ya anya
 Ọ bukpọọ!
 Ọgụ adaa!

...

Chai! Lekwaa eke
 Agwoola Okpo aju
 Kiririm! Piam!
 O setia, ozu adoro

('He' has seen a horned animal
 It is a large-horned deer
 He has blinded it with spit
 He releases blinding spit
 War ensues

...

Chai, see eke
 Has subdued the deer
 Kiririm! Piam!

He stretches (it) it drops dead.) (pp.12 – 13)

On the other hand, the incident highlights the desire of some individuals to appropriate the wealth or property that does not belong to them as manifested in the attempt by the short boa to possess the diamond belonging to Eke Une. Such action or ambition that is shown often leads to tragic end as experienced by the short boa eventually:

Lee ka o si n'odu
 Na-elokota ihe dum
 Ma eke nta ma ihe okpu n'onu

...

Akwa daiwon ahụ

...

Ono n'akpiri eke nta ahụ
 O wee sahee onu ya loo
 N'iwe n'iwe eke nta ahụ
 Na ihe okpu n'onu

(Watch as he begins from the tail
To swallow everything
Both the small boa and what is in its mouth

...

The diamond

...

It is in the throat of the small boa.
He opens his mouth and swallows
In anger, in anger, the small boa
And what it has in its mouth). (p.13)

Also portrayed in this incident is how a foolish interference and interloping can make someone get killed. The squirrel (Osa)'s interference and provocation of Eke, when 'he' was engrossed in a battle to repossess 'his' diamond from 'his' enemy, is a foolish interloping which seems to depict how some people get themselves involved in adjudicating matters without restraints and clear knowledge of the issue at stake or the prevailing circumstance, and end up losing their lives. The account is given in the following excerpt:

Bia lee nwa ọsa na-ebe
Chọ, chọ, chọ, chọkọlọm n'osisi
Ọ hula ihe a na-azọ
Ọ biakwara igba ọtito
Nwa ọsa wee wusa Eke une n'isi
Wee wusa ya n'odu
O wee wughachi n'elu osisi

...

Nwa ọsa abiakwala ọzọ!
Eke eghighasia bewe
Ma nwa ọsa wusara ya n'isi
Ọ takwara ya aru ọzọ
Ya mere Eke Une gburu ya elu
Nke mere ka ọ gbaa sisiriri!

(Come and see a squirrel singing
Chọ, chọ, chọ, chọkọlọm on the tree
It has seen what is being struggled for
It comes for defence
The squirrel darts on Eke's head
Darts also on his tail

And darts back to the tree.

...

The squirrel has come again

Eke un-coils and crows

But the squirrel darts on his head

It bites him again

Eke Une spits venom on it

Which leaves it dead.) (Pp.14-15).

iii. *The Theme of Love and Disaffection*

Love affair between boys and girls, men and women, is a feature of human life. But the attitude is more pronounced among the youths. A love affair between a human hero and a goddess could only be possible in a mythical world where deities and men are shown to be in active interaction.

Obike introduced the incidence of love affair in the myth of *Une Lake*. And using the mythic motif of a human hero, Ulku, in a consummation of love with a goddess, Mami, he (the poet) seems to be reflecting on the love life of youths in the society and its concomitant affection and disaffection, agreement and disagreement. Moments of joy and sadness, and of sharing feelings through physical interactions, are also depicted. Marriage proposal which is often the culmination of such affair and the possibility of ending the relationship on a tragic note, are also highlighted.

Mami, a beautiful river goddess and the daughter of a river deity, Eke Une, falls in love with Ulku, a human being and a handsome teenage schoolboy. At first sight, Mami admires the handsome lad greatly and gives him a gift of a magic silver ring which he receives with thanks. The ring has dos and don'ts but provides the magical resource with which Ulku can approach Mami. The dos and don'ts are embodied in the following instructions: That if Ulku wears the ring to Une water and slaps the cotton tree, the parrots and eagles on it will be hypnotized. Then with a climbing rope and a raffia bag, he will climb to fetch eggs but the young birds are not to be touched. When he climbs down, he is to slap the cotton tree again to wake the birds. He is not to forget that it is only with the eggs that he can reach the river queen, Mami. And when bringing the eggs he is to wear his silver ring and come with titillating melodious tune to wake Mami from sleep. He is to visit at midday, or midnight and keep the ring sacred and secure.

In their next meeting during the occasion of new yam festival in Isieke, Ulku carries out Mami's instructions. Featuring briefly at the scene of the festival, he leaves to collect the eggs from the cotton tree. The next day at midday, he goes to *Une* Lake with the eggs singing melodious ditty. The song attracts Mami who, riding on her father's neck, emerges from the river to meet Ulku. At the end of their interaction, Ulku gives her the eggs with a plea that she has to appear less snaky:

Butukwanu agwo soro
(Be less snaky) (p.23.)

She responds to Ulku's plea with a request that Ulku is to bring her an old sponge of his girl friend:

O riokwara ka o zitere ya
Sapo ochie enyi ya nwaanyi ji asa ahu
Nke ga-eme ka ya adikwala
Agwo agwo, ka o wee meekwa ya
Ka ya gho mmadu ... (lines 632 – 636)

(She also requested him to send her
The old sponge his girl friend uses to bath
Which will make her not to be
Snaky and then transform her
To be a human being)

The love affair deepens after Ulku has presented Mami with the sponge with which she transforms into a human being. They have an intimate physical consummation of love marked by music, kissing, hugging and dancing as reported in the following incident:

Lekwaa ha
Ndi na-anọ na mmiri alu di
Meturutaanu obi ugboro ugboro
Ma tekwaanu egwu onu (lines 699 – 702)

(Look at them
Who consummate marriage in the river
Kiss yourselves a number of times
And have a joyful dance.)

The occasion is rounded off with exchange of gifts. Ulku gives Mami some eggs while she in return gives Ulku a carton of naira.

Following the failure of Ulku, at their third meeting, to bring his lover, Mami, some eggs, disaffection develops. This makes Eke and Mami decide to go for the eggs themselves. In the process, they incur the wrath of the birds which attack and inflict wounds on them. The attack is stopped by the timely intervention of Ulku (lines 775 – 820). The episode precipitates a battle which impact is felt not only by Eke, Mami and Ulku but also by the entire community.

The love affair between Ulku and Mami continues to thrive after this incident until Ulku's formal proposal to marry Mami. Ulku yields as demanded by Mami to be tested by Eke Une in order to determine his fitness (Lines 993 – 1034). Surprised to see Ulku prove his mettle by going through the tests undaunted, Mami then presents the demand that Ulku exchanges her with his sister, Ojiugo. The demand is the final condition on which the possibility of the proposed marriage depends. As would be expected, Ulku rejects the condition and refuses to surrender to Mami the magic ring she had earlier given to him as a token of love. With the disagreement, the love affair comes to a tragic end as the former lover, Mami, threatens to deal with Ulku if he refuses to accede to her demands.

As we mentioned earlier Eke Une and Mami launched attack on Ulku and his sister, Ojiugo. The attack ushers in another protracted clash which like the preceding one is havoc-ridden and greatly felt by the entire community. The clash continues, until father and daughter make their final retraction into the lake without being defeated, and the battle ends.

As we also observed earlier, this mythical incident is a reflection of love affairs among young people and their attendant affection and disaffection including the possibility of the relationship coming to a deadlock and packing up.

iv. The Theme of Pride and Extravagance

Ulku manifests some of the traits of archetypal Igbo hero – the hero's exaggerated sense of his worth. With the carton of naira, the river goddess gives to Ulku, he goes home and begins to celebrate lavishly. That same day, Ulku throws a party and celebrates with pomp and pageantry, displaying his braggadocio. Ulku is showered with praises and cheers. Everybody is exhilarated. The following excerpt captures the mood:

N'ubochi ahụ o siri oriri
Iji zi okomoko ya
Bia lere ka okoro Isieke
Na-etu ya "Opara Ukwu"

...
 Opara oha a bu Ulku
 Bara fuo mmanwu
 Wee puta na-ete egwu
 Bia lere ka o na-awughari
 Na-akpokwa n'ubu
 N'ihhi na nkwa na-emebi ya isi (lines 718 – 728, pp.25 &
 26)

(That day he organized a banquet
 To display his worth
 Come and see, the young men of Isieke
 Acclaim him "Great Son"

...
 Ulku, the community Son
 Went in and emerged in masquerade
 Dancing to music beats,
 Come and see him displaying.
 He is also shrugging his shoulders
 For the music intoxicates him.)

The poet utilizes this incident to expose the materialistic disposition of the wealthy in a materialistic oriented society. Display of wealth through extravagant banquets and exuberant life-style has become a predominant feature of Nigerian society in the recent time. When people 'make it', they go on a spending spree: build expensive houses, organize parties where they commission the houses or take up chieftaincy titles, use the occasion to spray money on people and make promises in wanton profusion. The poet illustrates this habit by the fanfare with which Ulku celebrates his sudden affluence. This exposition is given in the following excerpt:

....
 Na nsotu egwu a
 O kpuru ulo putakwa n'ebube,
 Bia lee ya n'ejiji ohu
 Lee uwe mwuda uhia ya
 Huru iyagba ola-edo n'olu ya
 Ya na okpu ndi gburu agu!
 N'ezie, o yi "o sere ogu n'onugbo"

Ndiyom ukwu
 Ndiyom nta
 Biara na-efe ya akupe n'ihu
 Nke a mere ka o maa aka were
 Ukwu naira iteghete tuoro ha
 Bu ndiyom ndi a,
 Tumadi ndikom ogaranya niile!
 Ha rachara aka dike ya
 Burukwa ya n'ubu, bu Ulku
 Nwa o jee o wetara oha (lines 729-745).

(At the end of the music
 He entered the house and came out glorious
 Come and see him in new attire
 See his flowing crimson robe
 Behold a golden chain on his neck
 With his heroic cap!
 Truly, he is wearing "O sere ogu n'onuugbo"

Big women
 Small women
 Came fanning his face
 This made him take
 Nine bundles of naria and throw to them -
 These women,
 Specially all the rich men!
 They licked his heroic hand
 And lifted him, Ulku, shoulder high
 The fortune bringer son of the community.)

v. *The Theme of Praise and Rejection*

Also reflected on in Obike's narrative are the society's attitudes and reactions in diverse human situations. There is the tendency of identifying with someone when he has made it in terms of material acquisition, and deserting the same person when he gets into trouble or reduced to penury. People generally cluster round a man of substance, an achiever and eulogize him with all kinds of praise epithets when the goings are good;

but when otherwise, they mock, curse and make all sorts of uncomplimentary remarks about the person. This attitude is evident in the treatment meted out to Ulku. When Ulku became wealthy through the gift by the river goddess, girl friends and other, people praised and cheered him as we have shown above. He is branded such names as "Great son" and 'Community son' as well as 'go-getter'. When the same Ulku caused the birds to invade Isieke and make calamitous impact (during the conflict that broke out between him and his lover) the same people who had praised him not only condemned his action but also mocked him. This attitude is highlighted in the following lines:

....
 Ndi Isieke hụrụ wee tie aka n'obi
 Ha kọchakwara ọmụmụ ọjọọ bụ Ulku

(The people of Isieke saw and were grieved
 They also mocked the bad son, Ulku.) (lines 911 – 912)

5. Conclusion

We have in this paper noted that traditional myth is the basic ingredient of Obike's narrative poem in *Eke Une*. But we could say that Obike's attitude in the use of this traditional material is not one of mere observation of the mythological tradition. He does not just lift and incorporate the oral form of the myth into his narrative poem. He, as we observed above, brings in a great deal of his own imagination which results in the extension of the story. Through his presentation of the activity of the reptile in 'vomiting' and 'swallowing' up the Lake water periodically, Obike reinforces the traditional myth in which case he has preserved the mythological tradition in his literary work. And the poet's repetition of this myth in his literary work bespeaks his natural participation in the collective unconsciousness of his people – Isieke Ibeku, thus demonstrating that he is a product of the culture that holds the myth collectively. To the readers, it is a depiction of the elements which are of timeless emotional value and appeal to the people.

Apart from highlighting the mythological base of the epic poem and the poet's creative additions culminating in the extension of the story, this paper also identified and discussed some themes in the poem that could be interpreted as realities of human attitudes in society.

NOTES

1. *Eke Une* as a published work does not bear 1977 as its date of publication but an oral interview granted Mr Nnabūihe by the author, Obike revealed that the poem which was originally titled "The Serpent of the Green Lake" as one of the poems in the poet's *The Trial of Apartheid and Survival Psalms* published in 1973 was later developed and translated into Igbo language with the title *Eke Une* and published in 1977.
2. Isieke Ibeku, where *Iyi Une* is, is a community about 3 kilometres away from Umuahia town.

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