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THE PERFUMED FARMER

(to Mofunanya who dreams dreams)

Ву

EMEKA OKEKE-EZIGBO

His forbears sprung from a sinewy ancentry of simple farmers and retilled the soils their grandmen tilled, and out of the music of hoetoil raised robust ridges of humble symmetry, and grew gourds that blossomed, their long stems not hindered by land boundaries; scanty leafed tendrils masked large tubers which clustered the barns, maize blades chimed in the wind, corn ripened, flavouring with nature's mint; hens pecked in their order and came home to roost.

Then he emerged cheeks swollen with Lactogen,
eyes impatient with conquest fire.
He mapped out farmlands stretching
from the river's end to the mountain's
beginning;
ploughs were set loose and fields
laden with calcium and phosphates,
specimen NS I replaced' pagan' maize
and seed yams were 'cured';
scarecrows were donned with spectacles,
burglar alarms installed to betray
monkeys:
hens were yoked with 'cross-breeds'
and became 'poultry.'

And the yam tendrils displayed richgreen foilage with slender tubers - some tubers grew outsize and rotted a day after harvest or, boiled in time, dissolved in the enamel pot;

bastard chicks slew one another in their iron cage, table eggs assumed the stature of the roc's but fouled the palate; the hen joined the cock in random crowing: the one at midday the other at midnight, and at table tasted like boiled wood.

The birds flew past
and did not perch,
the monkeys shunned the copious cornfields not fear of scarecrows nor dread
of alarm bells - they already know;
but the perfumed farmer will know
later on harvest day. The
corn was eaten in the blade.

* * * * *

Emeka Okeke-Ezigbo holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he was a leading member of the undergraduate Writers' Club. (Some of their works are discussed in this issue in the article by Emenyonu.) He contributed a story to The Insider (No amife, 1971).

