

The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a stage. Two puppets are in the foreground, facing each other. The puppet on the left is a man with a beard and a crown, wearing a patterned tunic and leggings. The puppet on the right is a woman with a large, ornate headpiece, wearing a patterned dress and leggings. They are both holding hands. In the background, there are two bright spotlights shining down on the stage. To the right, there is a silhouette of a house or building. The overall color scheme is warm, with a lot of orange and red tones.

# LIGHTS

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# LIGHTS: THE MESSA QUARTERLY

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*Uzbek in Translation:*  
*Hamid Olimjon's "When Apricots Blossom"*  
By August Samie and Leopold Eisenlohr

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Hamid Olimjon possesses a prominent place in Uzbek Soviet literature. He was born in the city of Jizzax, in the Zarafshon valley, in 1909. His grandfather was *mulla* Azim, a high-ranking religious leader. At the age of four, his father passed away, leaving Olimjon in the care of his mother. His mother, Komila *opa*, raised him with historical tales and folk stories, or *ertak*, instilling in him a talent for creative expression. Olimjon completed his higher education at *O'zbek Bilim Yurti* (1923-1928) and *Samarqand Pedakademiyasi* (1928-1931), rendering him a masterful poet. Upon completing his education, he transferred to Tashkent to work as an executive for the newspaper *Yosh leninchi* (*Young Leninist*).<sup>1</sup> During his time at the paper, from 1931-1932, he cultivated his expertise as a literary critic, a scholar of Uzbek literature, and a journalist. He also married Zulfiya in 1931, another Uzbek author, who edited some of his works. In 1939, he became the executive secretary of the *O'zbekiston Sovet yozuvchilari soyuzi* (Union of Writers of Uzbekistan).<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, his life was cut short at the age of thirty-five when he was tragically killed in a car accident in 1944.<sup>3</sup>

He published his first collection of poems, *Ko'klam* (Springtime), in 1929. Though its level of literary skill and intellectual depth was criticized for its immaturity, the passionate, youthful romanticism it expressed and the sincerity with which he wrote about personal experience earned him notoriety. In addition to poetry intended to show the moral composition and mentality of his people, the collection also includes pastoral pieces such as "oydinda" (In the Moonlight) and "Qish ko'rinishlari" (Winter Scenes). His next four poetry collections, *Tong shabadasi* (Morning Breeze, 1930), *Olov sochlar* (Fire-Hair, 1931), *Poyga* (The Race, 1932), and *O'lim yovga* (Death to the Enemy, 1932), came out at a time of heightened political activity for Olimjon. He was engaged in panegyricizing Moscow and penning works such as the poem "Nima bizga Amerika"<sup>4</sup> (What is America to Us?). In it, he contrasts a Soviet worker, earning his own benefit and contentment by the work of his own hands, with an American factory worker who is enslaved and poverty-stricken by his imperialist, capitalist overlords.

Olimjon's poetry is primarily lyrical, consisting of two major elements: the romantic perception of life and politics. Though some of his work discusses Lenin and Stalin, as well as alluding to socialism, his lyricism never fails. It is his earlier works, however, that serve to showcase his mastery over poetical lyricism. "O'rik gullaganda" (When Apricots Blossom)<sup>5</sup> is one such poem. Translated below, it comes from his 1937 collection *Oygul blan Baxtiyor* (Aygul and Bakhtiyor). This translation is, to our knowledge, the first direct<sup>6</sup> translation completed from Uzbek to English. His description of spring in the countryside is the type of lyricism for which he is best known.

<sup>1</sup> Hamid Olimjon, *Tanlangan asarlar*, (Toshkent: O'zSSR fanlar akademiyasi nashriyoti, 1951), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Olimjon, *Tanlangan asarlar*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Khamid Alimdzhon (Hamid Olimjon), *Izbrannoe*, trans. Zhirmunskii (Tashkent?: Gosizdat UzSSR, 1944), 5-12.

<sup>4</sup> Olimjon, *Tanlangan asarlar*, 17-19.

<sup>5</sup> Olimjon, *Tanlangan asarlar*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> There is an English translation (see Usmon Qo'chqorov, ed. *O'zbek She'riyati*. Tashkent: Ma'naviyat, 2010. 115-116: "Apricot Blossom.") available, which was translated through a Russian version of this poem done by Zhirmunskii (V.M. Zhirmunskii (ed. and transl.), *Izbrannoe* / Khamid Alimdzhon, [Tashkent?]: Gosizdat UzSSR, 1944, 538-539, No. 210: "Kogda tsvetet uryuk," translated by V. M. Zhirmunskii) in 1942.

"When Apricots Blossom"

In front of my window a sole  
apricot tree blossomed pure white...

at dawn in the East, buds adorning the  
branches spoke the name of life,  
but the damned breeze at dawn stole away  
with the delightful flavor of the flowers.

This repeats each spring,  
each spring it happens just the same,  
however much I suffer, still those shameless  
winds deceive me with lies.

I say 'so be it' and will not get angry,  
I wrap my thoughts around the flowers;  
whenever I walk out into the spring,  
I ask whether I have any good fortune.

Caressing and brushing against my face,  
'you have good fortune,' blows the wind;  
as if they were wishing me well,  
'you have good fortune,' chirp the birds.

Everything greets me,  
each bud tells me a secret,  
while I walk in the garden  
only a voice praising my good fortune sings:

"Here is an abundance of flowers for you,  
take as much as possible into your satchel,  
fortune is more abundant than all else here,  
reside in this place until death comes.

Those who passed crying for never seeing  
flowers, their share of flower gazing is yours,  
Those who passed welcoming each spring  
crying, their share is also yours."

In front of my window a sole  
apricot tree blossomed pure white.

"Ўрик Гуллаганда" (1937)

Теразамнинг олдида бир туп  
Ўрик оппоқ бўлиб гуллади...

Новдаларни безаб ғунчалар  
Тонгда айтди ҳаёт отини,  
Ва шаббода қурғур илк саҳар  
Олиб кетди гулнинг тотини.

Ҳар баҳорда шу бўлар такрор,  
Ҳар баҳор ҳам шундай ўтади,  
Қанча тиришсам ҳам у беор  
Еллар мени алдаб кетади.

Майли дейман ва қилмайман ғаш,  
Хаёлмини гулга ўрайман;  
Ҳар баҳорга чиққанда яккаш,  
Бахтим борми, дея сўрайман.

Юзларимни силаб, сийпалаб,  
Бахтинг бор деб эсади еллар,  
Этган каби гўё бир талаб,  
Бахтинг бор, деб қушлар чийиллар.

Ҳамма нарса мени қаршилар,  
Ҳарбир куртак менга сўйлар роз,  
Мен юрганда боғларга тўлар  
Фақат бахтни мактаган овоз:

«Мана сенга олам-олам гул,  
Этагингга сиққанича ол,  
Бунда толи' ҳар нарсадан мўл,  
То ўлгунча шу ўлкада қол.

Умрида ҳеч гул кўрмай, йиғлаб  
Ўтганларнинг ҳаққи ҳам сенда,  
Ҳар баҳорни йиғлаб қаршилаб  
Кетганларнинг ҳаққи ҳам сенда.»

Теразамнинг олдида бир туп  
Ўрик оппоқ бўлиб гуллади.

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