

LANGSTON HUGHES:
POEMS, PHOTOS & NOTEBOOKS
FROM TURKESTAN

LANGSTON HUGHES



Zohra Saed, Editor

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KARIM AHMEDI: POEM FOR LANGSTON HUGHES
ON HIS ARRIVAL TO UZBEKISTAN

Ahmedi's version of this poem is difficult to read. The Arabic handwriting is unsteady, as if a child had spelled out some of the words, and probably reflects the official change in script, along with some desire to retain tradition. Arabic script, like cursive, is written continuously, but here the letters are not always strung together, making the poem a challenge to decipher. The poem is divided into quatrains, a curious move since the Soviets discouraged archaic Turko-Persian styles in contemporary writing. Though it begins in the flowery, lyrical format of a love poem, it doesn't maintain the form or style, veering into something much more sloganeering towards the end. Here, for the first time, is an excerpt, translated by my father, Abdulsamad Saed. Directly following is an excerpt of the version that Hughes had on file, designated by him as "Dour Soviet No. 3."

Poem for Langston Hughes on his Arrival to Uzbekistan

Crossing many oceans, you've come
Leaving your family behind.
I saw you and I felt wrapped in the curls of your hair.
The black and white of you,
a protective eye talisman,
entered my poor home.
When I looked in your beautiful eyes,
I loved you. In front of your glowing face,
your words came like stars and now you must hold my words.
I am powerless in the face of the Komsomol.
I am hiding.... The Negroes are a sacred race...
low is anyone who calls them barbarians [vakhshi]...
our tongues are folded away,
we have many novels, poems that are woven in tears.



Hughes with Karim Ahmedi who is dressed in traditional Uzbek Chapan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1933.

Listen to me, my Dear Langston

To L. H. on his arrival in Uzbekistan
I greet your arrival—
The hero man—hey you! Who came
Across the ocean!
The lion who conquered the waves of the sea.
I am bound to you as tightly as the curls of your hair.
And when I saw your eyes I loved you!
Welcome you, the poor son of the West!
When my eyes look into your
Lively laughing eyes I see the suppression
Of your people.
But when I see your smiling face I raise my fist against the West!
Why? Because in your face there are the winds of cold bitter days.
Their aim is to take you by the throat
To oppress you! The devils!