



**Lew Nussimbaum
alias Essad Bey
alias Kurban Said:
Cosmopolitan – Wanderer between two worlds – Jewish Muslim – Orientalist in Exile**

Literary Collage from his fantastic oeuvre

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On August 27, 1942 –75 years ago – the author and orientalist Essad Bey died in Positano / Italy lonely and destitute. He was not yet 37 years old when he succumbed to a rare disease. Only his Baltic-German nanny Alice Schulte was with him. She had known him from his earliest childhood, when he still was called Lew Nussimbaum.

Lew Nussimbaum was born on October 20, 1905 in Kiev as the only son of the rich Jewish Oil magnate Abraham Nussimbaum from Aserbaidshjan and his Russian-Jewish wife Berta Slutsky. While Lew's father made his fortune with the oil boom in Baku, his mother sympathized with the Bolshevik revolutionaries and secretly supported the young Stalin. When Lew was six years old, his mother, whose ancestors came from Lithuania and were members of the big Leites family, committed suicide.

When the Russian civil war ensuing from the October revolution finally reached Baku in 1918, father and son fled, first to neighboring Persia. Eventually in 1920 they emigrated via Georgia to Istanbul, and from there to Paris and Berlin. The 15-year-old Lew Nussimbaum initially attends the Grammar School of the Russian exile community and then enrolls in Arabic and Turkish literature at Berlin's Humboldt University. In 1922 he converts to Islam

In Berlin he gets to know Elske Lasker-Schüler, Vladimir Nabokov and Boris Pasternak and soon starts writing, mainly for the newspaper *Die Literarische Welt* (The Literary World) published by Willy Haas. His first book *Oil and Blood in the Orient*, a reconstruction of his childhood and escape from Baku was printed in 1929 and immediately became a best-seller.

In quick succession he published 13 other books, among them biographies of Mohammed, Stalin, Lenin and Nikolaus II. While some appreciate him as an expert of the Orient, others denigrate him as a Jewish cheater. Members of the Islamic community in Berlin distance themselves from Nussimbaum. The communists repudiate his books criticizing the Soviet Union as reactionary and undialectic. Lew Nussimbaum alias Essad Bey is caught between two stools. "Who is this Essad Bey?" Leo Trotzki asks in a letter in 1932.

In 1936, while he was already banned from publishing his works in Germany, Essad Bey under the nom de plume Kurban Said published his novel *Ali and Nino* in Vienna, a sort of Romeo and Juliet story playing at the intersection between Christianity and Islam. After the "Anschluss" the exposed Essad Bey loses his protection in Vienna and flees via Switzerland to Italy. Lew Nussimbaum's father Abraham stayed in Vienna and eventually was deported to Belzec and killed there. Despite horrendous pain Essad Bey til the very end continues writing another novel *The man who didn't understand anything of love*.

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