



# **The Orientalist: In Search of a Man Caught Between East and West**

*Tom Reiss*

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The Orientalist is the extraordinary story of a Jewish man's passion for the Arab world as political extremism swept Europe. Part Quest for Corvo, part Seven Pillars of Wisdom, it unravels the mysterious life of Lev Nussimbaum, a man born on the border of Europe and Persia, just as Revolution began to redraw the map. To read this book is to wander into a fabulous and forgotten civilisation, buried for ever by the forces of Naziism and Bolshevism. Tom Reiss first came across Nussimbaum when he went to the ex-USSR to research Russia's oil reserves, and discovered a novel instead. Ali and Nino is a captivating love story set in the glamorous city of Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, and a turn-of-the-century monument to cosmopolitanism and the huge wealth generated by Russia's black gold. The novel changed the way Reiss looked at East-West relations, but who was Kurban Said, its supposed author? And why had he and his book faded into obscurity? A chance encounter suggested to Reiss that Said was a pseudonym for Nussimbaum, but finding Lev was not so easy. For five years, Reiss tracked Nussimbaum's protean identity from a wealthy Jewish childhood in Baku, to a romantic adolescence in Persia on the run from the Bolsheviks, and an exile in Berlin as bestselling author and self-proclaimed Muslim prince. The fascinating story he tells is one of self-aggrandisement and willing deception, but also of political and religious tolerance, and the romantic dream of a universal brotherhood.



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