S. o. just who was this mysterious person behind the bittersweet love story Ali and Nino? Who was this astute observer of human nature, of traditions, politics and history, who felt compelled to hide behind the pseudonym Kurban Said? Who was the author capable of describing the delights and discovery of first love, while also identifying core issues that were tearing society apart? Who was this prophet who warned of the dire consequences of judging others, based exclusively upon nationality, religion or gender?

Back in the summer of 2004, the question of the authorship of the novel Ali and Nino was the furthest thing from our minds at Azerbaijan International. In fact, one might say we stumbled into this research quite by accident. It started with a simple question: How broad was the appeal for this book worldwide—this sensitive, cross-cultural love story between a Georgian beauty and an Azerbaijani youth—Christian and Muslim—and their quest to shape their world beyond the typical stereotypes and prejudices prevalent in early 20th century Baku? We wondered how many languages the novel had been translated into? We thought there might be six—the original German (1937), Italian, English, French, Russian, and Azerbaijani. Were there more?

Three months later, after late nights surfing the Internet, we had identified 21 languages. Our most recent find—Albanian—was published in October 2009. Today, covers of nearly 100 editions in 33 languages may be viewed here in this issue, as well as on Azerbaijan International’s Web site, AZER.com, and soon at ALNIINO.com.

“Without love, there is no life. With it, we can reach the summit of morality.”

—Yusif Vazirov (Chamanzaminli)
High school student in Baku, September 17, 1907
In a letter to Jahangir bey Nasirbeyov

In 2005, Tom Reiss in his book The Orientalist (New York: Random House) claimed that Lev Nasirbeyov (1905-1942), who called himself Essad Bey, was the creative force behind the narrative Ali and Ninos. Finally, Kurban Said had been identified—or so it seemed. We were ready to announce Reiss’s discovery in our 2005 summer issue of Azerbaijan International magazine, but then we hesitated. What was the Azerbaijani point of view? Could we counter any arguments that might arise? Shouldn’t we listen to the Azerbaijani side and try to understand their point of view?

The greatest advocates for the authorship of Yusif Vazirov (Chamanzaminli) (1887-1943) as Kurban Said were his sons. However by then, Fikrat Vazirov (1931), Mohammed the Prophet (1932), Nicholas II (1935), Lenin (1935), Alza Sham (1936), and Allah e Gross (in Azeri of Arabia, 1936). We soon discovered that historians and critics begged to differ, denouncing Essad Bey as a reliable scribe and interpreter of history.

As we began to look more closely at Essad Bey’s texts and articles—there are at least 150 of them—they began to arise. Could this person really be the same author who had penned Ali and Nino? If so, why was the tone and spirit so different? Why had he not written more about his alleged Homeland—Azerbaijan? Why was he so coulerful in his attitude towards truth? How was it that Essad Bey’s non-fiction read like
In fact, More at “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ) 60-69.

Reiss, Orientalist, p. 302, quoting letter from Essad Bey.

Most likely Lev Nussimbaum died of Buerger’s Disease, which typically causes inflammation of the arteries, limiting blood flow and causing pain and other symptoms. The disease can be very serious and if left untreated, can lead to complications including loss of limbs. Nussimbaum’s death was a tragic loss for the literary world, as he was a prolific and talented writer.

The contract for the novel had been made on June 11, 1942, between an author named Essad Bey and the publishing company. However, the contract was not signed by Essad Bey himself, but by his sister, who claimed to be his literary executor.

The authorship of the novel has been a source of controversy, with some claiming it to be the work of Lev Nussimbaum, while others believe it to be the work of Essad Bey. The debate continues, with new evidence being presented from time to time.

As a result, the novel has become a symbol of the struggle between authorship and ownership. The book’s history is a testament to the power of art and the importance of recognizing the contributions of all those involved in its creation.