Kurban Said's *The Girl from the Golden Horn* (1938): Play with Orientalism in Interwar Berlin and Vienna

ABSTRACT

Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn (*The Girl from the Golden Horn*), a novel published in 1938 in Vienna under the pseudonym Kurban Said, was most likely written by Lev Nussimbaum, a multilingual exile from Azerbaijan, who converted from Judaism to Islam in Berlin in the early 1920s. Although virtually unknown, this novel deserves an important place in the global history of German literature on account of its complexity and self-conscious play with literary and cultural traditions, especially the long-standing presence of Islam in German-speaking Europe, and the Orientalist tropes associated with it.

Lev Nussimbaum, Essad Bey, Kurban Said, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*, *The Girl from the Golden Horn*, Orientalism, Trivialliteratur, interwar Berlin, interwar Vienna

Forgotten World: Becoming a Muslim in Interwar Berlin

Imagine an autumn day in Berlin in 1928: thick fog envelops the linden trees lining the famous central boulevard as students hurry past the imposing neo-baroque façade of the Staatsbibliothek to lectures at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, as today's Humboldt Universität was still known then. Cars and trams rattle past horse-drawn carriages which they have not quite replaced yet, and cigarette smoke seeps out of brightly lit cafés. A little to the west, on Wittenbergplatz, display windows of the Kaufhaus des Westens shine in the dusk, while groups of passers-by in fashionable hats and leather gloves curiously peer at film posters advertizing latest features. Just the year before, Walther Ruttmann's *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*) had premiered: a film that would profoundly impact how this metropolis is remembered and imagined today.[1]

This article is about Kurban Said's *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*, a little-known but fascinating novel of 1938.[2] Published and partially set in Vienna, it begins in the late 1920s Berlin of which Ruttmann's film gives us such suggestive glimpses, but it also expands and nuances this familiar image in extraordinary ways. The goal of this article is threefold: to introduce this novel and its author to a wider readership by positioning it as an important text that deserves more recognition in the world history of German literature,

[1] *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt & Melodie der Welt*, dir. by Walther Ruttmann (Edition Filmmuseum, 2014).

[2] Quotations from the novel in the text are taken from the following editions: Kurban Said, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1975), and Kurban Said, *The Girl from the Golden Horn*, trans. by Jenia Graman (New York: Overlook Press, 2001). All other translations are mine.

to use Sandra Richter's recent turn of phrase;[3] to show its complexity and self-conscious play with literary and cultural traditions, especially the long-standing presence of Islam in German-speaking Europe and the Orientalist tropes associated with it; and to trace the reception of this novel in Germany and beyond since its publication, which will help explain why it has been almost entirely forgotten, and why it is high time to revisit it.

To return to the opening vignette, one of the first locales we are introduced to in the novel is a café that might seem taken straight out of Ruttmann's film — until one takes a closer look. The name of Café Watan on Knesebeckstraße, not far from Wittenbergplatz, means 'homeland' in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. The proprietor is a bespectacled Indian professor, a man who used to work as a minister in Bukhara in Central Asia now works as the head waiter here, and the barista is a former mountain bandit from Kurdistan. The clientele includes Egyptian students, Syrian politicians, and Iranian princes. This is the café frequented by Achmed-Pascha Anbari, one of the novel's main characters. The Golden Horn is part of the Bosporus, the strait in Istanbul traditionally seen as a symbolic border between Europe and Asia. The titular 'girl', the novel's protagonist, is Achmed-Pascha's nineteen-year-old daughter, Asiadeh Anbari: a Turkish aristocrat exiled to Berlin after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, now an impoverished student of Oriental philology at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität.

Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn captures the forgotten world of Muslim Berlin between the wars, and the connections between Muslim and Jewish communities at the time. Kurban Said was a pseudonym used by Lev Nussimbaum (1905–42), born in a multilingual, upper-class Jewish family living in Baku, Azerbaijan.[4]

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[3] Sandra Richter, *Eine Weltgeschichte der deutschsprachigen Literatur* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 2017).

[4] The only biography of Lev Nussimbaum published to date is Tom Reiss, *The Orientalist: In Search of a Man Caught between East and West* (London: Vintage, 2005). Some information in this important book, however, has since been shown to be incorrect. Nussimbaum's German publisher is working on a new biography and sometimes publishes new biographical information on his personal blog: Hans-Jürgen Maurer, *Essad Bey Truth Alert: Keeping Records Straight* <http://www.essadbeytruthalert.com> [accessed 23 September 2022]. Despite its sensationalist tone, Maurer's blog meticulously records relevant sources and is more

His birth was registered in Kiyv; Nussimbaum himself claimed that he was born on the train from Zurich to Baku, 'mitten in der russischen Steppe zwischen Europa und Asien' ('midway through the Russian steppe between Europe and Asia').[5] He had to flee his hometown in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution, and in the early 1920s arrived in Berlin — much like his heroine Asiadeh.

This was by no means unusual: some 500,000 Russian-speaking refugees arrived in Germany around that time, mainly in Berlin, including many Jewish people, as well as many refugees from the Caucasus. They mostly settled in and around Charlottenburg, which was then often nicknamed 'Charlottengrad'.[6] Nussimbaum had been so traumatized by the Soviet invasion of Azerbaijan, which forced him into exile, that later in life he supported the Nazi Party, seeing Hitler as the only European politician who could stand up to Stalin — a widespread belief at the time.[7] This was not enough to escape Nazi persecution, though: from 1935 he was not allowed to publish in Germany anymore; in 1938, after the Anschluss, he had to flee from Vienna, where he had been living since 1932. He died of a degenerative disease in Positano, Italy, in 1942, at the age of 36. Visitors can still admire his striking gravestone there today.

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reliable and up to date than most other publications on Nussimbaum, which often make unverified or misleading claims. In particular, Nussimbaum's authorship of several of the books usually attributed to him, especially *Ali und Nino*, has been called into question. In what follows, I only engage with the question of the authorship of *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*: I discuss the possibility of the novel having been written by or in collaboration with Elfriede von Ehrenfels-Bodmershof, or another woman writer, but conclude that Lev Nussimbaum is the most likely author.

[5] Essad Bey, 'Lebensläufe von heute. Die Geschichte meines Lebens', *Die literarische Welt*, 7.5 (1931), 3–4 (p. 3).

[6] See, for example, Karl Schlögel, *Das russische Berlin. Eine Hauptstadt im Jahrhundert der Extreme* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019).

[7] See, for example, Jonathan Haslam, *The Spectre of War: International Communism and the Origins of World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

It is so striking because the tall, narrow stone is topped with a carefully sculpted Islamic turban. Nussimbaum died a Muslim: soon after his arrival in Germany, he converted from Judaism to Islam in the Ottoman embassy in Berlin, shortly before it became the embassy of the new Republic of Turkey, and adopted yet another name — Essad Bey. 'Asad' means 'lion' in Arabic, like 'Lev' in Russian; 'bey' is an old Turkic honorific, traditionally a title for a chieftain, yielding something like 'Sir Lion'. The other pseudonym, Kurban ('sacrifice', from a Semitic root present in both Arabic and Hebrew, and used in both the Bible and the Quran) Said ('blessed, happy' in Arabic), could be translated as 'happy sacrifice'. 'Said' is also close to 'Sayyid' (a traditional Arabic honorific), which could yield 'Sir Sacrifice', by analogy with 'Sir Lion'. The etymologies of both 'Essad Bey' and 'Kurban Said' are clearly meaningful and layered: a fuller examination lies beyond the scope of the present article.

As Essad Bey, Nussimbaum became a prolific and well-connected writer and journalist, publishing more articles in the prominent Weimar weekly *Die literarische Welt* (*The Literary World*) than almost any other contributor, including Walter Benjamin, for whom it was one of two main publication venues in the 1920s.[8] Nussimbaum/Bey also published a string of popular nonfiction books, including some with Gustav Kiepenhauer, one of the most prominent publishers in Weimar Germany, associated with authors such as Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, and Joseph Roth, among many others. Most of these books have been translated into other languages, including English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, Russian, Polish, Czech, Serbian, Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian.

Nussimbaum left a mark on the German literary world and beyond. Gerhart Hauptmann wrote a poem titled 'Positano' to commemorate his death, and he is apparently the 'Essad' who appears in one of Ezra Pound's famous cantos (Canto 97).[9] His nonfiction can still make a strong impression — for example his

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[8] See Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjmain: A Critical Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), pp. 236–37.

[9] See Peter Sprengel, 'Exil in Positano: Gerhart Hauptmanns lyrisches Denkmal für Essad Bey', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 129.2 (2010), 239–51, and Massimo Bacigalupo, 'Essad Bey: Fictional Islam and

1931 biography of Stalin, the earliest ever written; one of Stalin's twenty-first-century biographers called Nussimbaum 'unreliable though often well informed'.[10] Nussimbaum in fact claimed that Stalin was close to his mother when he himself was a small child, and that Stalin briefly lived with him and his father in 1920.[11] The book about Stalin was swiftly followed by a biography of the Prophet Muhammad, recently described as 'modernist'.[12] Nussimbaum/Bey's 1936 history of Islam was called 'ein irritierendes und doch wunderbares Buch' ('an irritating and yet wonderful book') by Navid Kermani, one of Germany's leading Muslim public intellectuals today.[13] His *Öl und Blut im Orient* (*Blood and Oil in the Orient*, 1929) and *Flüssiges Gold. Ein Kampf um die Macht* (*Liquid Gold: A Struggle for Power*, 1932), as well as related journalistic pieces, were recently reappraised as a uniquely prescient contribution to the cultural discourse on the extraction of natural resources, especially petroleum.[14] Last but not least, *Ali und Nino* (*Ali and Nino*, 1937), the first and incomparably more famous work published in German under the pseudonym Kurban Said, is considered to be the foundational novel of modern Azerbaijan, and in the last few years was championed in Germany

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International Modernism', in *The Politics and Poetics of Displacement: Modernism off the Beaten Track*, ed. by Massimo Bacigalupo and Luisa Villa (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto Editore, 2011), pp. 127–40.

[10] Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), p. 156.

[11] See Reiss, pp. 19–21 and 81.

[12] Farid Hafez, *Essad Bey*, in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World: Digital Collection*, ed. by John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780197669419.001.0001/acref-9780197669419-e-125> [accessed 23 September 2022].

[13] Navid Kermani, 'Krieg führen, Koran lesen, beten', *Die Zeit*, 12 December 2002 <https://www.zeit.de/2002/51/SM-Islam> [accessed 23 September 2022].

[14] See Dariya Manova, *"Sterbende Kohle" und "flüssiges Gold". Rohstoffnarrative der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), pp. 194–226.

by Kermani and Nino Haratischwili, gained a British film adaptation, and was the subject of an American academic companion.[15]

In recent decades, historians have begun to reconstruct the cultural landscape in which such lives and careers were possible, but which has all but disappeared from the collective memory of the Weimar years. It centred around the Wilmersdorfer Moschee, the oldest surviving mosque in Germany: an imposing structure built between 1924 and 1928 in imitation of the Mughal style of architecture, of which Taj Mahal is the most famous representative, for the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Movement.[16] One of the most prominent members of this community was Hugo/Hamid Marcus, a gay Jewish convert.[17] In the late 1920s, the mosque was a lively cultural centre whose lectures reportedly attracted the likes of Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, and Albert Einstein.[18]

Nussimbaum was not active in the Wilmersdorf Mosque himself, often criticized other Berlin Muslims, and was in turn criticized by them. Still, as Gerdien Jonker remarks in her recent book, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* constitutes one of the most evocative surviving windows onto this cultural landscape: 'an intimate connoisseur of Muslims in Berlin, […] Nussimbaum left us some rare portrayals' of them.[19] Azade Seyhan, reminiscing in passing about her first encounter with *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*, before she learned the identity of its author, similarly states: 'this Said clearly was no Orientalist in the sense established by the

[15] Navid Kermani, *Entlang den Gräben. Eine Reise durch das östliche Europa bis nach Isfahan* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2018), Nino Haratischwili, 'Nachwort', in Kurban Said, *Ali und Nino* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2016), *Ali & Nino*, dir. by Asif Kapadia (Thunderbird Releasing, 2018), and Carl Niekerk and Cori Crane, eds., *Approaches to Kurban Said's "Ali and Nino": Love, Identity, and Intercultural Conflict* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2017).

[16] See Gerdien Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest for Religious Progress: Missionizing Europe 1900–1965* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

[17] See Marc David Baer, *German, Jew, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Times of Hugo Marcus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

[18] See Faruk Şen and Hayrettin Aydın, *Islam in Deutschland* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), pp. 11–12.

[19] Gerdien Jonker, *On the Margins: Jews and Muslims in Interwar Berlin* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), p. 53.

other Said, Edward Said, who defined Orientalism as a methodological and disciplinary appropriation of the cultures of the Orient in its broadest geographical parameters. He (or perhaps she?) seemed to be writing from the inside; his or her knowledge of Persian and Ottoman culture was not only comprehensive, but also nuanced'.[20]

But what Nussimbaum/Said left behind is not a straightforwardly factual portrayal of the transcultural landscape of interwar Berlin. His novel is in fact much more aesthetically and intellectually ambitious and complex, while at the same time easy to misread as much less serious in its intent and execution. As this article will demonstrate, it captures a longer history of Muslim presence in German-speaking Europe, and beyond: Said's novel points both backwards in time, especially to the long history of Ottoman-Habsburg relations, and seems to anticipate future developments in Germany, as well as the wider world. At the same time, the novel engages with themes of gender, identity, and authorship, continuously connecting and subverting them with much wit and irreverence. Asiadeh gives up her study of Oriental philology to marry Alexander Hassa, an Austrian ear, nose and throat doctor, an atheist descendant of Bosnian Muslims; they move to Vienna, where she struggles to adjust to her new life and pines for Abdulkerim, the Turkish crown prince she had been supposed to marry before the fall of the Ottoman Empire — now, as it turns out, an exile like her, a successful film director in Hollywood known as John Rolland, making adventure films set in an imagined Orient, which cater to the expectations of Western audiences.

Rolland's work provides an ironic meta-commentary on Nussimbaum/Said's own play with Orientalist tropes in his novel, which on the surface follows generic conventions of a trivial love story or an adventure romp. *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* takes in the traditional centres of German-language culture, Berlin and Vienna, and connects them to the wider world — from Asia to Africa to America — while at the same time both evoking and undermining traditional Orientalist narratives. Forms of play with Orientalism discussed in what follows include word play, clashing of discursive registers, elements of comedy of manners, ironic narrative perspective, humorous and subversive allusions to earlier literary texts, visual

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[20] Azade Seyhan, '*Ali and Nino*: The Novel as/of Cultural Translation', in *Approaches to Kurban Said's "Ali and Nino"*, pp. 15–16.

representations, and scholarly practices associated with Oriental philology, as well as the dismantling of preconceptions about the appearance, behaviour, and values of Muslim women.

The novel does all this four decades before the influential theorization of Orientalism by 'the other Said', as Seyhan put it, who famously excluded Germany from his discussion.[21] Later scholars — including Nina Berman, Todd Kontje, Andrea Polaschegg, Suzanne L. Marchand, Debra N. Prager, and many others — filled in the gap left by Edward Said and problematized his theory by discussing representations of the Orient in German culture from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, but especially in nineteenth-century literature, visual art, music, and humanistic scholarship, many of which were complex, often ambiguous, and went beyond a desire for imperial domination.[22] *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* is part of this tradition as a self-reflexive piece of late Orientalist fiction which prefigures critical Orientalist theory of the later twentieth century.[23] While a detailed examination of this theme lies beyond the scope of the present article, Nussimbaum/Said's novel should also be considered in the context of the so-called 'Jewish Orientalism' of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, present in Germany and beyond — a fascination with the potential of a shared pan-Semitic identity as an alternative to European assimilation marred by antisemitism.[24]

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[21] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

[22] Nina Berman, *Orientalismus, Kolonialismus und Moderne: Zum Bild des Orients in der deutschsprachigen Kultur um 1900* (Stuttgart: M und P, 1996), Todd Kontje, *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), Andrea Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus. Regeln deutsch-morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and Debra N. Prager, *Orienting the Self: The German Literary Encounter with the Eastern Other* (Rochester: Camden House, 2014).

[23] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for this last formulation.

[24] See Reiss, pp. 227–42. A classic study of this trope in German literature of the time, which, however, does not mention any works by Lev Nussimbaum, is Donna K. Heizer, *Jewish-German Identity in the Orientalist Literature of Else Lasker-Schüler, Friedrich Wolf, and Franz Werfel* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996). For a

Nussimbaum/Said's play with Orientalism was also strikingly prescient in other ways. In the 1970s, when Kurt Desch and S. Fischer reissued *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*, both editions were accompanied by a short foreword written by Umar R. Ehrenfels, an Austrian convert to Islam who had known Nussimbaum/Said in the 1930s. Ehrenfels wrote that when Said's novel about Turkish exiles in Berlin was first published, its topic seemed 'fernliegend, ein Ausnahmefall' ('remote, an exception') — but 'die Zeit für dieses Buch ist jetzt gekommen' ('the time for this book has come now').[25] This was true in the early 1970s, a little over a decade after the guest worker treaty was signed between Germany and Turkey on 30 October 1961, leading to a rapid growth of Turkish communities in Germany, but it is even truer now, more than six decades years later, with the growing recognition of Germany's long-standing transcultural history and identity.

'Ich bin zwar nur eine Turkologin': Philology, Exile, and Humour

Consequently, one of the aims of this article is to simply introduce *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* to a broader audience. This is how the novel begins:

'Und dieses "i", Frl. Anbari?'

Asiadeh hob den Kopf. Ihre grauen Augen blickten nachdenklich und ernst. 'Dieses "i"?' wiederholte sie mit leiser und weicher Stimme. Sie schwieg eine Weile und sagte dann entschlossen und verzweifelt: 'Dieses "i" ist das jakutische Gerundium, ähnlich der kirgisischen Form "barisi".'

Bang rieb sich seine lange gebogene Nase. Seine Augen hinter der runden Stahlbrille glichen den weisen Blicken einer Eule. Er schnaufte leise und mißbilligend.

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recent discussion of the aesthetics of German Jewish Orientalism in the long nineteenth century, see John M. Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[25] Umar R. Ehrenfels, 'Vorwort', in *Das Mädchen*, pp. 4–5 (p. 5).

'Ich halte', sagte er und schlug mit dem knochigen Finger an den Tisch, 'ich halte dieses "i" im jakutischen "bari" für ein Possessivsuffix. Bari bedeutet "die Gesamtheit" und die i-Form, die wir statt der vertrauten jakutischen a-Form finden, muß einer jüngern Palatalisierung entstammen. Wie lautete denn das ursprüngliche Nomen?'

'Bar — das Vorhandene', sagte Asiadeh.

'Ja', sagte Bang nachdenklich und wehmütig. 'Das Vorhandene, und es kann, wie jedes andere Nomen, dekliniert werden. Im Kumikischen lautet der Stamm gleichfalls "bari". Balkarisch und Karatschaewisch dagegen "barasin". Ich kann mir dennoch das Fehlen des "a" in der jakutischen Form nicht restlos erklären.'

Im kleinen Zimmer roch es nach altem vergilbtem Papier. Der viereckige Tisch stand am hohen Fenster. Bang blätterte traurig im Lexikon, und um den Tisch saßen der Tatare Rachmetullah, der Ungar Dr. Szurmai und der Sinologe Goetz. Asiadeh blickte auf ihre kleinen Nägel, und der Sinologe Goetz schlug vor, die rätselhafte Form aus einem erstarrten mongolischen Instrumental zu erklären.

'Als ich jung war', sagte Bang streng, 'wollte ich auch alles aus einem erstarrten mongolischen Instrumental erklären. Mut ist ein Privileg der Jugend.' *(p. 7)*

'And this "i", Fraulein Anbari?'

Asiadeh looked up, her gray eyes thoughtful and earnest. 'This "i"?' she repeated in her soft, gentle voice. She thought for a little while and then said decidedly and desperately: 'This "i" is the Yakut gerund, similar to the Khirgiz "barisi".'

Professor Bang rubbed his long, hooked nose. Behind the steel-rimmed glasses his eyes looked like those of a wise owl. He wheezed softly and disapprovingly.

'Yes,' he said. 'But I still cannot really understand why the "a" should be missing in the Yakut form.' And he sadly leafed through dictionary.

Goetz, another of his students, whose specialty was the Chinese language, proposed to explain the mysterious 'a' form as being a petrified Mongol instrumental. 'When I was young,' said Professor Bang severely, 'I too tried to explain everything as being a petrified Mongol instrumental. Courage is a young man's privilege.' *(p. 1)*[26]

The novel opens in the heart of interwar Berlin, in the philological faculty of the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (since 1945 Humboldt University) on Dorotheenstraße, where it is still located today, close to the main university building on Unter den Linden, with a clear view of the Brandenburger Gate. All these landmarks are mentioned on the opening pages of the novel; against this backdrop laden with imperial symbolism, the young female protagonist Asiadeh participates in a small seminar on comparative Turkic philology with four older men: a German professor of Oriental philology, a German Sinologist, and Hungarian and Tatar linguists. Asiadeh has enrolled at the university to study ancient Oriental languages, in an attempt to reconnect with her cultural and linguistic roots.

The small, niche faculty and its students and academics are depicted lovingly and mockingly at the same time; Nussimbaum was intimately familiar with this milieu, since he enrolled in such seminars himself in 1922 — soon after his arrival in Berlin, while still a 'Gymnasiast'. Bang, the German professor who teaches Asiadeh's seminar, has been identified as Willi Bang — a German Turkologist, linguist and Orientalist who was teaching in Berlin in Nussimbaum's time. The Tatar linguist also corresponds to a historical figure, Bang's later collaborator.[27] The topic of the seminar is a grammatical ending 'i' in Yakut, a Turkic language spoken in parts of Siberia. The seminar participants seek to identify this suffix, drawing comparisons with

[26] Note that Jenia Graman's English translation omits or shortens several paragraphs. I discuss the significance of these cuts below. Her translation is also occasionally imprecise, but I only corrected obvious misspellings.

[27] See Lars Johanson, '"Der Orientalist" als "Turkologe"', in *Florilegia Altaistica: Studies in Honour of Denis Sinor on the Occasion of His 90th Birthday*, ed. by Elena V. Boikova and Giovanni Stary (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), pp. 51–59 (pp. 54–55).

other Turkic languages — Kyrgyz, Kumyk, Balkar, and Karachay — as well as Mongolian, but Bang is not satisfied with any of them. He thinks 'i' must be a possessive suffix, even though the normal form in Yakut would be 'a'.

This scene might have ended up a rather tedious exposition of the comparative method in Oriental philology, as practised in interwar Berlin. But in fact it is a charming vignette that prefigures much of what is distinctive about the novel. First of all, it is full of light-hearted humour. In their telescopic focus on a single grammatical ending of a faraway language, the seminar participants display all sorts of intense emotions. Bang turns 'nachdenklich und wehmütig' and 'blättert traurig im Lexikon'; when Goetz suggest that the mysterious 'i' is an ossified Mongolian instrumental, this only enrages the professor. When he was young — he says 'streng' — he also wanted to explain everything as an ossified Mongolian instrumental. 'Mut ist ein Privileg der Jugend', he adds caustically.

Despite its comic tone, there is a serious dimension to the opening scene too. The Turkic word under discussion, 'bari', forms part of Asiadeh's Turkish surname mentioned in the first line — Anbari. This underscores the fact that she takes the seminar to reconnect with her cultural roots. 'Tausend Jahre trennten sie von den robusten Ahnen, die einst aus den Wüsten Turans kamen und die grauen Ebenen Anatoliens überfluteten' ('a thousand years separated her from her robust ancestors who had once come from the deserts of Turan to overrun the gray plains of Anatolia'), the narrator muses, focalizing her thoughts. Having lost her home — understood both as 'das verlorene Reich' ('the lost empire') and 'das Haus am Bosporus' ('the house on the Bosphorus'; pp. 9–10/p. 4) — Asiadeh feels an affinity with the ancient tribes which now only belong in history books, rather than the newly proclaimed Republic of Turkey, undergoing sweeping reforms by its first president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This included highly significant language policies: the replacement of the Perso-Arabic script with an adapted Latin alphabet through a law passed on 1 November 1928 — the very autumn in which Asiadeh chooses to take up the study of ancient Turkic

languages — and the corresponding act of purging the language of words of Persian and Arabic origin, extremely widespread in Ottoman Turkish.[28]

Asiadeh's attempt to better understand who she is through the study of philology is unsuccessful: just as an in-depth linguistic analysis of the word 'bari' does not lead to any firm conclusions, so does Asiadeh's quest to find solace in the mythical past of her Turkic forbearers end up in disappointment. The word 'bari' comes from 'bar' — 'das Vorhandene' ('in existence') — and means 'Gesamtheit' ('totality'). Its meaning stands in stark contrast to Asiadeh's feelings of incompleteness and lack in relation to her lost home and culture. Ironically, her journey of self-discovery is mediated through a conservative educational institution with Prussian roots. Her studies align her not just with her 'Mongol ancestors', but also the German philological tradition, and she senses the limitations of this approach. It does not mediate between these different cultures, or, to put it bluntly — as Asiadeh often does herself — the West and the East, in a way that would allow her to achieve a sense of belonging in either — or indeed both. At this point, the study of philology does not seem to hold any promise.

By the end of the seminar, Asiadeh develops a sore throat, as though all the 'barbarischen Formen der erstarrten Sprachen' ('barbaric forms of the petrified languages'), 'unwirklich, feindlich, beinahe lähmend' ('unreal, hostile, numbing her senses') as they suddenly seem to her, got stuck in her throat (p. 7/pp. 1–2). On a university notice board, she finds information about a laryngologist in the university hospital. Soon she is examined by Dr. Alexander Hassa:

'Wie heißen Sie?' 'Asiadeh Anbari.' 'Beruf?' 'Studentin.'

'Ach so, Kollegin', sagte Hassa freundlich, 'auch Medizinerin?'

'Nein, Philologin', sagte das Mädchen.

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[28] See, for example, Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Hass richtete den Reflektor zurecht.

‘Und was führt Sie zu mir? So, Halsschmerzen.’ Seine linke Hand suchte automatisch den Spatel. ‘Germanistin?’

‘Nein’, sagte das Mädchen streng, ‘Turkologin.’

‘Was bitte?’

‘Vergleichende türkische Sprachforschung.’

‘Mein Gott, was versprechen Sie sich davon?’

‘Nichts’, sagte das Mädchen böse und sperrte den Mund auf. *(p. 13)*

‘What’s your name?’ ‘Asiadeh Anbari.’ ‘Occupation?’ ‘Student.’ ‘Oh, a colleague,’ said Dr. Hassa, friendly. ‘Medicine too?’ ‘No, philology,’ said the girl. Hassa fixed the reflector.

‘And what brings you here? Oh, the throat hurts.’ His left hand searched automatically for the scalpel. ‘Germanistic?’

‘No,’ said the girl severely, ‘Turkology.’

‘Oh — what’s that?’

‘Comparative Turkish philology.’

‘Good God, what’d you expect to get out of that?’

‘Nothing,’ said the girl angrily, and opened her mouth. *(pp. 8–9)*

With its stichomythic dialogue and a harsh light pointed at Asiadeh’s face, this medical examination is not unlike a police interrogation. At stake is Asiadeh’s identity — her name and occupation, but also her interests and values. Unlike the novel’s reader, Hassa does not find out that she studies Oriental philology in search of a connection to her lost culture. Asiadeh demonstrates the usefulness of philology to him in another way:

Dann legte er [Hassa] den Reflektor ab, schob den Hocker zurück und sagte sachlich: '*Tonsillitis*. Beginnende *Angina folicularis*.'

'Auf deutsch Halsentzündung', lachte das Mädchen, und Dr. Hassa beschloß, auf Latein zu verzichten.

(p. 13)

Then he [Hassa] took the reflector off, pushed the stool back, and said very matter-of-factly: 'Tonsilitis. Beginning of angina folicularis.'

'Let's say quinsy.' The girl laughed, and Dr. Hassa decided to drop Latin nomenclatures.

(p. 9)

Philology allows Asiadeh to look through the doctor's posturing and assert her authority. Hassa prescribes her bed rest and advises her to go home 'im Auto'; but Asiadeh, who is in a precarious financial situation, 'bestieg […] einen Autobus, lehnte sich in die weichen Lederpolster und dachte befriedigt, daß ein Auto nur ein bescheidenes Diminutivum des weich dahinrollenden Autobusses sei' ('got on a bus, and as she leaned back contentedly into the soft leather cushions, she mused that the German word "auto" […] was only a modest diminutive of the slickly rolling autobus'; p. 14/p. 10). Philology — and a sense of humour — are what restores to Asiadeh a feeling of dignity and control over her life.

'Ich wußte nicht, daß es blonde Türkinnen gibt': Gender, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationality

The ultimate philological triumph in her budding relationship with scientifically minded Hassa comes when they meet in the university canteen. Hassa again quizzes her on her identity:

'Sie sind Türkin, nicht wahr? Ich wußte nicht, daß es blonde Türkinnen gibt.'

Asiadeh sah ihn erstaunt an. Es gab also Menschen, die nicht wußten, daß die hellen Augen der Istanbuler Prinzessinnen von Tibet bis zum Balkan berühmt waren.

'Es kommt vor', sagte sie bescheiden und bohrte mit der Gabel in der dampfenden Fleischspeise. 'Sie sind kein Deutscher, nicht wahr?'

'Woher wissen Sie das?'

Asiadeh lachte zufrieden. 'Ich bin zwar nur eine Turkologin, kenne mich aber in Dialekten aus. Außerdem ist Hassa kein deutscher Name.' *(p. 20)*

'You are a Turk, aren't you? I did not know there were blond Turks.'

Asiadeh looked at him, astonished. So there were people who did not know that the light-colored eyes of the Istanbul princesses were famous from Tibet to the Balkans.

'It does occur,' she said modestly, and pierced the steaming meat with her fork. 'You aren't German either, are you?'

'How do you know?'

Asiadeh laughed contentedly. 'Even if I'm just a Turkologue, I do know about German dialects. Apart from that, Hassa is not a German name.' *(p. 20)*

Hassa puts Asiadeh in an uncomfortable position of having to account both for her foreignness and the fact that her appearance does not conform to his ideas about foreignness. Asiadeh does see herself as foreign, but does not associate blond hair with Western Europe: indeed, blond hair is not uncommon in Turkey. Her response to Hassa acknowledges this, though she passes in silence over the connection she sees between the colour of her hair and her aristocratic background. Hassa's inability to imagine a blond Turkish woman is representative of the more general problem in European culture: how to avoid stereotypes when representing non-European women.

Hassa's confusion over the colour of Asiadeh's hair has been reproduced on the covers of numerous editions of the book, whether in German, English, or other languages. Not only is she often represented as having dark hair, but her portrayal also oscillates between two simplistic stereotypes: Weimar 'New Woman' or an 'Oriental' seductress. For example, the cover of the most recent German edition features a nineteenth-century French painting of the Golden Horn by Henriette Gudin, alongside a supposedly typical Weimar-era 'New Woman' with a fashionable dark bob haircut — even if it in fact uses a photograph of Louise Brooks, a famous American actor who starred in many successful Weimar productions in the silent era, only highlighting how tenuous constructions of national identity can be.[29] In contrast, S. Fischer's cover from 1975, designed by Katja Mackens-Hassler, is the only one that succeeds in capturing the complexity of Asiadeh's identity: it portrays her in a striking hat, of the kind fashionable in 1920s Germany, with a lock of blond hair peeking out from underneath, and a subtle architectural sketch in the background, which could be taken for the Berlin Cathedral from afar, but up close is clearly identifiable as Istanbul's Hagia Sophia mosque.

Meanwhile, Christel Aumann's 1973 cover design for Kurt Desch resembles more closely the original 1938 cover: it features a dark-haired woman in the foreground, gazing on what is unambiguously Hagia Sophia, depicted in the background.[30] Maurer's edition of 2009 changed the colour scheme of Aumann's design to give Asiadeh her blond hair back, as it was depicted on the original cover.[31] In an opposite move, two particularly unfortunate covers of twenty-first-century English and Polish editions channel an Orientalist male gaze: they feature a dark-haired naked woman covering her breasts with her arms, a cliché of seductive but coy 'Oriental' femininity.[32] Taken together, the covers reflect the dilemma that confronts Asiadeh time and again in the novel: existing cultural narratives about gender and ethnicity struggle to accommodate a

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[29] Kurban Said, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* (Frankfurt am Main: H. J. Maurer, 2021).

[30] Kurban Said, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* (Vienna: Zinnen, 1938). Kurban Said, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* (Munich: Kurt Desch, 1973).

[31] Kurban Said, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* (Frankfurt am Main: H. J. Maurer, 2009).

[32] Kurban Said, *Dziewczyna znad Złotego Rogu*, trans. by Agnieszka Gadzała (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2018).

character who evades simplistic categorization as either a liberated, modern, Western European 'New Woman' or a conservative Muslim woman without any agency of her own.

Asiadeh finds a clever way of rebelling against such simplistically dualistic models of ethnic and cultural identity by pressing Hassa on his background for the first time. Her question is almost identical to his ('Sie sind Türkin, nicht wahr?' — 'Sie sind kein Deutscher, nicht wahr?'), but with an important shift: the emphasis is now not on who Hassa is, but on who he is *not*. In his encounters with Asiadeh, Hassa has been playing the role of what could be dubbed the 'normative native' — a representative of the cultural norms that Asiadeh fails to meet: an educated man (rather than woman), scientifically minded and rational (rather than spiritual and emotional), native speaker of German (rather than Turkish). It is clear from the dialogue that Hassa had assumed Asiadeh had taken him for a German man — nationally, ethnically; somebody who 'naturally' belongs in Berlin. But now Asiadeh reveals that thanks to her philological knowledge she has seen through his ruse from the beginning. She recognized his accent and surname as 'foreign': the big reveal is that Hassa is no native, no better than her.

Hassa finally admits that he is Austrian. 'Kennen Sie Wien?' ('Do you know Vienna?'), he asks Asiadeh — and she again replies by copying his question, but adding an important twist: 'kennen Sie Kara-Mustafa?' ('do you know Kara Mustapha?'; p. 21/p. 20). Kara Mustafa Pasha was the Grand Vizier who led the Ottoman army into the Battle of Vienna in 1683 with the aim of expanding the Ottoman Empire into Central Europe. Despite early successes, the Ottoman army was ultimately defeated just outside Vienna by an army led by the Polish King John III Sobieski, and Mustafa was executed at the order of Sultan Mehmed IV. Asiadeh's playful response is a reminder that the history of Austrian-Turkish relations goes back many centuries.[33] The idea that these two countries are entirely foreign to each other is simply not true. Through the reference to Mustafa, her own verbal sparring with Hassa gains a centuries-long history. The setting of this conversation in the heart of imperial Berlin is part of this shared past too: in the early twentieth century, Germany laid out plans to collaborate with the Ottoman Empire and build the Berlin–Baghdad railway, a

[33] See, for example, Heinz Kramer and Maurus Reinkowski, *Die Türkei und Europa: Eine wechselseitige Beziehungsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008).

crucial asset that would have enabled Germany to rival British and Russian influences in the region and create opportunities for the transportation of petroleum.[34] The Ottoman Empire then sided with Germany in the First World War.

It soon turns out that Asiadeh's and Hassa's cultural backgrounds have even more in common. Irritated that Hassa continually attempts to imagine her past life in Istanbul by drawing on Orientalist tropes that cast her in the role of an uncivilized barbarian, Asiadeh returns to a philological examination of his name. 'Es gibt ein Land Hessen und einen Namen Haß. Hassa ist barbarisch und nicht deutsch. Diese Endung auf "a" ist einfach sinnlos' ('There is a county Hessen, and a name Hass. Hassa is barbaric and not German at all. The ending "a" simply does not make sense'), she proclaims (p. 25/p. 27). This prompts another big revelation:

'Hassa ist eine gesetzlich genehmigte Abkürzung', sagte er. 'Früher hießen wir Hassanovic. Wir stammen nämlich aus Sarajewo in Bosnien, sind aber noch vor der Annexion nach Wien übersiedelt. Ich selbst bin in Wien geboren.'

Jetzt richtete sich Asiadeh auf. Entgeistert blickte sie den Arzt an. 'Aus Sarajewo?' sagte sie. 'Hassanovic? Verzeihen Sie — die Endung "vic" heißt doch soviel wie "Sohn", der Stamm muß Hassan lauten.'

'Ganz richtig', meinte Hassa harmlos. 'Der Stammvater wird irgendein Hassan gewesen sein.'

'Aber Hassan ist doch…', begann Asiadeh und verstummte, über die eigene Spitzfindigkeit erstaunt.

'Was ist denn?' staunte Hassa.

'Ich meine…', stotterte Asiadeh. 'Ich meine, daß doch Bosnien bis neunzehnhundertelf offiziell zur Türkei gehört hat, und Hassan ist ein muslimischer Name. Ein Enkel des Propheten hieß Hassan. […] Dann müssen Sie doch auch Muslim sein, nicht wahr?' […]

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[34] See, for example, Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin–Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power, 1898–1918* (London: Penguin, 2010).

'Kleine türkische Lady', lachte er. 'Wenn Kara-Mustafa Wien erobert hätte, oder wenn der Friede von San Stefano anders ausgefallen wäre, würde ich Ibrahim-Bei Hassanovic heißen und einen Turban tragen. Kara-Mustafa hat aber Wien nicht erobert, und so bin ich ein guter Österreicher geworden und heiße Dr. Alexander Hassa.' *(p. 25–26)*

'Hassa is an abbreviation, quite legitimate,' he said. 'Our name used to be Hassanovic, long ago, because our family originally came from Sarajevo in Bosnia, even before the annexation. I was born in Vienna myself.'

Now Asiadeh rose up. Completely dumbfounded, she looked at the doctor. 'From Sarajevo?' she said. 'Hassanovic — excuse me — the ending surely stands for 'son.' The root must be "Hassan."'

'That's right,' said Hassa innocently. 'Our first ancestor must have been some Hassan or other.'

'But Hassan is...' began Asiadeh, then stopped, astonished at her own perceptiveness.

'What is?' said the astonished Hassa.

'I mean,' stuttered Asiadeh, 'I mean... surely Bosnia was part of Turkey until 1911, and Hassan is a Muslim name. One of the prophet's grandsons was called Hassan. […] Well — then surely — you must be a Muslim too?' […]

'Little Turkish lady,' he said, laughing, 'if Kara Mustapha had conquered Vienna, or the Peace of San Stefano had turned out differently, my name would be Ibrahim-Bey-Hassanovic, and I would wear a turban. But Kara Mustapha did not conquer Vienna, so I have become a good Austrian, and my name is Dr. Alexander Hassa.' *(p. 27–28)*

What Asiadeh discovers thanks to her philological acumen ('Spitzfindigkeit') is that — to her utter astonishment — Hassa comes from a family of Bosnian Muslims. The Ottoman Empire conquered Bosnia in the fifteenth century and ruled it until 1878, when the Ottomans lost control of Bosnia after the Treaty of San Stefano. Bosnia officially became annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908 (not 1911, as Asiadeh has it), which is now known as the Bosnian Crisis, and seen as one of the events that led to the

outbreak of the First World War. Hassa's family — presumably his parents — moved to Vienna around the turn of the century, where they changed their name, language, nationality, and faith. Asiadeh realizes that, had they been a generation older, Hassa would have been her compatriot — and a member of a lower social class than she. They started out as a 'native' and a 'foreigner', an 'Easterner' and a 'Westerner'; now the picture has become much more complex.

This ambiguity is symbolically captured through Asiadeh's careful examination of individual vowel sounds on the novel's opening pages. She first puzzles over an 'i'-ending that corresponds to the ending of her own surname, with the word in question, 'bar' — 'Gesamtheit' ('totality') — contrasting with her own feeling of loss. This sentimental education in philology continues in unexpected ways outside the classroom. The 'a'-ending of her doctor's name leads Asiadeh to discover his identity as a child of Bosnian Muslims. Her own first name and surname both begin with 'a' too. But Hassa does not identify as a Bosnian Muslim: when Asiadeh joins him in his car, it has 'hinten am Schild neben der Nummer ein großes weißes "A"' ('a big white "A" next to the number plate') — for 'Austria', as Hassa explains proudly (p. 22/p. 23). The letter 'a' is used by Hassa as an indicator of cultural assimilation, while for Asiadeh it becomes an indicator of cultural difference.[35]

The outcome of Asiadeh's philological search for belonging is ambiguous. She challenges facile dichotomies of foreignness and nativity and forges a connection with Hassa, but a perception of difference remains to unsettle her. Throughout the novel, the dichotomy of 'native' and 'foreign' threatens to tip over into a discourse about a 'rational civilization' faced with 'irrational barbarians'. At the same time, even as it continually evokes conventional ways of representing the 'Orient' in European culture, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* pushes against them. This play with cultural tradition has many layers. Asiadeh has a significant literary precursor in Aziyadé, the titular heroine of a popular nineteenth-century novel by Pierre Loti, a French naval officer who travelled to the Ottoman Empire.[36] As Almas points out, Asiadeh's inherited name 'hints at the complex issues of authorship, language, and identity, turning the female

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[35] I am grateful to Tayiba Sulaiman for this last observation.

[36] Pierre Loti, *Aziyadé* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1879).

protagonist into a kaleidoscope of ambiguous filiations'.[37] She is not exactly right when she asserts that Asiadeh is an 'invented Turkish name', though: it comes from a Persian name, Azadeh, meaning 'free' or 'free-minded'.

In keeping with this significant etymology, and unlike Loti's Aziyadé, who lives in a harem and so more easily fits into the stereotype of a submissive Oriental lover, Said's Asiadeh is a much more complex character. A student in Berlin, she nevertheless misses her early life in a harem and is critical of many aspects of European modernity that she is now forced to experience first-hand, including social conventions around relationships between men and women. She abandons her studies to get married, seemingly without much regret, and does not express any curiosity about Atatürk's new Republic of Turkey, which sent aristocrats like her into exile, but began introducing many civil and political rights for women. At the same time, though, Asiadeh embraces her own agency and mobility, skilfully navigating life in big European metropoles, and at the end of the novel is excited to embark on a new adventure in New York.

This last revelation comes in Asiadeh's letter to her father, which constitutes the closing lines of the novel, otherwise narrated in the third person. This is significant: on the opening pages, Asiadeh quite literally loses her voice when studying philology, and it is only restored to her thanks to a treatment prescribed by her future husband, Dr Hassa. By the end of the novel, however, she has made the choice to divorce Hassa and marry Prince Abdulkerim — now Hollywood director John Rolland. It is this decision that she communicates to her father in the closing letter, finally allowed by the narrative to speak in the first person, in her own voice again. Yet the last two words of the novel (Asiadeh Rolland), and the fact that they are addressed to her father, emphatically show that Asiadeh asserts her independence by choosing to conform to patriarchal social norms, at least to some extent. In other words, she subverts traditional gender roles in some ways, while still submitting to them in others.

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[37] H. Esra Almas, '*The Girl from the Golden Horn*: Kurban Said/Lev Nussinbaum's Vision of Home and Exile in Interbellum Berlin', in *Spiritual Homelands: The Cultural Experience of Exile, Place and Displacement among Jews and Others*, ed. by Asher D. Biemann, Richard I. Cohen, and Sarah E. Wobick-Segev (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 183–204 (p. 194).

Could this simply be because this character was written by a male author? To better appreciate the complexity of this question, it is instructive to consider two of the rare reviews of the novel: one from 1938, the year in which *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* was first published, and one much more recent — from 2018. In 1938, the book was reviewed in a German literary magazine by Rosemarie von Jankó, who claimed that a 'begabte Dichterin' ('talented woman writer') who spent her youth 'im Land um das Goldene Horn' ('in the country surrounding the Golden Horn') was behind Kurban Said's pseudonym.[38] As explained below, this seems improbable, but what the review nevertheless indicates is that at least some contemporary readers saw the novel as reflective of a distinctly female perspective.

This alternative authorship is improbable even though the pseudonym Kurban Said was in fact registered by a woman, Elfriede von Ehrenfels-Bodmershof, an Austrian aristocrat whose distant relatives still hold the copyright. However, she likely registered the pseudonym under her name to help shield Nussimbaum, a friend of her and her husband, from antisemitic persecution. In his foreword to Kurt Desch's and S. Fisher's reissues in 1973 and 1975, Umar — by then Elfriede's ex-husband — identified the author as an Azeri man he met in Vienna before the Second World War, buried in Positano.[39] Nussimbaum's authorship is also indicated by the fact that significant elements of the book's plot show close parallels with his own life experiences.

Another possibility is floated on the dustjacket of the English translation of the novel: 'it is believed that Kurban Said was a confected name representing the writing of one Essad Bey and his collaboration with an Austrian countess, the Baroness Elfriede Ehrenfels'.[40] In a letter from 1974, the Baroness asserted that 'Kurban Said ein Schriftstellername des aus Baku stammenden Muhammed Essad-bey war, mit dem ich an der Veröffentlichung seines Romanes *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* im Jahre 1938 in Wien zusammengearbeitet habe' ('Kurban Said was a pen name of Muhammed Essad-bey from Baku, with whom

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[38] Rosemarie von Jankó, '*Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*. Roman. Von Kurban Said', *Die Literatur. Monatsschrift für Literaturfreunde*, 41.4 (1939), 245–46 (p. 246).

[39] Ehrenfels, p. 5.

[40] Said, *The Girl from the Golden Horn*.

I collaborated on the publication of his novel *The Girl from the Golden Horn* in 1938 in Vienna').[41] A creative collaboration would not have been impossible, especially given that women's creative activity was often belittled and went undocumented. However, Ehrenfels-Bodmershof does not appear to have published any other literary works, nor spent her youth in Ottoman Turkey, and the phrasing of her letter ('mit dem ich an der Veröffentlichung seines Romanes […] zusammengearbeitet habe') is consistent with her role in the registration of the pseudonym.

Not much is known about Rosemarie von Jankó either, apart from more credits as a book reviewer, journalist, and a literary translator from English and French — and the fact that she lived in Vienna, but was born in Ottoman Turkey.[42] The precise meaning and broader significance of her review remains unclear. According to Hans-Jürgen Maurer, she might have simply reproduced paratextual information provided in some contemporary editions of Kurban Said's novels.[43]

Eighty years after Jankó's review with its tantalizing claim of female authorship, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* was read by a group called the Istanbook Feminist Book Club. As can be gathered from an informal report published online by one of the members, the five women who attended the in-person meeting in Istanbul — some 'from the West' and some 'from the East' — greatly enjoyed it. The blog's author dubbed the novel her 'biggest guilty pleasure read of the year' and wrote of the group's appreciation of Asiadeh's

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[41] Quoted in Kurban Said, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* (Frankfurt am Main: H. J. Maurer, 2021), p. 256. See also Hans Jürgen-Maurer, 'Der Roman *Ali und Nino* und sein Autor "Kurban Said": Neue Erkenntnisse zur Publikationsgeschichte des Romans und zum Schicksal seines Autors', in *Neue Wege der Germanistik: Literatur- und Kulturtransfer zwischen Europa und dem Kaukasus*, ed. by Sevinj Rzayeva, Sieglinde Hartmann, and Leyla Cosan (Frankfurt am Main: H. J. Maurer, 2023), pp. 203–12.

[42] Karin Gradwohl-Schlacher, 'Jankó, Rosemarie von', in *Literatur in Österreich 1938–1945. Handbuch eines literarischen Systems. Band 4: Wien*, ed. by Uwe Baur and Karin Gradwohl-Schlacher (Vienna: Böhlau, 2018), pp. 368–70.

[43] Personal correspondence, 9 June 2023.

agency.[44] This despite, one assumes, sexist elements of the narrative frame, such as a long passage of Orientalist description of Asiadeh as seen through Hassa's gaze after one of their conversations quoted above — or the very fact that the third-person narrator almost always refers to Asiadeh by her given name, while Hassa is called by his surname.

As we have seen, the framing of Asiadeh's and Hassa's contrasting occupations — student of Oriental philology and medical doctor — forms part of this stereotypical dichotomy. The professions of other characters in the novel are telling in other ways. In his exile in Berlin, Asiadeh's aristocratic father becomes a carpet seller — a pattern still recognizable today, whereby an upper-class immigrant is forced to take up what he considers a menial job in his new country. But there is a twist to this narrative: the objects Achmed-Pascha sells, Oriental rugs, are deeply symbolic. These highly intricate artistic objects are both familiar and unfamiliar to Europeans: while Achmed-Pascha's customers seem entirely ignorant of their value and meaning, which frustrates him no end, in fact Oriental rugs have long been a source of fascination and admiration in European art, where they appear prominently displayed in many paintings, such as Petrus Christus' 'The Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Francis' (1457). As throughout the novel, the 'West' and the 'East' turn out to be both disconnected and connected in complex ways at the same time.

'Wie ein Fremdkörper': An Author in Search of Readers

The occupation of Abdulkerim, the Turkish crown prince who Asiadeh had hoped to marry before her exile, is also highly significant. Even though she initially idealizes him as a repository of the lost Ottoman world, it soon turns out that he is now known as John Rolland and works as a successful director in Hollywood, making adventure films set in a fantastical Orient. His 'shed[ding of] one identity in favor of a more convenient one, the willingness to adapt to his surroundings, and yet feed from his dreamy past when

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[44] Karen, 'The Girl from the Golden Horn', *Empty Nest Expat*, 11 November 2018 <http://empty-nest-expat.blogspot.com/2018/11/the-girl-from-golden-horn.html> [accessed 23 September 2022].

crafting new identities, albeit fictional ones, is not unlike that of Nussinbaum himself', Almas points out.[45] But the author bestowed parts of his identity on Asiadeh too: like him, she is a young exile in Weimar Germany, who studies Oriental philology before moving to Vienna. For a time, Nussimbaum even shared her excitement about America, as well as the notoriety of her Hollywood husband: in the early 1930s, he married Erika Loewendahl, a daughter of a fantastically wealthy shoe magnate, and frequently travelled to New York with her. They were treated like celebrities, complete with extensive press coverage. Their divorce, a year before the publication of *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*, also aroused great interest in the press.[46]

Given this notoriety, the popularity of Nussimbaum's writing in the Weimar era, and the renewed interest in *Ali und Nino* in recent decades, it is striking how little impact Said's second novel has had. It is absent from German- and English-language literary histories, even those focussed on transcultural and Orientalist narratives, and remains largely unknown to readers in Germany, Turkey, and beyond.[47] Even Tom Reiss, the single most influential mediator of Nussimbaum's life and work, only mentions *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* in passing. His biography substantially drew on the extensive research undertaken by the late Gerhard Höpp; however, Höpp was a historian, not a literary scholar, and did not write about the novel in any detail either.[48] In 2008, a plaque commemorating Essad Bey was placed on Fasanenstraße 72, where he used to live — directly opposite what is now Literaturhaus Berlin. Its archivist wrote a pamphlet about the

[45] Almas, p. 194.

[46] See Reiss, p. 276.

[47] On Turkish readership, see Almas, p. 189.

[48] I am nevertheless grateful to Thomas Ripper and Alisher Karabaev from the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient for allowing me to access to Gerhard Höpp's research archive and other related collections. For an overview of this research archive, see Gerhard Hoffmann, *Erfolgreicher Autor und gescheiterter Phantast: Essad Bey in der Recherche von Gerhard Höpp* (Leipzig, 2021).

city's role in Nussimbaum/Bey's life, but *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* is only mentioned in passing: its significance as an important and rare source on little-known facets of Weimar Berlin is not explored.[49]

The most substantial and analytical interpretation of the novel is offered in a recent essay by H. Esra Almas, a scholar of Turkish literature at Bilkent University, who frames Istanbul as a 'bridge' between Nussimbaum and Erich Auerbach, drawing on the latter's writings completed during his exile there, especially his famous *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (*Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 1946).[50] An earlier essay by Mahmut Karakuş, a scholar of German literature at Istanbul University, presents a more introductory reading of the novel, as indicated in its subtitle: 'die persönliche Begegnung als Medium der Konfliktaustragung zwischen Orient und Okzident' ('personal encounter as a medium for staging the conflict between the Orient and the Occident').[51] Useful material is provided in the latest German reissue of *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*: a short, introductory essay by Behrang Samsami, supplemented by Hans-Jürgen Maurer's ongoing biographical investigation.[52] Otherwise the novel has only been occasionally discussed in passing, as well as in a small number of master's theses in Germany, Austria,

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[49] Sebastian Januszewski, *Essad Bey in Berlin (1921–1933)* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2017).

[50] Almas.

[51] Mahmut Karakus, '*Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* oder die persönliche Begegnung als Medium der Konfliktaustragung zwischen Orient und Okzident', in *Kommunikation und Konflikt: Kulturkonzepte in der interkulturellen Germanistik*, ed. by Ernest W. B. Hess-Lüttich (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 229–42.

[52] Behrang Samsami, 'Herausgesprungen aus Tausendundeiner Nacht', in Kurban Said, *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* (Frankfurt am Main: H. J. Maurer, 2021), pp. 239–51. See also Behrang Samsami, '"Kann sie glücklich sein mit einem Ungläubigen?" Interkulturelle kontra duo-subjektive Liebe und Ehe als Integrations- und Bewältigungsstrategie in Kurban Saids frühem Migrationsroman *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* (1938)', in *Das riskante Projekt. Die Moderne und ihre Bewältigung*, ed. by Simon Huber, Behrang Samsami, Ines Schubert, and Walter Delabar (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2011), pp. 157–85.

and Turkey, which are mainly restricted to summaries and paraphrases of the plot and do not offer sustained literary-critical analysis.

This dearth of attention on the part of readers and scholars alike, especially compared to the comparative popularity of *Ali und Nino*, is puzzling given that the two novels are similar in many ways. Both their plots are driven by the aftermath of the First World War in Turkey and the Caucasus, feature a doomed relationship between a young man and a young woman from different cultural backgrounds, and move across a series of evocatively described settings with an epic sweep. Even though *Ali und Nino* is narrated in the first person by the titular Ali, whereas *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* has a third-person narrator, both are written in a similar narrative style — direct, dynamic, and constantly moving from sarcasm to melodrama, and back.

Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn has sometimes been described as aesthetically less compelling than *Ali und Nino* — or, to put it more pointedly, written off as kitschy drivel.[53] As the present article has sought to demonstrate, however, Nussimbaum/Said in fact playfully engages with the conventions of what is known in German as 'Trivialliteratur' ('light' or 'popular' literature) — it is no coincidence that one of the main characters is a Hollywood director — to construct an original novel of irreducible complexity. But this complexity is easy to miss, especially when one encounters the novel in its only existing English translation, with the naked, dark-haired woman on the cover and the opening scene of a philological seminar cut almost by half. Such editorial decisions were presumably made to market *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* more easily in the United States by making it conform to well-established generic conventions, but they simplify and de-intellectualize both the female protagonist and the novel as a whole.

Arguably what truly distinguishes *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen* from *Ali und Nino* is that it is set largely in Germany and Austria, rather than the Caucasus. For Western readers, the transcultural encounters and tensions it portrays thus take place not safely 'away', on the much-mythologized border between Europe

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[53] See, for example, anonymous review in *Kirkus Review*, 1 October 2001 <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/kurban-said/the-girl-from-the-golden-horn/> [accessed 23 September 2022].

and Asia — whether imagined as the titular Golden Horn or the Caucasus — but in Berlin and Vienna, the traditional imperial centres of the German universe. As Behrang Samsami writes, in comparison to *Ali und Nino*, 'eine schnelle Zuordnung von Kurban Saids zweitem Roman [ist] schwieriger' ('Kurban Said's second novel is more difficult to classify'); 'das Buch wirkt für seine Zeit einfach zu modern' ('the book seems simply too modern for its time'). This 'früher Migrationsroman' ('early novel of migration'), as he calls it, seems 'wie ein Fremdkörper von seiner eigenen Epoche abgestoßen zu werden' ('pushed out of its own era like a foreign body').[54]

And not just his own epoch. Jenia Graman's English translation was published in 2001 by Overlook Press, an independent publisher based in New York, founded as 'a home for distinguished books that had been "overlooked" by larger houses'.[55] Graman did not have a strong platform as a translator, since her only other published translation was *Ali und Nino* (1970). The timing of the publication of her second translation could have hardly been more unfortunate: it appeared mere weeks after the September 11 attacks. Traumatized by this act of terrorism, the literary world in the United States became particularly inhospitable towards any positive portrayals of Islam and Muslims, especially as part of Western cultural tradition. Unsurprisingly, reviews were few and far between, and generally mixed or entirely negative.[56]

Integrating Nussimbaum into German literary history poses even more difficulties. Not only was he an immigrant Muslim convert, but also a Jewish author who supported Hitler, even if Nazi policies ended his

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[54] Samsami, 'Herausgesprungen aus Tausendundeiner Nacht', p. 239.

[55] Jeff Harman, *Guide to Book Publishers, Editors & Literary Agents 2007* (Stockbridge: Three Dog Press, 2006), p. 294.

[56] See especially negative reviews by Carolyn See, *The Washington Post*, 9 November 2001 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/11/09/instanbull/41fd9fb5-58b4-4295-a83e-746b1ce20c6d> [accessed 23 September 2022] and Julie Gray, *The New York Times*, 6 January 2002 <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/06/books/books-in-brief-fiction-poetry-866270.html> [accessed 23 September 2022].

writing career in Germany and sent him into another exile, while his father died in a concentration camp.[57] It is thus unsurprising that, as Almas put it, 'his life has eclipsed his work'.[58] Her alternative is to praise *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn* as a 'manifesto' of Nussimbaum's 'staunch belief in the possibility of self-orientation in a world without hinges, as well as his swan's song to a world of multiple affinities'.[59] The interpretation developed in the present article is more ambiguous. Said's intercultural love story, set in 1928 but published in 1938, contains no references to the Nazi destruction of Berlin and Vienna's cultural diversity. Yet Nussimbaum himself lived a difficult and multifaceted life, aspects of which are reflected in his writing, including *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*. Neither pulp fiction nor a hopeful manifesto for interwar cosmopolitanism, this odd book was urgently relevant and strangely misplaced whenever and wherever it was published; unusually well informed about various cultures and multidimensional in its portrayal of the female protagonist, it nevertheless draws its narrative energy from simplistic dichotomies, be it 'East' and 'West', or masculinity and femininity; deceptively simple, it is in fact a sophisticated response to the collapse of the established political order in the aftermath the First World War, and a unique testament to Christian-Jewish-Muslim connections in interwar Berlin and Vienna; it is restless, funny, gleefully kitschy, and yet self-consciously literary and pregnant with meaning.

All Souls College, University of Oxford; Karolina Watroba; Karolina Watroba, All Souls College, OX1 4AL Oxford; karolina.watroba@all-souls.ox.ac.uk

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[57] See Reiss, p. 340.

[58] Almas, p. 183.

[59] Almas, p. 197.

attended her lecture and seminar series 'World Literature in Weimar Germany: Texts, Authors, Institutions' at the University of Oxford in 2023 for a fruitful discussion of *Das Mädchen vom Goldenen Horn*.