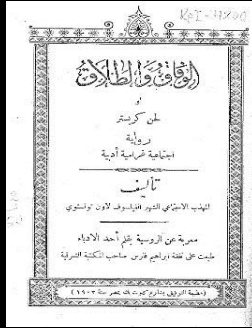
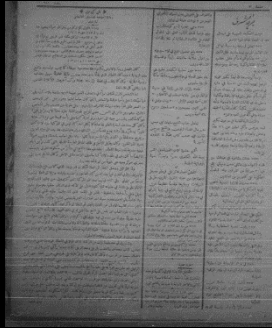
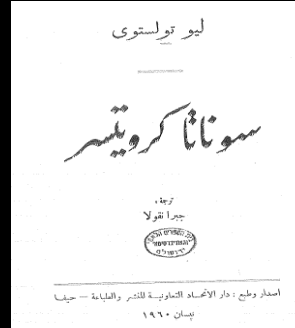


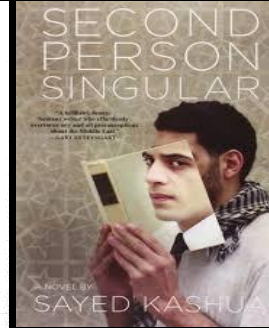
1902-4



1960



2010



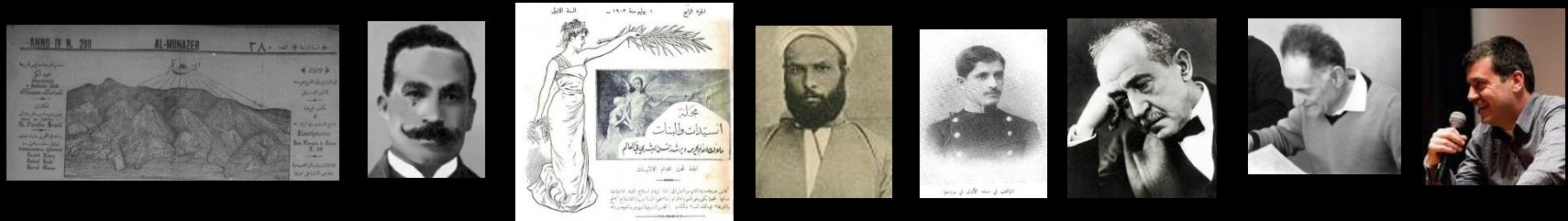
Arab/ic Rewritings of Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*

Margaret Litvin

Boston University

EUME/Alexander von Humboldt Fellow (2017-8)

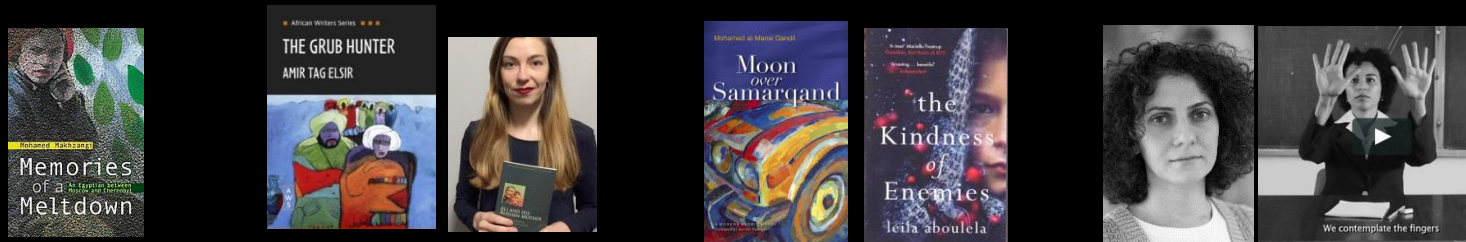
1. Traveling **Texts**: Tolstoy and his Arab Readers



2. Traveling **People**: Unplanned Solidarities in the Moscow Dorms



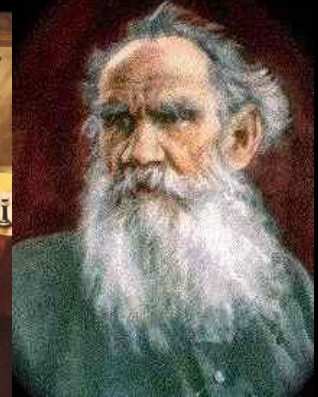
3. Traveling **Fantasies**: How post-1990 Arab artists have **re-imagined** Arab-Russian and Arab-Soviet ties



Today, Part I: Tolstoy's Arab Readers and *The Kreutzer Sonata*

Man, Woman, Society, & God

Nahda journalism & the "Woman Question"



1889

How to be Palestinian-Israeli?



2010



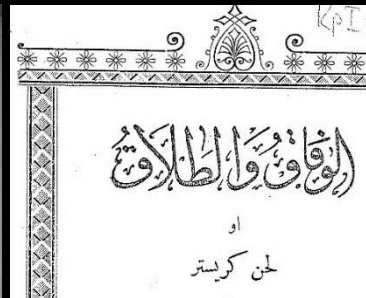
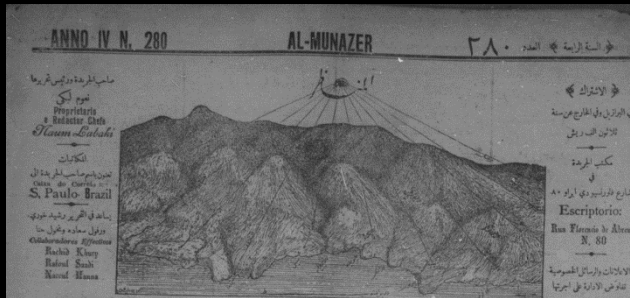
1960

1902

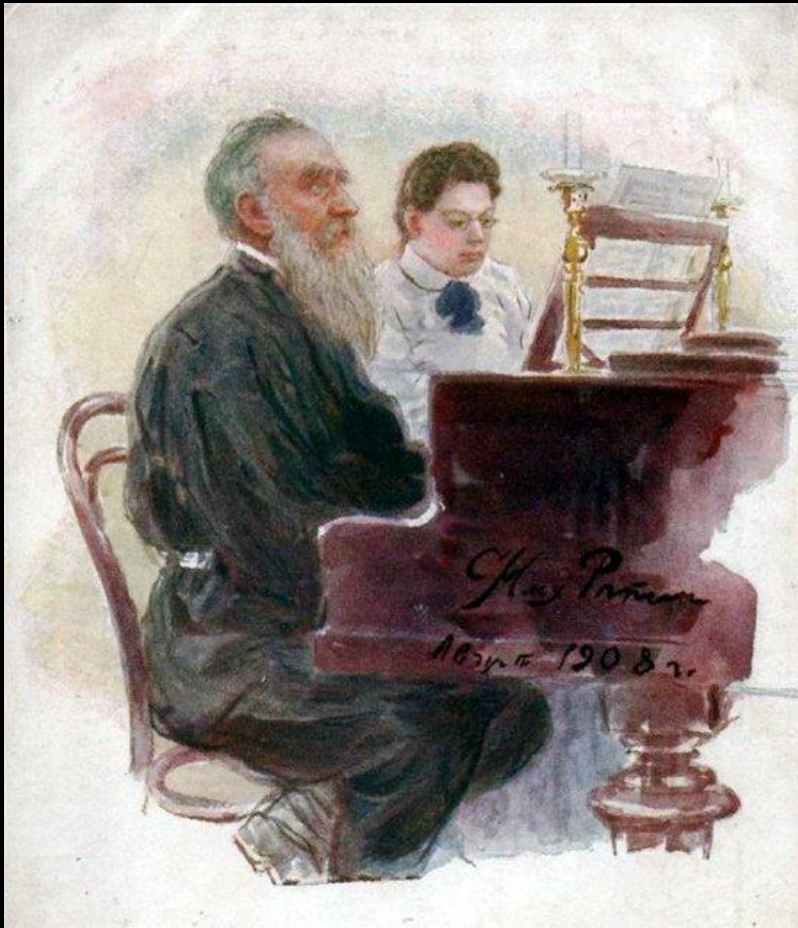
QUESTIONS:

- Why was this bizarre novella so *fertile*?
- Tolstoy died in **1910**. What literary and polemical purposes did he serve in **1902-3**, **1960**, and **2010**?
- Is "the Arab Tolstoy" path-dependent?

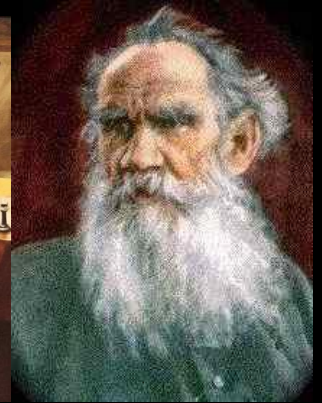
1903



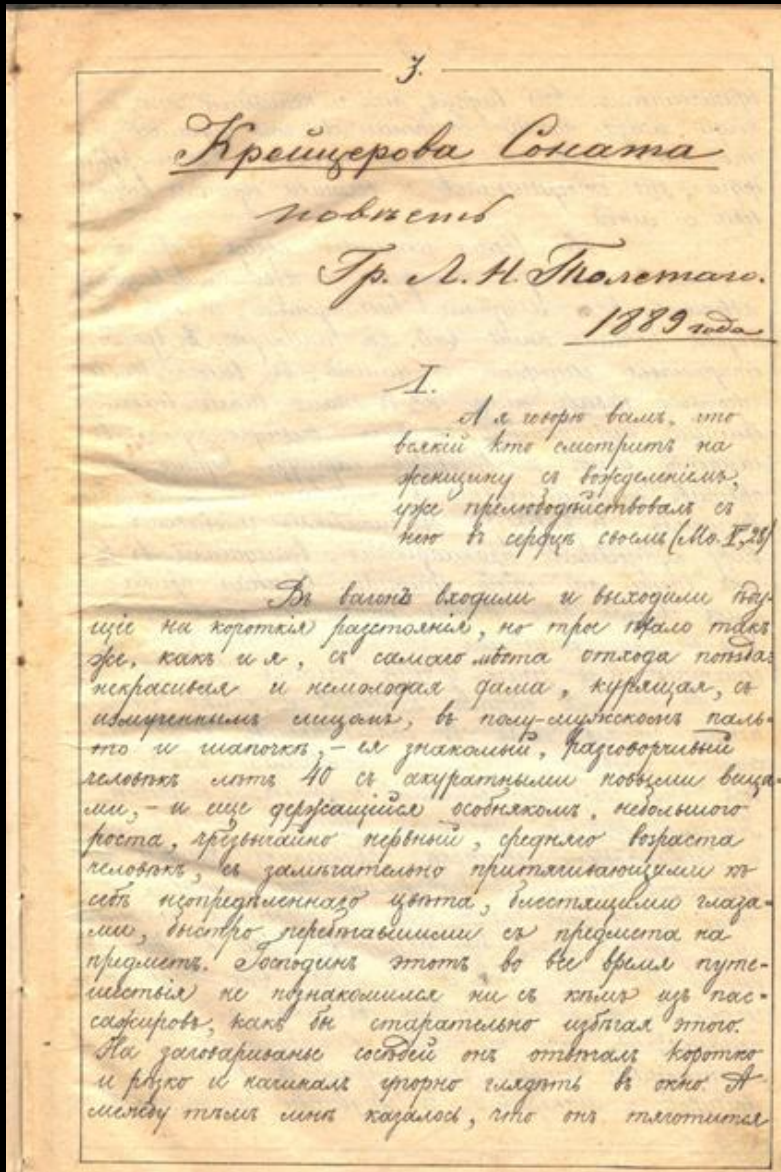
1. Tolstoy 1828-1910



Man, Woman, Society, & God



1889

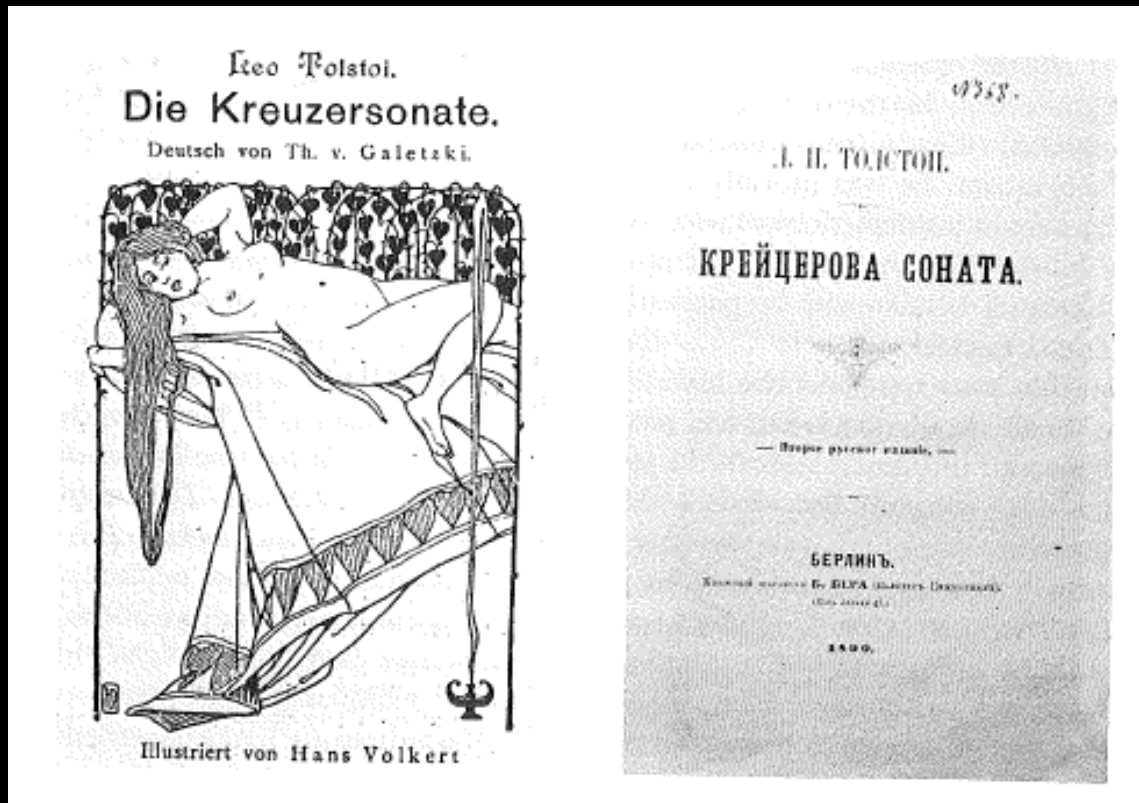


Clandestine hectograph edition (1889)
circulated before print publication in 1890
(British Library)

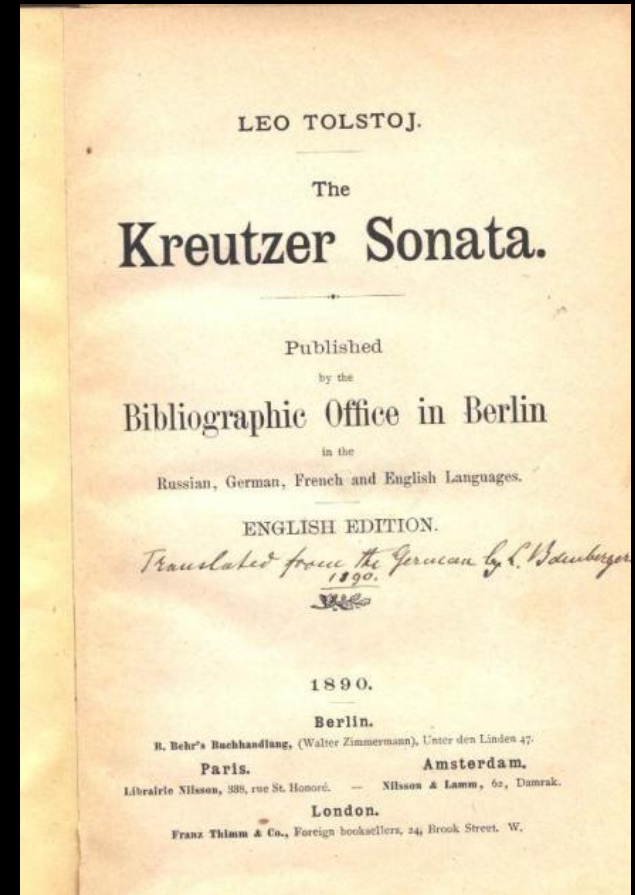
An irrepressible text:
both *tamizdat* and
samizdat



German translations and reprints (smuggled in!)



Source: Peter Ulf Møller, *Postlude to The Kreutzer Sonata: Tolstoj and the Debate on Sexual Morality in Russian Literature in the 1890s* (Brill, 1988)



English edition published in Berlin in 1890.

©The British Library Board

Too “Oriental” for the Victorians!

W.T. Stead, British publisher (1890):

In his preface Stead gave as his most serious objection to the work the fact that it reflected an Eastern rather than a Western way of thought: “/.../ while Count Tolstoj is in one sense a Puritan of the Puritans, he is not a Westerner. His philosophy, his aspirations are not Occidental, but Oriental. The spirit that breathes in ‘The Kreutzer Sonata’ is not Christian so much as Buddhist”³⁸. It was of course the problem of the extinction of the human race—the final consequence of Tolstoj’s sexual morality—that had suggested this idea to Stead. Stead could not allow such an alien philosophy simply to speak for itself: “In his pessimistic Orientalism he sees nothing but the purely animal, carnal, brutal, and, in his own words, ‘hoggish’, in passionate love. Hence I cannot reproduce, as I had intended doing, his latest story. It is not only that his expressions are often coarse and brutal, but because I profoundly dissent from the whole strain and tendency of his teachings. This road is not the way of life. It is rather the pathway that leadeth downwards to death”³⁹. Tolstoj’s tale was, however, not entirely devoid of positive features in Stead’s eyes. Tolstoj’s protest against carnal lust and double morality were especially worthy of recognition.

In the USA, too: a censored sensation

July 1890: U.S. Postmaster General rules *The Kreutzer Sonata* is “indecent” and bans distribution by mail.

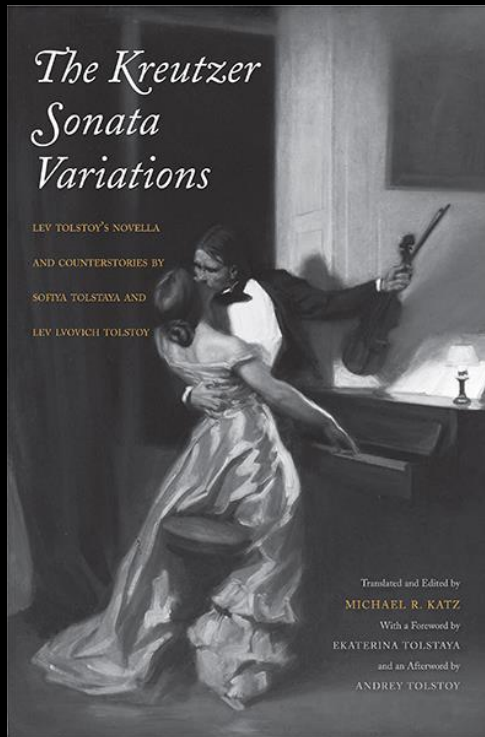
Aug 1 and 2: *New York Times* reports on the ban.

Then:

“In Buffalo, Montreal, Boston, New York – in all of the large towns the salesmen stood on the street corners with enormous baskets filled with your books, and all day long they scarcely had time to deal with one customer before the next was ready.”

–An Iowa bank secretary in a letter to Tolstoy

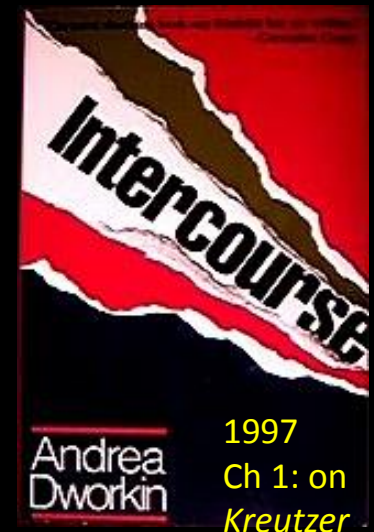
Counternovels, adaptations, protest



Joshua Bell plays Beethoven's sonata with Yuja Wang ([watch it!](#))

Joseph Conrad on *Kreutzer* :

“An **obvious degenerate** not worth looking at twice... is presented as a sympathetic victim of some sort of sacred truth living within him.”



Shadowed by Europe... and Africa

He had **almond-shaped, damp eyes, reddish smiling lips**, a little waxed mustache, the latest, fashionable hairstyle, and a commonly pretty face, one that women call ‘not bad looking’; his build was weak, though not unsightly, and he had **particularly developed buttocks, like a woman’s, or as Hottentots are said to possess. They’re also said to be musical.** He wore high-buttoned shoes of that particular Parisian flavor, bright-colored neckties, and other **fads that foreigners adopt in Paris**, which, by their novelty, always have an impact on women.

Misogyny or feminist critique?

“Just like the **Jews** use their financial power to get **payback for their oppression** – that’s exactly what **women** do. ‘Ah, you want us to be merely merchants; fine, as merchants we will rule over you.’ ‘**Ah, you want us to be mere sexual objects; fine, as sexual objects we will enslave you.**’ Woman is deprived of rights, not because she cannot vote or be a judge – these activities do not constitute rights – but in the lack of equality in sexual relations with the man, **having the right to use a man** or abstain from him as she wishes, **to freely choose a man** rather than be chosen. You say this is grotesque. Fine. Then the man should not have those rights either.”

Tiny recognition? redemption?

“For the first time I forgot all about myself, my rights, my pride, and **for the first time I saw in her a human being**. Everything that had offended me seemed so insignificant—all my jealousy; what I’d done seemed so significant that I wanted to press my face to her hand and say ‘Forgive me!’ but I dared not.”

“I began to understand only then, when I saw her lying in her coffin...” He sobbed, but continued hastily without delay: “Only when I saw her dead face did I understand all that I’d done. I understood that I, I had killed her; **it was my fault that she who was once alive, moving, and warm, was now motionless, waxen, and cold; and it would be absolutely impossible to remedy—never, nowhere, nowhow!**”

صاحب المطبعة ورئيس تحريرها

نعوم لكي

Proprietario e Redactor Chefe
Naum Labaki

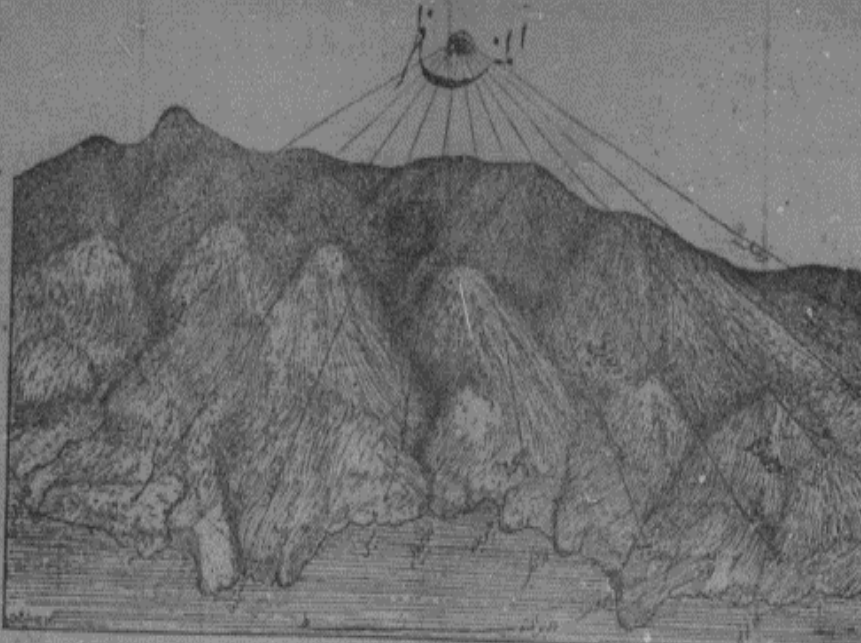
المكاتبان

نعوم باسم صاحب المطبعة الى
Caixa do Correio
S. Paulo - Brazil

يساعد في التحرير رشيد نخوي

ورفول سعاده ونعمول حنا
Colaboradores Effectivos

Rachid Khury
Rafoul Saadi
Nawal Hanna



في الاشتراك

في البرازيل وفي الخارج عن سنة

ثلاثون الف وريش

مكتب المطبعة

في

شارع فلورسيو دي اروا ٨٠

Escriptorio:

Rua Floriano de Alencar
N. 80

الاعلانات والرسائل المصنوعة
تفاوض الادارة على امرتها

KpI-4200

الرفاق والاطلاق

او

لحن كريستر

رواية

اجتماعية غرامية أدبية

تأليف

المهذب الاجتماعي الشهير الفيلسوف لاون تولستوي

معربة عن الروسية بقلم أحد الادباء

طبعت على نفقة ابراهيم فارس صاحب المكتبة الشرقية

(مطبعة التوفيق بشارع كلوت بك بمصر سنة ١٩٠٣)

2. *Kreutzer* comes into Arabic (1902-4)

Tolstoy in Arabic: early translations

- 1902** *Kreutzer Sonata* (trans. Riful Sa`dah, in Brazil)
- 1903** *What is Religion?* (Riful Sa`adah, Cairo) [other tracts also]
- 1904** *Kreutzer Sonata* (trans. Qubayn, Cairo)
- 1904 (or 1901?)** Qubayn's *Madhhab Tulstuy (Teachings of Tolstoy)*
- 1908** *Al-Ba`th (Resurrection); Prisoner of the Caucasus* (Cairo)
- 1909** *Power of Darkness* (Qubayn, Cairo)
-
- 1912** *Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad* (Qubayn, Cairo)
- 1913** *Anna Karenina* (Khalil Baydas, serialized in *al-Nafa'is*, Haifa)
- 1915** *Family Happiness* (Bebbawi Ghali al-Duwayri)
- 1922** popular & children's tales (Anton Ballan)
- 1925** *Marriage and Love* (الزواج والحب) in *al-ikha'a*
- 1940s** Two more *Anna Karenina* versions; *Confession*
- 1953** *War and Peace* (Baydas' son Emile finally translates it)

Letter from Ramzia Awafini (1904)

Многоуважаемый Лев Николаевич!

Вам покажется очень странным этот незнакомый почерк ... я родом арабка из Сирии, из города Дамаска, по имени Рамза Ававини. Окончила курс в Московском филаретовском Епархиархиальном училище и теперь бернулась обратно на родину...

Простите меня за смелость к Вам обращения и не откажите в ничтожной для вас посылки Вашего дорогого для **час портрета для вмещения его в хороших и любящих Вас домах**, а также в нуждающихся газетах и журналах...

Respected Lev Nikolaevich!

This unfamiliar handwriting will seem strange to You, but let me immediately acquaint you with it.

By birth I am an Arab woman from Syria, from Damascus, named Ramza Avavini (رمزية عويفني). I graduated from the Filaretov Eparchial Institute in Moscow and have now returned home...

Please forgive me for my temerity in addressing You and do not refuse the favor, trivial for You, of sending what would be very valuable to us: **a portrait of Yourself, for display in decent homes that love You**, as well as in newspapers and magazines.

Letter from Muhammad Abduh (1904)

“To the great wise man
Monsieur Tolstoy:

You are known to us in
spirit if not in person. The
light of your thought has
illuminated us, and the
suns of your ideas have
risen in our skies, drawing
the souls of intelligent
people close to yours.”

أيها الحكيم الجليل، موسيو
تولستوي:

لم نحظ بمعرفة شخصك، ولكننا
لم نحرم التعارف بروحك،
سطع علينا نور من أفكارك،
وأشرقت في آفاقنا شمس من
آرائك، ألفت بين نفوس العقلاء
ونفسك.

Tolstoy's radiant self-image

“A friend came and informed Tolstoy of his enemies' plots and accusations against him. He smiled, and took the friend by the hand and led him outside the house. It was noon.

Tolstoy said to him, pointing to the sun: “Do you see this great celestial body shining in the sky over our heads, not obscured from us by anything?”

“I see it.”

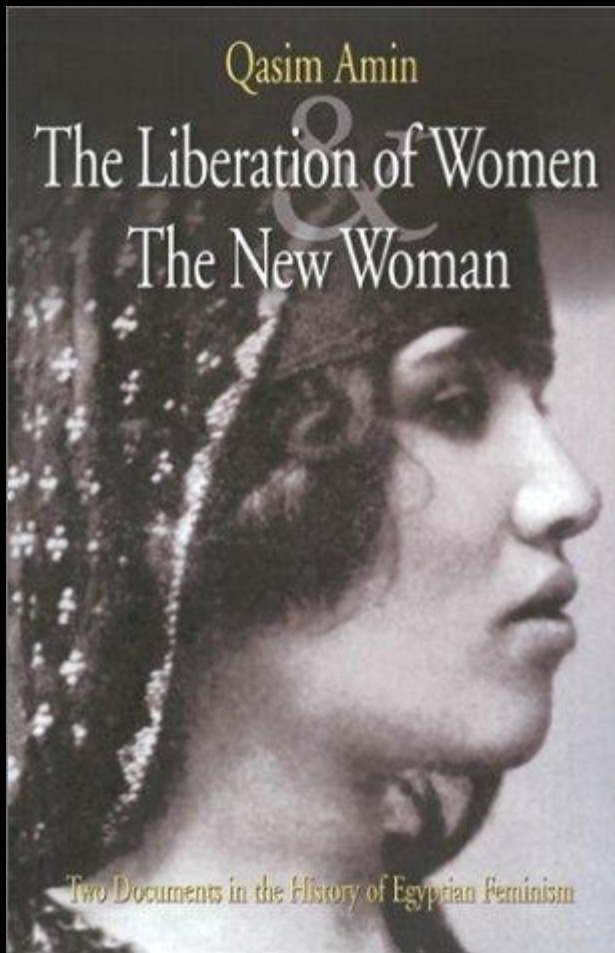
“Can you see it well?”

“No. The strong rays keep me from looking straight at it.”

The philosopher said to him: “**That's how truth appears, clear and bright, but people don't dare to face it because it hurts.** It's the same with my thoughts and sayings: they are clear truths, and **people resist them just because they know they are true** and yet are incapable of saying them to anyone.”

– Rafoul Saadi's 1902-3 introduction to *Kreutzer*, quoted by Salim Qubayn, 1904

Nahda feminism circa 1900

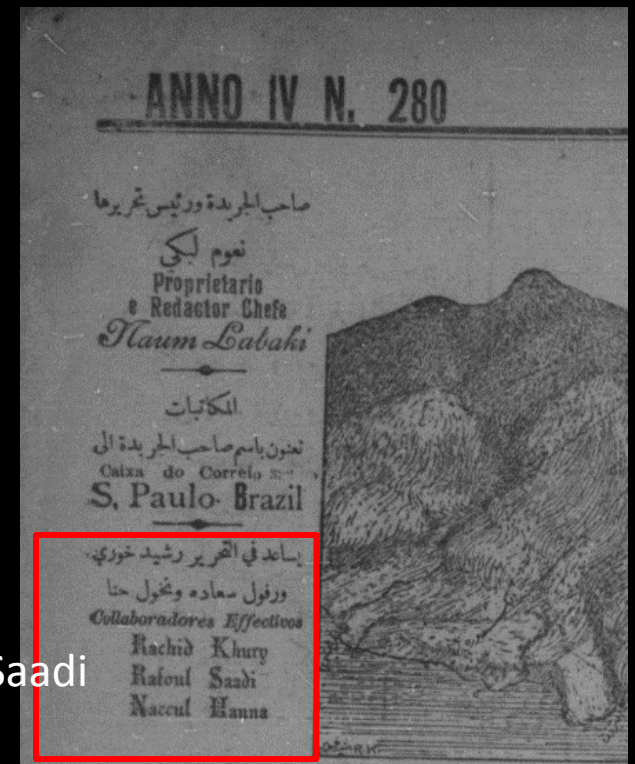
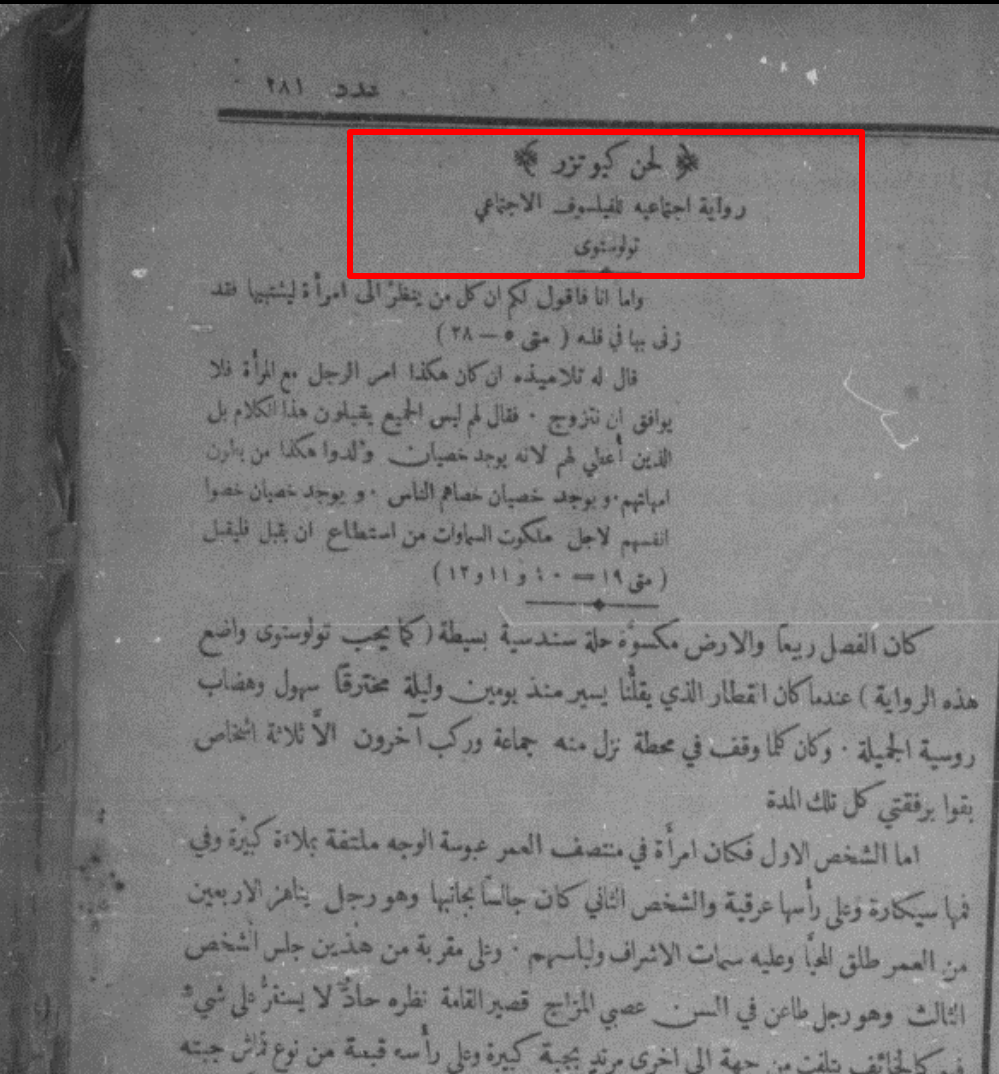


“A man's decision to imprison his wife contradicts the freedom which is the woman's natural right.”

"It is impossible to be successful men if they do not have mothers capable of raising them to be successful."

São Paulo, Brazil, April 1902

The Kreutzer Melody
A Social Novel by the Social Philosopher
Tolstoy



Rafoul Saadi

S-PAULO Terca Feira 22 de abril de 1902

ماهوالدين

✽ للفيلسوف الكونت ليون تولستوي ✽



معربة بقلم رفول افندي سعادته



نُشرت تباعاً في جريدة المناظر

١٩٠٣



طُبعت في المطبعة الشرقية



والغ

في

دوا

بن وا

ر بالا

هذا المج

لا يتمس

ع الحقيق

Tolstoy's Pozdnyshev never said:

“For the true purpose of marriage is not for a man to make a woman into the object of his lust or treat her as the image that he desires every time he sees it, but for the man to find in the **woman a companion and sincere helpmeet, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh**. As for the young man of our day, he rarely marries except out of lechery and rarely looks at a woman but to desire her, and that is why we see him choose a woman for her temporary external beauty and rarely **look at her manners, her modesty, or her virtue.**”

Rafoul Saadi in *Al-Munazir* 303 (June 28, 1902), p. 3, also in his intro, quoted in *Sayyidat wa Banat* (July 1903). Also in Qub`ayn's 1904 text, quoted p. 11 (intro) and plagiarized p. 65.

No Christian redemption here!

Saadi's likely French source

Je l'ai tuée avant de l'avoir connue, j'ai tué *la* femme quand, la première fois, j'ai goûté la volupté sans amour, et c'est *alors* que j'ai tué *ma* femme. **Oui, monsieur, c'est seulement après avoir souffert, après m'être torturé, que j'ai compris la racine des choses, que j'ai compris mon crime.**

...

— Qu'est-ce que vous entendez par la «véritable» question des droits de la femme ?

— La question de ce qu'est cet être spécial, organisé autrement que l'homme, et comment cet être et l'homme doivent envisager la femme...

Saadi's text

My wife died morally (*adabiyyan*) before she died naturally, since we cut the tie of love.

How much I endured, how I suffered until the fateful hour came - the hour of revenge. [!!!]

"I plunged my dagger into her breast and killed her, a final natural death, and her spirit flew to its eternal place... and my experience is a good example for all families."

Alexandria, Egypt-based journal
Al-Sayyidat wa-l-Banat (Ladies and Girls), written and published by
Rose Antun, 1903-6

Topics: Successful women of the
world; clothing reforms for
women; household advice.

Published excerpts from and
comments on Tolstoy's "women's
novel" *The Kreutzer Sonata* (in
Rufal Sa`adah's translation) in
July 1903 (1.4)

الجزء الرابع ١ يوليو سنة ١٩٠٣ - السنة الاولى



مجلة
السيدات والبنات
ماونه انترم بريس ويرث انسل بشري في العالم

الجنة تحت اقدام الامهات

نقل درجة مدنية الامن من النظر الى
تساعها - فحينئذ يكون علو اقدم
والارتقاء فهناك النساء ما لكات
اذا اردتم اصلاح الهيئة الاجتماعية
فاصلحوا النساء وبنها الاصلاح يطلع
الجنس البشري لانهم مربياته ومدرباته

اصلاح ملابس السيدات

(تحسين الصحة واقتصاد الوقت والمال)

مشروع جديد - بشري للرجال

اخذت السيدات الاوربيات يهتمن بمسألة من اهم المسائل وهي
اصلاح ملابسهن « قالت مدام دي بروتل الكاتبة الفرنسية المشهورة
ان مشداتنا تضغط على المعدة والكبد والقلب والرئتين . وذيولنا تكس

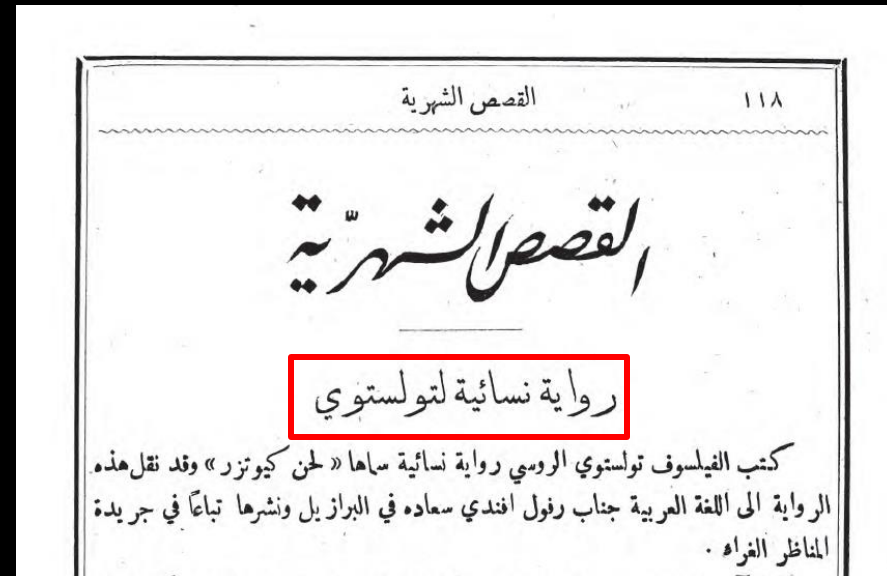
Sayyidat wa Banat, July 1903

Some of Tolstoy's views are noble, while others "are best dispensed with, for they oppose women's liberty and, although Tolstoy doesn't call for the hijab, give men absolute power over women. And **in an age and social condition like ours, if we make women slaves to men we will destroy the social fabric, for men have not yet reached the stage of perfection and purity Tolstoy requires**, to build their rule on gentleness and affection rather than hard power."

"When men become as Tolstoy wants them to be, and the current situation changes, only then can woman bear this heavy burden, i.e., she can follow the man like a shadow, lacking all freedom and independence without him. So the solution to this problem is in the hands of the men, not the ladies." (124)

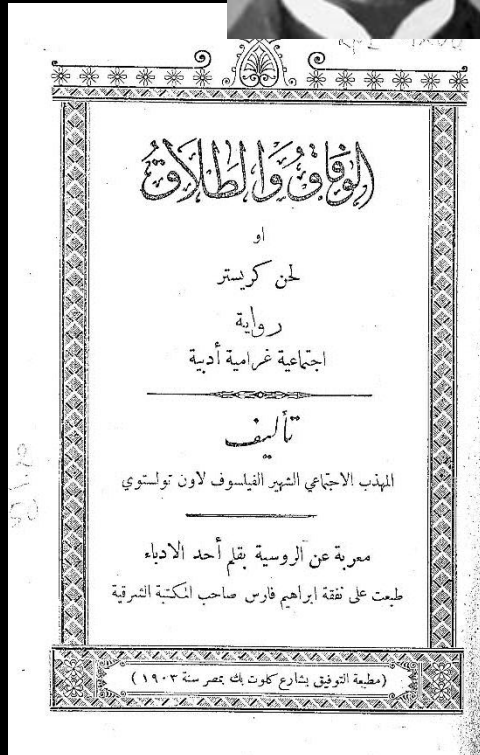


Rose Antun Haddad (1882-1955)

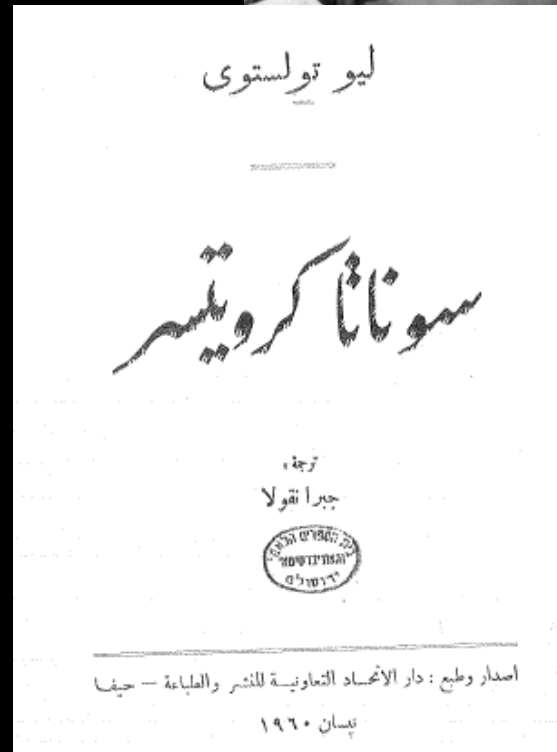


Three Palestinian-authored *Kreutzer* Variations

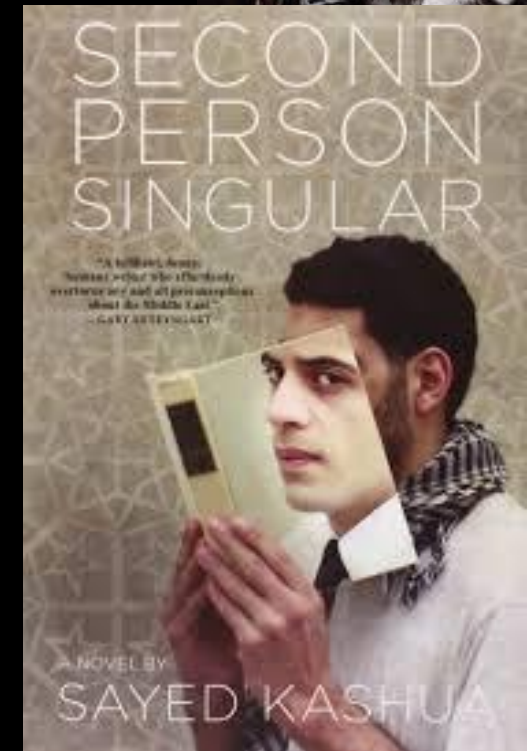
Salim Qubayn
(1870-1951)



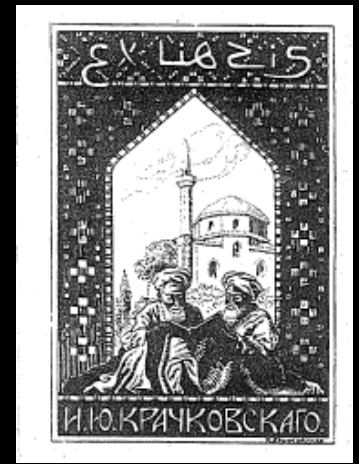
Jabra Nicola
(1912-74)



Sayed Kashua
(b. 1975)



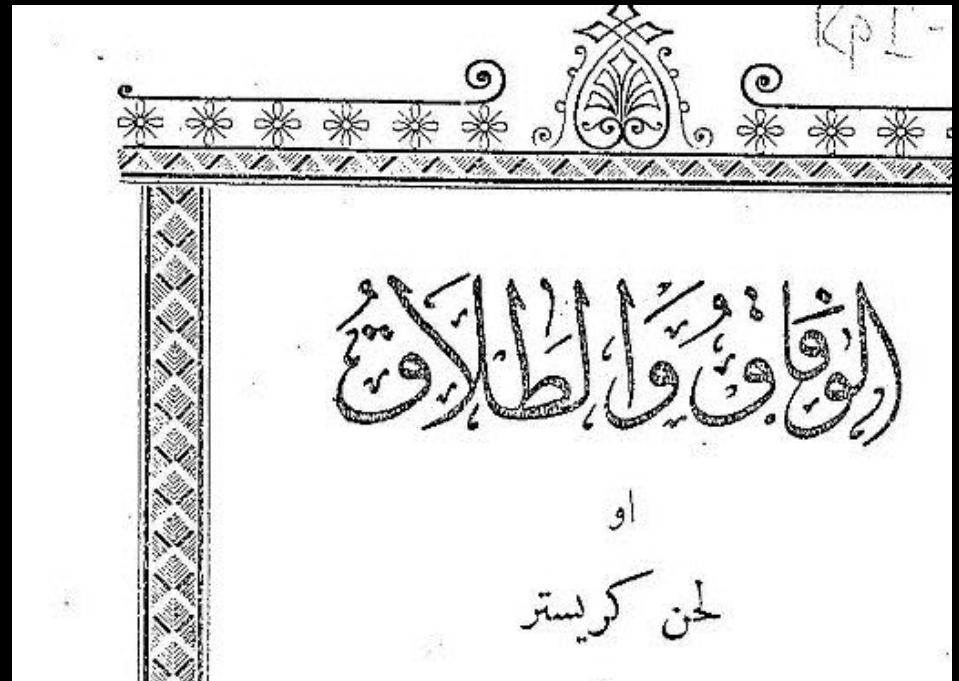
Salim Qubayn's *Kreutzer*: "Harmony and Divorce"



Salim Qubayn (1870-1951)

Graduate of Russian Schools:
Nazareth Orthodox School &
Teacher's College

Emigrated to Egypt



KpI-4200

الوفاء والطاوع

او

لحن كريستر

رواية

اجتماعية غرامية أدبية

تأليف

المهذب الاجتماعي الشهير الفيلسوف لاون تولستوي

معربة عن الروسية بقلم أحد الادباء

طبع على نفقة ابراهيم فارس صاحب المكتبة الشرقية

(مطبعة التوفيق بشارع كلوت بك بمصر سنة ١٩٠٣)



« الكونت نيقولا يفنش تولستوي »

« مستعارة من جريدة النيل الغراء »

(حقوق اعادة طبع الكتاب محفوظ للمكتبة الشرقية)

Readers don't care who translated it

النقريظ والانتقاد

٣٨٤

الوفاق والطلاق

هي رواية للفيلسوف تولاستوي اسمها في الاصل لمن
كيتسر وقد ترجمت مرة اولى في البرازيل وترجمها مرة اخرى في مصر حضرة سليم
افندي قبعين وطبعت على نفقة المكتبة الشرقية في العاصمة . وقد ساء لنا كثيرون
من القراء عن رواية لحن كيتسر بعد نشر مجلة السيدات شيئاً منها حتى ان بعض الاصدقاء
ارسل يطالب نسخة الادارة . فمن رام اقتناء هذه الرواية الآن فليطلبها من المكتبة
الشرقية في العاصمة

(Farah Antun, *Al-Jami`ah* no. 9-10, 1903)

From Saadi's text into Qub`ayn's?

قَالَ : نَعَمْ اِنْ الْغَرَضُ الْحَقِيقِيُّ مِنَ الزَّوْجِ لَيْسَ اَنْ الرَّجُلَ يَجْعَلَ
الْمَرْأَةَ هَدَفًا لَشَهْوَاتِهِ كَمَا نَظَرَ اِلَيْهَا اَشْتِهَائُهَا بَلْ اِنْ يَجِدُهَا مَعِينًا لَه
وَرَفِيقًا صَادِقًا وَعَظْمًا مِنْ عَظَامِهِ وَلِحْمًا مِنْ لَحْمِهِ . . . اَمَّا الشَّابُّ فِي وَقْتِنَا
هَذَا فَقَلْبًا يَتَزَوَّجُ اِلَّا لِلْمُضَاجَعَةِ وَقَلْبًا يَنْظُرُ اِلَى الْمَرْأَةِ اِلَّا لِشْتِهَائِهَا وَلِذَلِكَ
تَرَاهُ يَخْتَارُ الْفَتَاةَ ذَاتَ الْجَمَالِ الْخَارِجِيِّ الْزَائِلِ وَقَلْبًا يَنْظُرُ اِلَى اَدَابِهَا
وَفَضِيلَتِهَا كَمَا نَظَرْتُ اَنَا اِلَى امْرَأَتِي وَاخْتَرْتُهَا زَوْجَةً لِي

Qub`ayn's Pozdnyshev, p. 65,
on "true purpose of marriage"

From Beethoven to `oud

لي في البداية لكنني فيما بعد شعرت بعامل خفي يدفعني الى مجاملته
والتوذرذ اليه فحادثته عن الموسيقى وسأته عن الآلة التي يحسن التوقع
عليها جيداً . فاجابني انه يحسن الضرب على العود أكثر من غيره
ويوقع على سواه من ذوات الاوتار ايضاً وانه متضلع في فن الموسيقى
على الاجمال وخبير باسرار هذا الفن وولع بها فاظهرت له ارتياحي
لسماع انغام العود ثم قلت له : ان امرأتي مولعة بالموسيقى ايضاً وهي
تحسن الضرب على البيانو . ولم اكد اكل هذه العبارة حتى شعرت
بان حربة اخترقت احشائي وصوتاً خفيفاً يقول لي هذا هو الرجل ذو
الشأن العظيم في سيرة حياتك والذي سيجل بك من جرائه مصائب
واحزان شتى . واذ ذاك دخلت امرأتي علينا فوقف هو للسلام عليها

Christian redemption??

“The next day they took me [from prison] to see her. When I entered the room where she was laid out and saw her stretched out there, a cold corpse devoid of spirit or movement, **I cried bitter tears for her and regretted what I had done, but what good was regret when the case had been solved.**

After she was buried and I had said my last goodbyes, I was taken to court, put on trial, and found innocent, and released.”

When Pozdnyshev got to this point, he grew silent and looked at me, while I looked at him, after which he sat up and said: “And if I had known at that time what I know now, I would never have married or gotten involved with women or a family, but I would have remained a bachelor all my life. Had I not been fickle, I would not have fallen, nor would I have suffered these misfortunes. **I do not blame myself, because I did not consider my wife’s moral (adabiyya) traits or virtues when I decided to marry her, but focused on her external charms,** and I

corrupted her by submitting to her and immersing myself in animal pleasures with her, disregarding that the great teacher’s words do not apply to strange women only but to one’s own lawful wife too:

‘Whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.’”

امشى فيها ذهاباً واياباً وكان الوقت عندئذ صباحاً . وعند المساء ماتت امرأتي وأخذ العدل منها حقه والقي القبض عليّ في الساعة الثامنة من ذلك النهار وأودعت السجن . وفي اليوم الثاني أخذوني لاراها

فلما دخلت الغرفة التي كانت موضوعة فيها وشاهدتها ممددة في النعش جثة باردة بلا روح ولا حراك بكيتها بكاءً مرّاً وندمت على ما فعلت ولكن ماذا ينفعني الندم وقد حلّ القضاء . وبعد ان شيعتها

الى المدفن وودعتها الوداع الاخير أعدت الى السجن وبقيت فيه مدة احد عشر شهراً ريثما اخذت الدعوى منهاها . وفي الجلسة الاخيرة أخذت الى المحكمة وتليت عليّ صورة البراءة وأطلقوا سراحي

وعندما وصل بوزدنيشف الى هذا الحد أخذته سكتة وصار ينظر اليّ وانا انظر اليه وبعد ذلك تنهد وتأوه وقال -- ولو اني كنت اعلم في ذلك الحين ما اعلمه الآن لما كنت تزوجت ولا تعلقت

بنساء ولا بعائلة بل كنت بقيت عازباً طول العمر . . . ولكني لو لم اكن طائشاً لما وقعت ولا اصابني هذه المصائب ولست اؤم نفسي لاني لم اتأمل في صفات امرأتي الادبية وفي فضائلها عندما خطبتها بل

شغلت بجهاها الخارجي وافسدتها باستسلامي اليها وانغماسي معها في الملذات الحيوانية غير منتبه الى ان المعلم الاعظم لا يعني المرأة الاجنبية فقط بقوله « ان كل من ينظر الى امرأة ليشتتها فقد زنى بها في قلبه » بل جميع النساء على الاطلاق والمرأة الشرعية ايضاً

(تمت)

3. How to be Palestinian-Israeli?

And can Russian culture help?

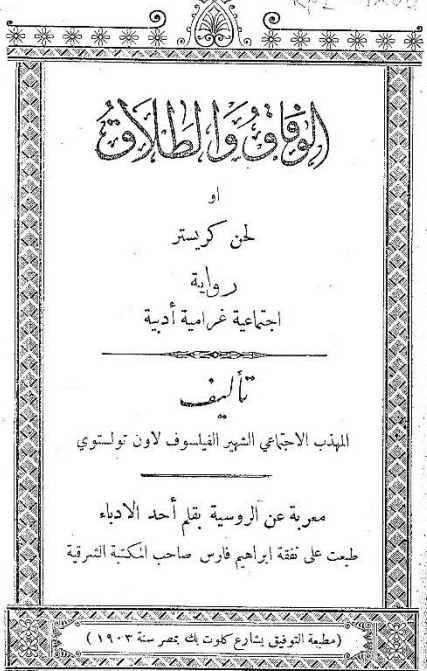


2010

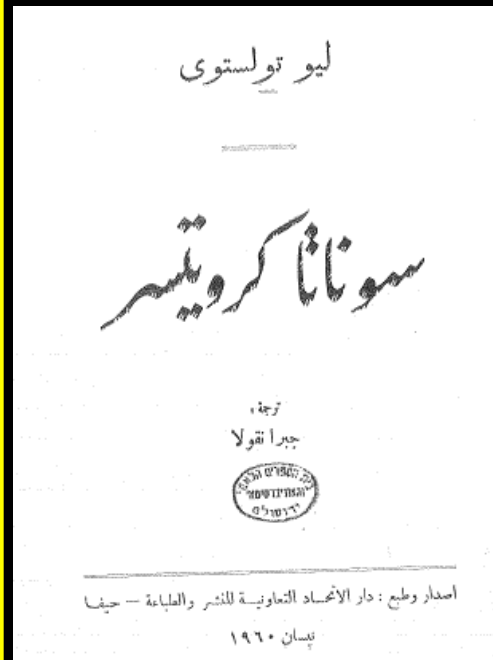


1960

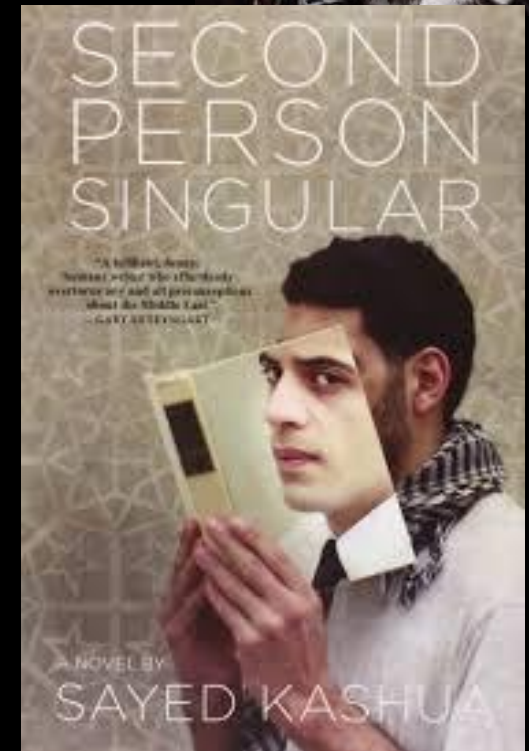
Salim Qubayn
(1870-1951)



Jabra Nicola
(1912-74)

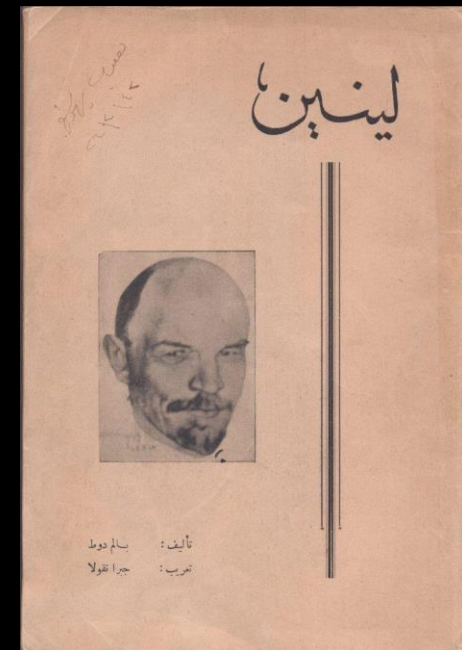


Sayed Kashua
(b. 1975)



Comrade Jabra Nicola

- Jaffa-born (1912) Palestinian journalist, trade unionist and translator.
- One of the first Palestinian Marxists, possibly first Palestinian Trotskyite (recruited by “Tony Cliff”).
- Wrote many political articles (as A. Said); *Professional or Trade Union Organization; In the Jewish World; Abu-l ‘Ala Al-Ma‘arri*
- Translations: *The Arab Orient; Lenin* (by R. Palme Dutt), *Arabs and Historical Development in the Middle East; Tolstoy’s Kreutzer Sonata*.
- Died in London in 1974.



R. Palme Dutt, *Lenin*

Comrade Jabra Nicola



“Although he did not keep his Trotskyist views secret, the leaders of the party—intellectual Lilliputians compared to him—did not dare expel him. But they gradually removed him from all positions of direct political influence and confined him to literary work. Even subject to this restriction, **Jabra found an outlet for his talents:** he published important articles and studies on Arab history and Arabic literature, as well as translating literary classics into Arabic. **He was particularly proud of his translation of Tolstoy’s *Kreutzer Sonata*.**”

- Moshe Machover’s obituary

Know your heritage! إعرف تراثك!

“We discovered that in school, they teach us more about Theodore Herzl than [the Prophet] Muhammad. Examples of poetry by Hayim Nahman Bialik are far more numerous than examples of al-Mutanabbi’s poetry. Study of the Torah is mandatory, while study of the Qur’an is non-existent. We felt that a Hebrew cultural attack was sneaking up on us, like a snake, and we had no choice but to immunize ourselves. So we drew closer to leftist circles and began reading about Marxist principles that instilled in us zeal and hope.”

Mahmoud Darwish, *Shay’ an al-Watan* (Beirut: Dar al-‘Awda, 1971), 252. Quoted by Maha Nassar, “My Struggle Embraces Every Struggle,” in the new Routledge volume on *The Global 1960s*.

Lenin's Tolstoy (1908)

The contradictions in Tolstoy's works, views, doctrines, in his school, are indeed glaring. On the one hand, we have the great artist, the genius who has not only drawn incomparable pictures of Russian life but has made first-class contributions to world literature. On the other hand we have the landlord obsessed with Christ. On the one hand, the remarkably powerful, forthright and sincere protest against social falsehood and hypocrisy; and on the other, the "Tolstoyan", i.e., the jaded, hysterical sniveller called the Russian intellectual, who publicly beats his breast and wails: "I am a bad wicked man, but I am practising moral self-perfection; I don't eat meat any more, I now eat rice cutlets." ... On the one hand, **the most sober realism, the tearing away of all and sundry masks**; on the other, the preaching of one of the most odious things on earth, namely, religion, the striving to replace officially appointed priests by priests who will serve from moral conviction, i. e., to cultivate the most refined and, therefore, particularly disgusting clericalism. ...

Historical and economic conditions explain both the inevitable beginning of the revolutionary struggle of the masses and their unpreparedness for the struggle, their Tolstoyan non-resistance to evil, **which was a most serious cause of the defeat** of the first revolutionary campaign.

"Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution." *Proletary* 35, September 11 (24), 1908.

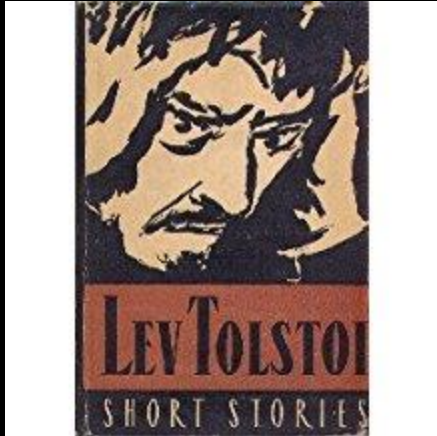
Leftist cred

“It is a story about the extent to which **love between man and woman has been degraded by society** ... a story of such force, that it leaves nothing of those false conventionalities which are current among people in order to mask their actions. ... Tolstoy’s work **condemns any insincerity in marriage** and considers that such a misfortune is a direct result of the emptiness of their life.”

– Mikhail Lifschitz, *Soviet Literature*

قصة « سوناتا كرويتسر »
تظهر الى اي درك حط المجتمع
الحب بين الرجل والمرأة ...
انها قصة تبلغ من القوة حدا لا
يبقى على شيء من تلك التقاليد
الشائعة بين الناس لسر اعماهم .
انـ تولستوي في قصته
« سوناتا كرويتسر » يشجب كل
نفاق ورياء في الزواج ، ويعتبر
مثل هذه المأساة نتيجة مباشرة
لفراغ حياة الزوجين .
ميخائيل ليفشيتز
في مجلة الادب السوفياتي

Translatability



Nicola's likely source, six stories including *Kreutzer* translated from Russian by Margaret Wettlin. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950.

“The tears and laughter of a Chinese infect me just as the laughter and tears of a Russian; and it is the same with painting and music and poetry, **when it is translated into a language I understand**. The songs of a Kirghiz or of a Japanese touch me, though to a lesser degree than they touch a Kirghiz or a Japanese. I am also touched by Japanese painting, Indian architecture, **and Arabian stories**. ... Great works of art are only great because they are **accessible and comprehensible to everyone**.”

- Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art*, 1897

“More literal than literary”



Wajih Sam`an, Anwar Awad, Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), Victor Sami Nicola (b. 1943).
Photo courtesy Wajih Sam`an.

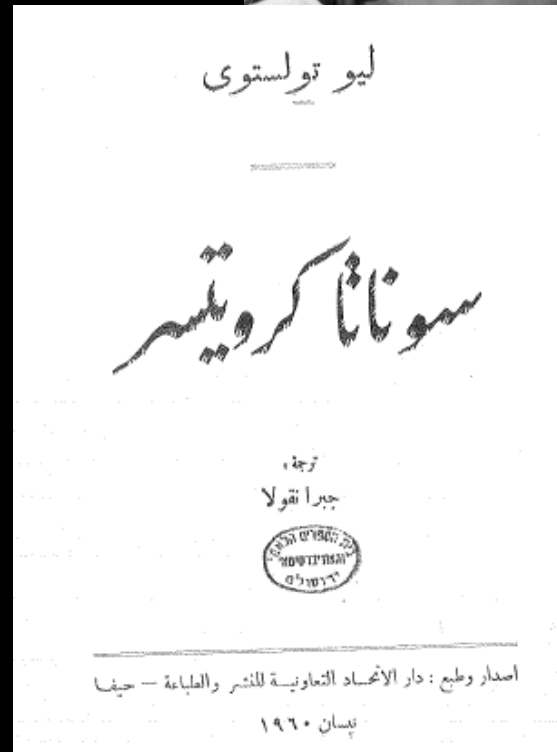
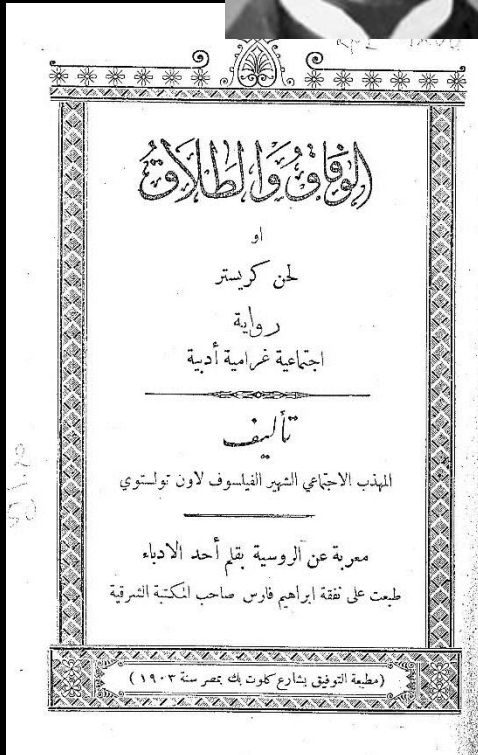
Salim Qubayn
(1870-1951)



Jabra Nicola
(1912-74)



Sayed Kashua
(b. 1975)



From Kashua's *Second Person Singular*

He looked at the rather ugly cover. Two thick black lines dissected it into three unequal parts. The uppermost part was yellow and bore the author's name, Tolstoy. The lower, green section was home to the title, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and the middle one featured an ugly pastel illustration. On the right side of the drawing there was a man with **fiery eyes, a hooked nose, and a set mouth. His hand was balled around the handle of a dagger.** On the other side of the drawing was a faceless woman whose body was curled and indistinct, her hand feebly raised before the murderer. **Had he not known who the author was, the lawyer thought to himself, he would never have bought this book.**



A colleague and I interview Kashua

ML: I wanted to ask you about **Russian literature**. You read it **through Hebrew**, right? In school, or on your own?

Kashua: **Yes, in Hebrew**. But not Tolstoy. No, the thing I read in school was Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*. That was the only Russian novel.

ML: What else?

Kashua: I'm really bad with names, and **I don't have an agenda** for like, "This is **Russian literature**."



SR: **Why did you choose *The Kreutzer Sonata* to drive the plot, of all books?**

Kashua: Because it was there on my shelf, and **my wife said, for her master's degree she used to study psychotherapy, and they talked a lot about *The Kreutzer Sonata***. So I took it and I started, and then it fit.

Whose world literature canon?

“The lawyer actually very much wanted to read the classics and he would have been happy to familiarize himself with the great works, those that were known in name even to nonreaders. He wanted to know what **Dostoevsky** had said, what **Anna Karenina** and **War and Peace** were about, and he wanted to read **Kafka** and **Chekhov** and even **Chaim Nachman Bialik**, but it was hard to do, almost impossible. ... Sometimes, when he could not overcome his curiosity, he would take one of the classics off the shelf and ask Meirav to gift-wrap it. **Lolita**, **Crime and Punishment**, and **Anna Karenina** were all taken home in festive wrapping, because, more than anything else, the lawyer wanted to read the great works, **the ones that all his Jewish peers had read.**”

Reading as ownership:

“to know what it said”

“what it was about”

i.e., because he didn't want the bookstore staff to know he was only now reading these books for the first time!

Symbolic value of Russian lit in Israel

“I, Miri Siboni Regev, **never read Chekhov.*** I almost never went to the theater, I listened to [Israeli-Moroccan singer] Jo Amar and Sephardic songs **and I am no less refined than all the consumers of Western culture.**”

- Sept. 12, 2015 interview with *Yisrael Hayom*.

<http://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/313067> and <http://jfp.com/regev-rides-the-mizrahi-victim-horse/>



Israeli Minister of Culture (!)
Miri Siboni Regev

One columnist:

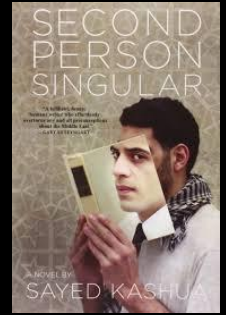
“I’m sure that she read Chekhov too, because if memory serves me right, **he and Tolstoy were both required reading** for the Israeli matriculation exams.”

**or was it Dostoevsky?*



Know your heritage?

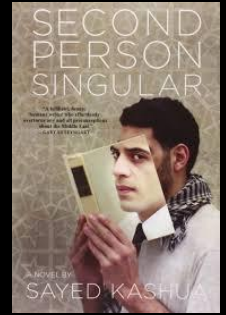
إعرف تراثك؟



He recalled how a colleague had once said to him in court, “Don’t tell me you don’t know who Chekhov was?” And that recollection led him to another earlier but no less painful one, from back in his college days, when a Jewish student had discovered that he had never heard of the Rolling Stones. He, of course, resorted to **the technique he had learned from other Arab students, who employed it often**, and responded with a question that was meant to underscore the cultural divide, “Why, how many **Fairuz** songs do you know? Do you have any idea what **al-Mutanabbi** wrote?” And yet he had felt a sharp twinge of inferiority.



Becoming Pozdnyshev



He reached page 102, where the story ended, and just as he was about to shut the book a small white note fell from the pages. The lawyer started to smile as he read **the note, written in his wife's hand, in Arabic.**

*I waited for you, but you didn't come.
I hope everything's all right. I wanted
to thank you for last night. It was
wonderful. Call me tomorrow?*

The lawyer leaped out of his daughter's bed to kill his wife. He'd stab the bitch, cut her throat, gouge out her eyes, butcher her body. Or maybe he'd strangle her. He'd sit on her stomach, straddle her, pin her to the bed, and wrap his fingers around her throat, thumbs pushing deep into the flesh ...

[etc., etc, etc., *ad nauseum*]

He turned toward the kitchen, opened a drawer, and looked for the right knife.

World high culture *de-civilizes* him

(but isn't Russian literature kind of barbaric to start with?)

Tolstoy:

One of the most torturing conditions for jealous men – and all of us are jealous in our fashionable society – are certain social conventions whereby the greatest and most dangerous proximity is permitted between a man and a woman. People would simply make themselves ridiculous if they tried to prevent this nearness at dances, between doctors and their female patients, between artists, and especially between musicians. ... But meantime, precisely by means of these very occupations, especially by music, the largest part of the adultery in our society is committed.

Kashua:

What an idiot he had been when he spoke out against the **treatment of women in the Arab world**, saying that it was widespread misogyny that held those societies back, quoting Israeli writers and leaders. ... Only now did he realize that their goal had been to bring **ruin to Arab society**. Only now, for the first time in his life, did he understand what honor meant. He, who even lectured now and again about **honor killings**, he, who opposed the phenomenon and labeled it **barbaric**, only now saw the error of his ways. (155)

Kashua's ambiguous *Kreutzer* use

- In *Second Person Singular*, the modernizing companionate marriage project and the project of full Palestinian-Israeli belonging fail in the same moment. Knowing “your own” heritage is useless. Knowing “theirs” brings better options but not happiness.
- But on the meta level: Sayed Kashua = satirist of Palestinian-Israeli pretensions, scourge of Ashkenazi liberal hypocrisies, bestselling darling of Israelis and the West.
- However: he left Israel in 2014. In exile in Illinois. No place to stand. A new Pessoptimist.

So what?

Kreutzer's Arab/ic reception restores to view:

1. Tolstoy in his lifetime: a reformer, a guru, a key participant in global polemics about gender & society. Oh, also a novelist.
2. “Arab culture”: internationally mobile, transnationally engaged, and having different interlocutors and priorities in each place & period
3. Arab translators and adapters as *agents*, in both senses (brokers; deciders).

But also...

So what else?

Kreutzer variations show shifting Arab (and specifically Palestinian) concerns about modernization and political identity:

1902-3 – the Woman Question: sexual ethics, compatibility, companionate marriage – a different message than Tolstoy's asceticism and universal brotherhood/sisterhood

1960 – Russian (via Soviet) culture as global high culture, Tolstoy as scourge of bourgeoisie & ally of Palestinians

2010 – Jabra Nicola's gambit has failed; Palestinian Israelis can't "culture" their way into equal rights or belonging. Honor killing in Tolstoy, a Hebrew-mediated world classic, casts a funny light on supposed Arab cultural backwardness.

Comments or suggestions?
mlitvin@bu.edu

Our working group on Facebook:
“Arab-Russian and Arab-Soviet Literary Ties”
www.facebook.com/groups/244572505674949