TOLSTOY'S LETTERS:
(2 vols., 1828–1879 and 1880–1910)
edited by R. F. Christian
Scribner's, 1978
737 pp. $35 set
L. of C 77-90494
ISBN 0-684-15596-6 set;
0-684-15670-9 v. 1;
0-684-15671-7 v. 2

The passion for letter writing gripped Europe
and America for a century before the rise of
the telephone. Few succumbed to it more
completely than Leo Tolstoy. Besides his
dozens of novels and tales, Russia's greatest
novelist penned countless letters, of which
some 8,500 have survived. Until now not
many had been translated; English readers
have had no way of knowing that literally
thousands are still as interesting as they were
when they were written. This selection
is therefore a landmark. Never mind that
the translator chose to censor out "vulgar
or obscene words." Tolstoy was scarcely
addicted to them. These volumes show the
bewildering range of his intellectual-
literary-philosophical-political-theological
world at the same time that they reveal a man
engaged in a myriad of daily concerns, family
cares, petty feuds, and intense friendships. If
Tolstoy's "graphomania" was not unusual for
his time, his letters are unique in suggesting
how important each part of his life was for
the others. All flowed into his epic novels.

CULTURAL EXPRESSION
IN ARAB SOCIETY
TODAY
by Jacques Berque
Univ. of Texas, 1978
370 pp. $19.95
L. of C 77-16099

A French scholar, whose knowledge of Arab
society from Morocco to Iraq is unsurpassed,
surveys contemporary Arabic literature,
music, poetry, painting, theater, and philoso-
phy. He finds that the search for "the ideal of
modernity" without losing cultural authen-
ticity that marks contemporary Arab poetry
characterizes all modern Islamic scholarship
and theology, as well as the popular novel
and Arab music (classical, popular, and
Westernized). Berque discusses Mideast poets
who strive to reconcile foreign borrowings
with rigid Islamic verse forms ("intensifica-
tion of metaphor in today's Arab poetry bal-
ances the loss of rhyme and meter"). Al-
though "altercation and affinity with the
West have always characterized the Arabs,"
decolonization is stripping away foreign
layers from language and thought. No ac-
cetable synthesis has so far emerged.

The Wilson Quarterly/Autumn 1978
161