

*Arts & Letters***TOLSTOY'S LETTERS:**

(2 vols., 1828-1879
and 1880-1910)
edited by R. F. Christian
Scribner's, 1978
737 pp. \$35 set
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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
ISBN 0-292-70330-9

A French scholar, whose knowledge of Arab society from Morocco to Iraq is unsurpassed, surveys contemporary Arabic literature, music, poetry, painting, theater, and philosophy. He finds that the search for "the ideal of modernity" without losing cultural authenticity 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 ("intensification of metaphor in today's Arab poetry balances the loss of rhyme and meter"). Although "altercation and affinity with the West have always characterized the Arabs," decolonization is stripping away foreign layers from language and thought. No acceptable synthesis has so far emerged.