

In response to:

[Inventor of Modern Opera](#) from the October 27, 1988 issue

To the Editors:

The erudite and instructive Charles Rosen has made a surprising mistake in his review of the *Oeuvres* of Beaumarchais [*NYR*, October 27, 1988]. He quotes a passage from the last act finale of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, in English translation, as follows:

*All is tranquil and placid
The beautiful Venus has gone in
She can take with wanton Mars
The new Vulcan of the age
In her net*

At first glance, this seems impossible. The Homeric story, of course, is that Hephaistos (“Vulcan”) took in *his* net the adulterous pair, Aphrodite (“Venus”) and Ares (“Mars”), *in flagrante delicto*—thus provoking the famous “Homeric” laughter of the gods when he summoned them to view the spectacle. On second thought, it seems barely possible that Figaro intends an ironic reversal: that he is “caught” by the infidelity of his affianced. But this reading seems tortured and unconvincing; and the Italian text shows that first thoughts are here best. The third through fifth lines of the passage read in fact:

*Col vago Marte prendere,
Nuovo Vulcan del secolo,
In rete la potrò*

—that is: “I—the new Vulcan of the age—will be able to take her in a net, together with charming Mars.”

Howard Stein
Chicago, Illinois

Charles Rosen replies:

I am grateful for this correction of my inexcusable error.