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.”

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Charles Rosen replies:

I am grateful for this correction of my inexcusable error.