its words. The dramatic action is usually dismissed as too trivial and contrived to warrant close attention, the words serving as little more than an excuse for the music. Isn't the music the point?

Well, not entirely. Or so argues Till, who has staged Mozart's operas at the Glyndebourne Festival, and who proposes to understand Mozart by explicating the texts of the operas. To do so, he examines the intellectual currents that ran through 18th-century Europe and places Mozart firmly in their grip. Although Mozart did not write his own librettos, he chose them with great care, and he inadvertently commented upon many of the moral and political debates of the age as he emended the librettos to his liking.

By attending to seemingly inconsequential aspects of the 18th century, Till provides greater insight into Mozart than do more ambitious studies such as Norbert Elias's *Mozart: A Study in Genius* (1991). Till brings up the 18th-century marriage contract, for example, to show its relevance to *The Marriage of Figaro*. Mozart composed during a time when contractual agreements had assumed a novel and distinctly modern character. Once traditional bonds were loosed, contracts became an essential prop for saving society from dissolution. Marriage in bourgeois society was, Till notes, the central nonpolitical contractual institution of the new order, and *The Marriage of Figaro* celebrates its ability to mediate conflicting interests among the individual, the family, religion, and the state. In contrast to the luminous universe of *Figaro* is the dark world of *Don Giovanni*, where the contractual agreements and promises that sustain society are no longer respected. Giovanni, who makes a point of breaking promises, is a harbinger of chaos, a destructive force who embodies all of the more profound social contradictions underlying the Enlightenment. He is freedom become license, and it is Giovanni's contempt for the marriage contract that finally rouses the statue of Commendatore to action.

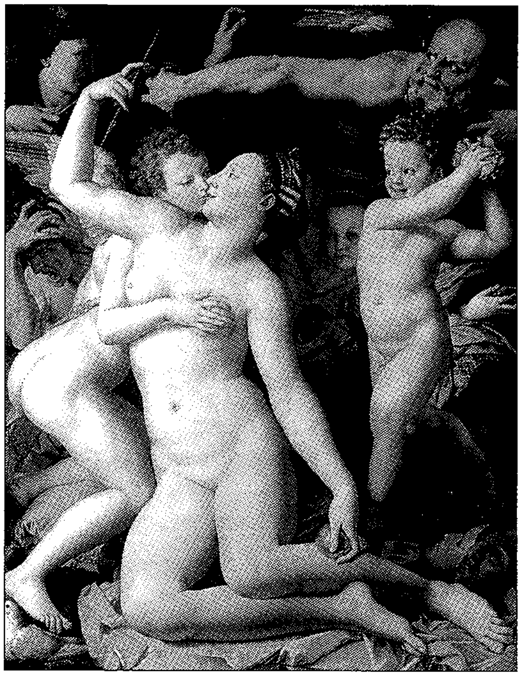
About other seemingly small details within Mozart's operas—the confusions of identity, the disguises, and the incongruous, harmonically skilled servants—Till is consistently acute. After reading *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, an opera lover may return to Mozart eager to hear as well what prompted the composer to set each particular text. Till knows the full range of scholarship about Mozart, yet in one respect he is not only unacademic but refreshingly old-fashioned. He writes, without apology, of faith, moral passion, and spiritual growth. No skeptic's quotation marks hedge the *beauty*, *truth*, and *virtue* in his title. Nor did they in the composer's art.

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP. *By Allan Bloom. Simon & Schuster. 590 pp. $25*

Allan Bloom (1930–92) is known most widely for his best-selling diatribe, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), but the University of Chicago philosopher enjoyed a somewhat quieter reputation as an outstanding teacher. *Love and Friendship* suggests why. While the polemical edge that marked his best seller is not absent here, *Love and Friendship* is much more a teacher's book, in the best sense. It is a deeply learned and strongly opinionated exploration of what our finest poets, novelists, and philosophers have said about the subject of love and friendship and of the force that drives both—eros.

Or at least once did. Bloom, in his feisty introduction, argues that eros is now a much diminished thing, thanks in part to the triumph of scientific-reductivist ideologies (such as Freudianism and, more recently, "Kinseyism") and assorted degradations of the democratic dogma.

To show how powerful a force eros once was, Bloom conducts a reverse-chronological tour of its place in the Western imagination. He begins with the foremost thinker of early modernity, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose notions of sublimity, combining the "purest longing with the fullest bodily satisfaction," provided the basic text of Romanticism. To be sure, Bloom notes, this ideal of the sublime could not survive the skepticism of the modern age: "The high began to appear to be merely moralism, whereas the



low looked like what really counts and what had been covered over by Romanticism." But doomed though his ideal was, the Swiss thinker's exploration of the human heart inspired countless artists who came after him, notably such novelists as Stendhal, Gustave Flaubert, Jane Austen, and Leo Tolstoy. Their better works unfailingly recur to the Rousseau-delineated conflicts between claims of the heart and the rules of society, and Bloom shines in his explication of these various elaborations.

Following Rousseau is Shakespeare, whose plays Bloom credits with depicting the greatest variety of erotic expression—"love's promise of unity, its mysterious attraction to beauty, and its hope to overcome even the ugliness of death," as well as its "folly and disappointment." Bloom also makes a compelling case for Shakespeare as the first philosopher of history, eager to know how the "permanent problems of human nature" are colored by the "typical circumstances of their particular place."

Bloom ends his book with the thinker who has longest engaged his interest, the great Socratic pupil, Plato. In Plato's dialogues, Bloom finds a rare merger of rational reflection and art, a combination that allowed the Greek thinker to range widely across the subject of love: "He explores the tensions between love of one's own and love of the good, and between the politically necessary subordination of eros to the family and the liberation suggested by such questionable erotic phenomena as incest, pederasty, and promiscuity. He sees in eros the possibility of both individual happiness and true human community."

Illuminating as Bloom's explications always are, they leave the reader with a curious sense of incompleteness. Is it because Bloom moves so exclusively in the realm of ideas, never touching ground in the historical conditions that might have occasioned major shifts in the (ever-diminishing) imaginings of eros? Or is it because he never takes too seriously the claims to truth of those beliefs, such as Christianity, that gave definitive shape to notions of love? One ends up wishing that Bloom had a little more of the large historical curiosity he so admired in Shakespeare. That failing aside, Bloom's last legacy is a triumph of humanistic reflection, and a reminder of what constitutes real education.

Contemporary Affairs

LENIN'S TOMB: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire. *By David Remnick. Random House. 576 pp. $25*
BLACK HUNDRED: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia. *By Walter Laqueur. HarperCollins. 317 pp. $27.50*

In a decade or two, it will probably seem inevitable: The collapse of the Soviet Union led to *a*) the reimposition, after a fleeting democratic experiment, of traditional Russian authoritarianism; *b*) Russia's gradual, steady, albeit painful emergence as a democratic, free market society; or *c*) a bloody descent into all-out civil war. At this moment, all these (as well as *d* and *e* and *f*) seem possible. Two excellent studies use recent events in Russia to project two quite divergent futures for that country in its latest "time of troubles."

Mixing the perspective of a historian and the street smarts of a journalist, Remnick recreates the final days of the communist era, on which he earlier reported as a correspondent for the *Wash-*