



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-*

ington Post. Remnick attempts something more ambitious than the court history that Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott presented in *At the Highest Levels* (1993), or the straightforward political analysis of John B. Dunlop's *Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (1993). He hopes to make comprehensible and alive what happened in the Soviet Union by narrating the story through the voices and experiences of the people there. He paints an immense, vivid canvas, crowded with characters and events from every corner of the collapsing empire. Remnick's account deals, of course, with the "fall of Marxism"; in his explanation, Marxism suffers, as it were, a second kind of fall. Perhaps most observers, in one good Marxist tradition, have written about the Soviet Union's collapse in terms of economics—that is, of economic corruption and inefficiency too extreme to deliver even the minimum of goods to keep a cowed populace in its place. This economic framework is largely missing from Remnick's account; instead he focuses on what he calls the "revenge of history." For decades, history (or rather its interpretation) had been a servant of the Communist Party, which shamelessly rewrote textbooks and airbrushed photographs to support the current party line. But then Gorbachev decreed that the "blank spots" of history be filled in. By admitting the crimes committed by Stalin (the purges, the famines, the Nazi-Soviet pact, the Katyn Forest massacre), Gorbachev hoped indirectly to cleanse the socialist system of its crudest and cruelest features. But once Gorbachev dropped the myth of party infallibility and the threat of physical punishment for historical heresy, people quickly advanced beyond Stalin's tattered image to criticize the very state and system that had enabled that tyrant to rule. "When history was no longer an instrument of the Party, the Party was doomed to failure," Remnick writes. "For history proved precisely that the Party was rotten at its core."

Remnick is optimistic about a "gradual and painful rise from the wreckage of communism," confident "that the former subjects of the Soviet experiment are too historically experienced to return to dictatorship and isolation." In *Black Hundred*, Laqueur presents a darker possibility. A prolific historian of modern Europe who earlier traced the parallels between Russian and

German right-wing extremism, Laqueur acknowledges that the demise of the Soviet empire was "probably inevitable" but laments that the "way it did unravel was a disaster." Parliamentary democrats like Boris Yeltsin are still too weak, Laqueur maintains, and they are being challenged by a "nationalist movement firmly believing that Russia can be saved only by a strong, authoritarian government that restores law and order and pursues a conservative policy." In a restrained, pedestrian tone, Laqueur discusses the born-again incarnations of long-suppressed right-wing groups and that stewy concoction of chauvinism, anti-Semitism, anti-Westernism, racism, conspiracy theories, yearning for dictatorship, and messianic interpretations of history that bubbled over in tsarist times and is now on the boil again. The simultaneous collapse of empire, economy, and prestige has caused many Russians to look for easy explanations and identifiable scapegoats. Laqueur can never quite resolve, though, whether the current crop of extremists is merely a local variant of fringe groups that arise in most societies or a unique and grave threat to Russia. Certainly, after Remnick's stirring optimism, *Black Hundred* is a sobering reminder of the ugliness that might prevail should the post-Soviet democratic effort falter.

LIFE'S DOMINION: An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom. By Ronald Dworkin. Knopf. 273 pp. \$23

The United States needs a great book about abortion. Such a book, written perhaps by one of our more eminent political thinkers, would illuminate what may be the leading moral issue of our time for the mass of Americans, who are less "pro-choice" or "pro-life" than confused, troubled, or ambivalent about abortion.

Dworkin, who is the author of *Taking Rights Seriously* (1977) and who divides his time between Oxford University and New York University's law school, is certainly qualified to write such a book. And he very nearly succeeds. He argues that very few "pro-life" advocates actually believe in a "right to life." If they did, he notes, then logically they would insist on prohibiting abortion under all circumstances. The fetus,