

It is a pity that the narrative could not have been carried on entirely from the viewpoint of this irresistible old woman who had lived long and fully and who had come to believe that love, after all, is the *summum bonum* of human existence. Infinite wisdom is Gran'mère's as well as infinite love and deep understanding of those about her. If Gran'mère had held the threads of the story in her competent hands, if the romance that involved Max Van Rennen and Felicia and Anna had been told through the all-seeing eyes of the sweet and wise old woman, the story might have attained a verisimilitude that it now lacks. The interlude that has to do with Gran'mère's childhood and marriage to her first husband John Verney as well as the one that deals with her encounter with Max Van Rennen's grandfather are so exquisitely done as to be convincing evidence that Mrs. Mordaunt writes best when she is in love with a character, as she very obviously is with her fine old woman, who well may take her place in fiction's portrait gallery.

The plot upon which the story is hung shows the hand of its creator far too clearly. The book, delightful as it is, full as it is of color and charm, is not stamped by the inevitability that constitutes one of the first requisites of great fiction. Yet the creator of Victoria Cochrane, the little girl who marched through a hard childhood into eighty full and eventful years, makes a bid to fame no critic can deny.

**GOG AND MAGOG** by *Vincent Sheean*  
(HARCOURT, BRACE. \$2.00)

AS A TREATISE on revolutionary Russia, introduced by a picture of an artists' party in Paris, this book has merit; as a novel, however, little can be said in its favor. Centering in its first two chapters about Molly Kèlen, the American wife of a French violinist, the story is subsequently told from the viewpoint of Molly's brother John, an impressionable young American.

After an horrific dinner party where musicians talk and drink excessively and perform rather badly upon man-made instruments or vocal chords, John leaves his sister's home with a Russian singer, Terschelling, to whom his boredom, which she seems to share, has drawn him. During his visit to Switzerland and his weeks at Terschelling's home in Moscow, there is a somewhat wearying succession of long dialogues in which the pros and cons of the Russian situation are presented—adequately, we are willing to admit, but not in such a way as to advance the story or to reveal the characters involved. The people seem to have been chosen, not for any merits of their own, but that light may be thrown on the hodge-podge that is Russia today. John is the average American making his first acquaintance with the Soviet; Terschelling is the artist who "does not concern herself with politics but is a Russian, Monsieur"; Madame Cordier is the deposed aristocrat whose hand has been kissed by Nikolai Alexandrovich and who is now suffering much because of the dirty Bolsheviks; Sheila Rudd is the visionary American girl, burning to help the oppressed. The characters fit neatly into the mosaic intended to make up a picture of Russia in turmoil, but they do not move as characters in a novel. Their personal emotions never stir the heart, and though their words are frequently illuminating and succeed in presenting some new aspects of a struggling people, they themselves do not come alive.

Yet the theme of the treatise is clear: a great force, as difficult to understand as the mythical Gog and Magog of Ezekiel and Revelation, is at work in Russia. Chaos has resulted. Chaos may continue. "My heart is heavy," says John in conclusion, "and this air is crowded with darkness." Out of it all something may come. John and the reader wonder and cannot foretell. A novel may well exist without thesis, but there can be no novel unless life has been breathed into the characters.

EUDORA RAMSAY RICHARDSON

SEED ON THE WIND by Rex Stout  
(VANGUARD. \$2.00)

Mr. Stout's second novel, following *How Like a God*, is another stunt in technique. In this study of a woman who has five successive lovers and a child by each of them, he begins with her latest experiment and works back with ever increasing dramatic intensity to her first. The problem must have been a difficult one and Mr. Stout has worked it out with skill and distinction. He also tells a good story. Better still, he approaches the study of the woman and her lovers and children with intelligence and without the slightest apparent striving for either sensationalism or smartness. Nevertheless the volume is unimportant.

For a story of this kind, a story which deals with the tangled and confused impulses and desires of men and women against the social and economic background in relation to their need for love, sexual fulfillment, children, security, for all the deepest and most insistent demands that the emotions make on the human spirit, Mr. Stout remains singularly placid and unpenetrating. He is content to tell his story along the outlines of his logically prearranged pattern, ignoring the insoluble complexities, even the indication of them. He remains on the surface of the extraordinary situation which he has conceived while moving his pieces about in his looking-glass-world chess game. So far, Mr. Stout, for all his skill, has failed to be either important or convincing in his study of character.

FRED T. MARSH

THE MUSICALE by Francis Steegmüller  
(CAPE & SMITH. \$2.00)

ONE does not know to what extent writers of the age and venturesomeness of Mr. Steegmüller are willing to acknowledge themselves the inheritors, if not the followers, of literary methods used in the past. Possibly Mr.

Steegmüller would not care to trace the pattern of his present work farther than the formula of Mrs. Woolf, but some readers will find that the author has much in common with Henry James. Like James, he aims to show less of life and more of living. With the industry and patience of a miniaturist he unfolds before us a purely cranial drama illuminating a section of Main Street trod by those who by their education and profession are irrevocably committed to "culture".

Yet here, too, under the calm surface of a conventionalized, unperturbed, almost stagnant life there are hidden strong human emotions, ardent longings, daring wishes. But these are never permitted to reach the stage of outward clash and action. Their latent power is made known only through the thoughts of the different characters. Being interested in revealing human minds and motives in their truest aspect, Mr. Steegmüller chooses a musical gathering at the home of the heroine as the occasion for his disclosures. Under the influence of music one is most alone, and aloneness is the state in which one is most honest with himself. His style and treatment are well suited to his purpose. Above the tonal concert, admirably described, there is a symphony in mutes, skillfully orchestrated and eloquent beyond mere words, to which Mr. Steegmüller makes us listen and of which fact we are constantly aware. But can an author hide himself behind the cranial wall of his characters and not thereby limit his freedom of attack?

LOUIS RICH

GLORY PLACE by Marian Bower (BOBBS-MERRILL. \$2.50)

THERE is a certain charm to stories that have agreeable villains for heroes and Anthony Gateways, villain that he is, is agreeable. It is his ambition to become master of Glory Place, a vast ancient mansion in East Anglia, whose rightful owners, the Gaisleys, are too poor to occupy it. Anthony learns that through an