Book Reviews

seem well justified by the evidence. It is somewhat ironic—but in keeping
with the nature of the subject of the work—that Crittenden on the
printed page should still play a role secondary to Clay and subordinate
to the events of the later years of his own life. Kirwan speaks of the
irony in the life of Crittenden; perhaps he did not intend so clearly
to perpetuate it.

The volume is divided into three “books” which bear the headings,
“Clay's Lieutenant,” “Party Leader,” and “The Patriot.” In the first,
Crittenden is overshadowed by Clay; in the second, covering approxi-
mately the ten years following the election of 1844, Crittenden periodi-
cally receives star billing; in the third, he is the chief actor who
sacrifices any and all personal ambition at the altar of his “only
passion,” the preservation of the Union.

Crittenden's ability, his military record, and his connections with
the “great families” of Virginia and Kentucky were factors in his rapid
political rise and continued success. He seems to have been nearly
always guided by principle and by his devotion to Clay. It appears that
he may have wanted to become president, but as long as there was a
possibility of Clay's candidacy he suppressed what ambitions he may
have had. With Clay's failure in 1844, Crittenden became the congres-
sional leader of the Whigs and devoted his energies to grooming
Zachary Taylor. When Clay did become a candidate for nomination,
Crittenden ceased his activities in Taylor's behalf but the long, intimate
relationship of the two Kentuckians cooled. Crittenden's work for Taylor
seems to represent a departure from principles—a prostitution to
availability—and Kirwan says that it was “almost a bizarre spec-
tacle . . . to see a man as knowledgeable and as devoted to party as
Crittenden choosing and grooming for the Presidency one as ignorant
of party principles as Taylor” (p. 478).

Crittenden was not always a party man. He supported Stephen
A. Douglas in the Lecompton controversy, and he viewed the rising
Republican party as a threat to the Union. He was a Constitutional
Unionist in the late 1850's and denounced both major parties for their
actions on and reactions to the slavery issue. He devoted every fiber
of himself to his famous compromise proposals of late 1860, but the
failure of Lincoln to give his approval to these helped send them down
to defeat.

A very able lawyer, a warm friend, a devoted family man, a
superior debater and speaker, an almost unparalleled lover of the Union,
Crittenden might well have risen to greater heights had he been more
politically conscious of the “imperative now.”

Indiana University

Chase C. Mooney

Theodore Dreiser: Our Bitter Patriot. By Charles Shapiro. Cross-
currents Series. Edited by Harry T. Moore. (Carbondale: Southern

Critical opinion concerning Dreiser has often tended toward ex-
tremes: he is a careless writer of chaotic sociological novels or a
producer of immoral stories (some years ago the Indiana State Library
refused to purchase any of his works), or he stands at the top of American fiction. It is encouraging, therefore, to encounter a book which avoids these excesses, carefully analyzing his fiction to determine frankly its faults and virtues. Such a study is this readable yet scholarly work by Charles Shapiro. Though fairly short, it claims to be the first book devoted entirely to Dreiser's fiction rather than to his life. Works other than fiction are disregarded.

Shapiro's purpose, as indicated in the Introduction, is "to understand all of Dreiser's novels in terms of underlying themes which serve as foundations for each book . . . . to demonstrate that Dreiser was an artist with a purpose, a writer who conceived and executed his work as a result of that purpose. Seeing America as a country emerging from its youth, he was concerned about a culture which . . . perverted the worthwhile institutions of the society and robbed the individuals of the chance to live up to their full, inherent potentialities" (p. xiii).

Dreiser is viewed as one of the best American novelists, who powerfully presented his attitude toward our national life through carefully planned, artistic, and beautiful novels. Thus, in *Sister Carrie* several persons are corrupted by the claims of a false American dream; and in *Jennie Gerhardt* two families, each decent but of widely different social levels, decay because of social pressures. The trilogy composed of *The Financier, The Stoic,* and *The Titan* portrays the futile ruthlessness of American business life; *The "Genius"* studies the forces harming the creativity of the artist; and *The Bulwark* shows the failure of religion adequately to solve problems when morality and business collide. *An American Tragedy* is the epitome of all Dreiser's fiction because in it are found all the themes of his other novels. The short stories are inferior, for they often seem to be compressed novels, demonstrating defects more easily. For example, "Free" is an artistic failure. Throughout Shapiro's book, Dreiser's qualities are seen as concern with sadness, bitterness, human failure, and yet courage amid tragedy—all mixed with a feeling of wonder and sympathy for the characters, though not necessarily approval.

Although Shapiro's judgments are not always new, they seem to be valid, as in his contention that the *The "Genius"* is a failure and *An American Tragedy* the most successful novel. Now and then someone may disagree, as, for instance, with the statement that *The Financier* is "the best fictional study of the American businessman" (p. 44). But Shapiro gives fair coverage of Dreiser's faults, such as pompous preaching, over-moralizing, awkward, sophomoric passages, boring asides, and failure to capture speech patterns. The author gives evidence of wide reading of other Dreiser critics, from whom the reader may think that he quotes too copiously. Yet, though the book may not add spectacularly to knowledge, it is an important, compact addition to Dreiser criticism.