

other hand it also saves him from rigidity in his attitude to the Law. For Rabbi Blue is very aware of the danger of rigidity in what he calls (p. 28) a religion of knot-making: if one makes too many knots to remind one of God, one is in danger of forgetting their pur-

pose and being left with only the knots. Perhaps the tone of the book is best summed up by the mention by the author of one legal puzzle, for the book is humorous yet earnest, devoted yet self-critical: *is it allowed to wear a self-winding watch on the Sabbath?*

HENRY WANSBROUGH

GENIUS: An Ideology in Literature, by Robert Currie. *Chatto and Windus*, London, 1974. 222 pp. £3.25.

Mr Currie's thesis, in barest outline, is as follows. There is an historical train of thought, traceable from Judaism and Christianity, through the Romantic movement to the Modernist epoch, which regards the human condition here and now as one of tragic alienation and disintegration, but which looks to some higher realm where unity is to be found. The ideology of genius is common to all three, in that they share the belief that the search for unity is primarily the task of the great individual, or man of genius, who finds himself set over against the philistine common run of men precisely because he is chosen for that task. The difference between the religious and the Romantic versions of this ideology is that the former sees ultimate unity in a 'heaven' beyond this world, whereas the latter—in this sense mere 'split religion'—sees it as the secular goal of the man of genius in this world. The difference between the Romantic and the Modernist versions is that the former is an optimistic faith in the man of Genius as hero, whereas the latter sees him pessimistically as doomed to be a victim. The development of the ideology of genius is traced, first of all in a potted history of the secularisation brought about in the transition from Christianity to Romanticism, and later in a series of essays on five key figures: Hoffmann, Kierkegaard, Wyndham Lewis, Kafka and Beckett. Finally, Mr Currie argues, on the basis of his findings, that it would be best if we could cry a plague on all these houses and settle for a culture without genius; a culture which accepts the fact of alienation as inevitable and

comes to terms with it by affirming the commonsensical democratic virtues of what the ideologists of genius call 'philistinism'.

Reading this book over the weekend which included the aftermath of the Birmingham bombings and a peculiarly vile political hi-jacking, I found Mr Currie's thesis exceptionally attractive. The case is argued persuasively, with—especially for a political scientist—a formidable and sensitive understanding of literature and the arts. I am not qualified to comment on all the specialist essays, but the inner links between the chosen writers are effectively established. But the book as a whole seems to me flawed by working at two distinct levels. The essays on the various writers presuppose a very close familiarity with the material discussed (for example, quotations are not identified or references given). One would have to be very inward with, say, Hoffmann or Kafka to judge for oneself how valid Currie's interpretation is. Here the book is for the specialist: the ordinary philistine wouldn't get much out of it, I fear. On the other hand, the general theory which encloses these chapters at beginning and end seems too sketchy to latch on to. I was asking myself, all the time, is this thesis true?—because it is certainly important, and the question is therefore crucial. But I did not feel I was given enough to be able to decide for myself. When the author has worked out his general position in as much depth as his analysis of particular cases demands, he may well have produced a very formidable work.

BRIAN WICKER

NEW DIRECTIONS IN LITERARY HISTORY, edited by Ralph Cohen. *Routledge & Kegan Paul*, London, 1974. 263 pp. £4.50.

This selection of thirteen essays from *New Literary History*, the journal edited by Ralph Cohen from the

University of Virginia, exemplifies usefully a programme of literary-critical slants and tacks as yet fairly unfamiliar

to the common reader over here. The contributors mostly occupy academic posts in the United States, though there is a significant leavening of Europeans who hold professorships respectively in Switzerland, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, and Scotland. Wherever English 'English' schools flourish, then, a chart of this network would only have large blanks. The Russian Formalists are cited much oftener than any English critics. Yet, in the course of an assault on the now rather old 'New Criticism', the point is made that 'the great English critics of this century—men as diverse in other respects as Richards, Lewis, Empson, and Leavis—never doubted that writing is a human act and implies an audience or reader' (p. 219).

That phrase gives the key theme of the whole book. In the opening essay, Hans Robert Jauss invites us to approach a literary text as a 'notation', requiring therefore a reading which is in effect a re-writing. Though they are never mentioned, this must remind one of the work of Roland Barthes and

Julia Kristeva, and of a recent lecture by Raymond Williams (*New Left Review*, No. 82). A literary text, being a tissue of codes which predispose the reader by internal strategies to a very definite type of reception, cannot be isolated from the reader any more than a piece of music can be heard without a listener. In other words, a literary text is more like a score requiring to be played than a product ready to be consumed. Round this very simple and basic insight (Marxist in its provenance), the recurrent concern of the whole book is the ways in which past texts interact with present readers, and how the history of the reading of a text belongs to its continued existence.

Modern American and European literary theory is sometimes dismissed as no more than a very belated discovery of what was current in Oxford and Cambridge fifty years ago, only freshly dressed in outlandish jargon. A collection like this helps to show how much truth there is in such a judgement—not very much.

FERGUS KERR OP

HERESY, CRUSADE AND INQUISITION IN SOUTHERN FRANCE, 1100-1250, by Walter L. Wakefield. *George Allen & Unwin*, London, 1974. 288 pp. £5.25.

To attempt to chronicle the interior, spiritual developments of an individual is a formidable undertaking; to do the same for a whole society is almost impossible. An historian may be able to familiarise himself with the declared feelings and overt actions of a people, in other words, with the external aspects of a society; but to divine the motive forces, the inspiration behind such actions, is a rare achievement. Professor Wakefield has made a brave if ultimately unsuccessful attempt at the former; he has unfortunately failed to achieve the latter.

He has divided his study. In the first part he attempts, a trifle ambitiously, to describe the origins, growth and suppression of heresy in 194 pages of text. The second consists of several contemporary documents mainly concerned with the Inquisition. The documents themselves are interesting, well chosen and translated. The first half of the work is less satisfying.

In his preface Wakefield states that his book is 'deprived of a claim to originality' because of the extent to which it rests on the researches of others. He records his debt to such notable authorities as Antoine Don-

daine OP, Manselli and Dossat; his neglect of the primary sources has unfortunate results, noticeably in his discussion of the all-important question of the origins of heresy in Languedoc. The appearance of a catalogue of erudite opinion frequently bewilders, and is often used to support questionable hypotheses in place of an original corpus of contemporary evidence. Such an approach arouses a pervasive sense of *deja vu* in the informed reader, and it can only serve to confuse anyone approaching the subject for the first time. His account of the Crusades led by Simon de Montfort and the Capetian Kings is more satisfactory. The tumultuous course of events is accurately and at times enthusiastically described.

Throughout the work Wakefield never dissents from the traditional and most widely held views of scholars. He again advances the theory of the indirect derivation of Catharism from primitive Manicheism via Bogomilism, an opinion formulated initially by Runciman and later advanced by Dondaine. Recent research has shown this connection, although plausible and attractive in its neat simplicity, is far from being as 'generally agreed' as the