

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