

both factions' criteria. The trouble is, their work has been overwhelmed by a tidal wave of trash: novels based on television shows or games, "sharecropped" books expanded from outlines left by dead or retired giants of the field.

A novelist and literary critic who championed the New Wave in the 1960s, Disch indicts today's science fiction on a number of counts. It stimulates woolly-minded daydreaming. It drives readers to promote ridiculous or pointless causes, such as the existence of UFOs. As "lumpen-literature," it encourages simplistic fantasies—every woman a warrior queen, every man a starship trooper.

Much of Disch's critique is accurate. Science fiction attracts its share of obsessives and eccentrics, including some who turn antisocial (the creator of Japan's Aum Shinrikyo cult apparently derived his messianic ideas from Asimov's Foundation series). But most readers choose SF for its entertaining stories and stimulating ideas—

and they are just as skeptical of the genre's occasional mystical nonsense as Disch. The author's understanding of current SF is spotty, too. His chapter on female writers concentrates on Ursula Le Guin and Joanna Russ, neither of whom has written much science fiction for years, and he devotes a single dismissive line to Lois McMaster Bujold, who has won three Hugos for best novel in the 1990s.

"As to the future of SF," Disch writes, "apart from the fortified suburbs of tenured teaching, the outlook is bleak." He rightly argues that many midlist writers, whose books generate respectable but not spectacular sales, will have trouble getting new contracts (a situation that's not limited to science fiction, by the way). But SF has survived past predictions of doom. In all likelihood, the genre will continue to account for about 15 percent of all fiction published, Disch's entertaining but misleading rodomontade notwithstanding.

—Martin Morse Wooster

History

FREE SPEECH IN ITS FORGOTTEN YEARS.

By David M. Rabban. Cambridge Univ. Press. 393 pp. \$34.95

In *Schenck v. United States* (1919), the Supreme Court ruled that a group of socialists could be imprisoned, First Amendment notwithstanding, for dispensing antiwar circulars to men heading for military service. Writing for the Court, Oliver Wendell Holmes explained that the utterances at issue "are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent." Holmes's casual "clear and present danger" aside soon became the judiciary's test for regulating speech; it remained the analytical standard in sedition cases until the 1950s. Rabban, a professor of law at the University of Texas at Austin, traces the origins of the test by placing *Schenck* and the other landmark World War I speech cases in a context of legal and intellectual history, creating a rich and textured view of First Amendment law from the 1870s to the 1920s.

Harvard Law School professor Zechariah Chafee, Jr., emerges as a central character in the story. His *Freedom of Speech* (1920) established the 20th-century framework for analyzing the First Amendment. Written in support of the "clear and present danger" standard, albeit a somewhat more demanding version than Holmes's, Chafee's book treated the World War I speech restrictions as virtually unprecedented. Not since the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, he claimed, had courts and the law been so unfriendly to free speech. It was a persuasive legal brief, but it turns out to be flawed history: American law and courts were quite hostile to free speech throughout the 19th century.

To Chafee and liberal champions of free speech of the post-World War I era—including Herbert Croly, John Dewey, and Roger Baldwin—speech principally served communal ends. In approaching the First Amendment, they "retained the progressive emphasis on social over individual rights," Rabban explains, even as they worked to avoid a recurrence of the

wartime suppressions that putatively had occurred in protection of the community. From these advocates' perspective, speech must be free in order to benefit society; in those instances when speech demonstrably harms society, it can be abridged. "Clear and present danger" served as their benchmark for the level of harm that justifies suppression.

Rabban points out that First Amendment jurisprudence could have taken a different path. Beginning in the late 19th century, libertarian radicals argued for a broad freedom that would serve individual autonomy rather than the collective good. Under this view, everyone would have the right to speak regardless of viewpoint or impact on society. As Rabban observes, this approach might have provided a sturdier foundation for modern free speech than Chafee's disingenuous history and the Progressives' emphasis on community.

This important study ends by reflecting on the current challenges to free speech from the Left. Rabban urges that we recall the lessons the Progressives learned during World War I: democratic governments do not always act in the public interest, and freedom of speech is an essential check on them. It is a caution we ignore at our peril.

—*Timothy Gleason*

THE FOUNDING MYTHS OF ISRAEL.

By Ze'ev Sternhell. Translated by David Maisel. Princeton Univ. Press. 419 pp. \$29.95

Did the founders of modern Israel set out to create a socialist society? This book, published to coincide with the nation's 50th anniversary, answers the question with an emphatic "no." Sternhell, a political scientist at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, contends that the founders, facing the task of creating a nation out of disparate bands of immigrants, "had no patience for exper-

imentation" with socialism or any other unproven philosophy. When forced to choose between advancing socialist principles and attracting capital, David Ben-Gurion, Berl Katznelson, and the other founders invariably picked the latter. Tax rates favored the wealthy, for example, and the quality of schools varied according to neighborhood income. The leaders' pious invocations of socialist principles constituted "a mobilizing myth," the author asserts, "perhaps a convenient alibi that sometimes permitted the movement to avoid grappling with the contradiction between socialism and nationalism."

Sternhell detects similar hypocrisy in



some Israeli leaders of the 1990s. During a protest against the Oslo peace accords in 1995, demonstrators waved signs depicting Yitzhak Rabin as an SS officer. According to the author, speakers at the rally—including Benjamin Netanyahu, now the prime minister—voiced no objections to the hyperbole. "For the Right," Sternhell observes, "Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres were comparable to the worst enemy the Jewish people ever had." One month later, Rabin was assassinated. Israel became, in the author's dispiriting words, "the first democratic state—and from the end of the Second World War until now the only one—in which a political murder achieved its goal."

—*Ami E. Albernaz*

Religion & Philosophy

STRIVING TOWARDS BEING:

*The Letters of Thomas
Merton and Czeslaw Milosz.*

Edited by Robert Faggen. Farrar,
Straus & Giroux. 178 pp. \$21

What are friends for? The question is usually posed as though the answer were self-evident: friends offer help in time of need. But literary friendships are different. They leave a record, the quality of which depends on