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*Zionism and Melancholy: The Short Life of Israel Zarchi*. By Nitzan Lebovic. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019. Pp. xxxi + 154. Paper \$30.00. ISBN 978-0253041821.

Based largely on fourteen of his works, this thought-provoking study of the young Zionist writer Israel Zarchi offers the reader an introduction into the life, times, and the literary work of a relatively little known but significant early Zionist immigrant and intellectual in Palestine. It also provides us with an in-depth look into the vibrant intellectual and literary life of the *Yishuv* in Mandatory Palestine before 1948. *Zionism and Melancholy* is an interdisciplinary study in its scholarly approach, one that includes Jewish intellectual history, psychology, and modern Hebrew literature. The book's specific focus is on the melancholy or disillusionment of Zarchi and other immigrant intellectuals, mainly on the left of the Zionist political spectrum, as they moved from central and eastern Europe to Palestine as part of the third *Aliyah* during the 1920s.

Israel Zarchi was born in Poland in 1909 and emigrated to Palestine as a young pioneer in 1929. He died in 1947 at the age of thirty-eight. His intellectual interests were primarily in nineteenth-century European literature and philosophy. He published six novels, several collections of short stories, and some translations of literary and philosophical classics from their original German, English, and Polish into Hebrew. Yet, his impressive literary production was apparently out of step with much of the Hebrew literature of the time because of Zarchi's perceived disillusionment, his melancholic depictions of Zionism, and the Jewish National Home on several levels. The result was that "his name was erased from the pages of Hebrew literature" (xii).

At the beginning of chapter 7, Nitzan Lebovic contextualizes Zarchi's dilemma in the following way: "Zarchi's melancholy exposes the Zionist condition, that is, that an absolute destruction or negation was the Zionist condition *par excellence*. For the Zionists, only the destruction of past worlds would open the possibility of revival" (106). In other words, Zarchi and some of his contemporaries found it difficult to break completely with their European cultural, political, economic, and social pasts in the diaspora. Moreover, the obvious fact that the deep divisions within the international Zionist movement, such as those that separated political, cultural, revisionist, bi-nationalist, and other Zionists, especially in the *Yishuv*, were difficult to overcome. These divisions existed despite Lebovic's recognition of the reality that "the revival of [modern] Hebrew served as a uniting force that transcended all political and discursive boundaries" (108).

What was the nature and source of Israel Zarchi's melancholy and that of some of his contemporaries in the Jewish National Home? Lebovic cites Sigmund Freud's conclusion that melancholy is the "reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an idea, and so on" (xxi). What was the loss that Israel Zarchi felt as he began to live his life in what was supposed to be a kind of utopia for the Jewish people? Lebovic conveys some of the answers to this question by analyzing some of Zarchi's literary works.

Zarchi's first two novels, *Youth* (1933) and *Naked Days* (1935), take place in a Palestine that Lebovic describes from those books as "an open and unsettled space, bare and empty ... desert land, the drying stony fields do not offer much consolation to the farmers" (19). Tension seems to have existed between Zarchi's utopian idealism in the promise of Zionism on the one hand, and the political, economic, and social realities of the Jewish National Home in the 1930s and 1940s on the other. *And the Oil Flows to the Mediterranean*, published in 1937, is also about a pioneer who roams Palestine with no particular purpose in mind, who initially fails to successfully "grow crops on a rocky mountainside" in Galilee (28). Lebovic concludes that Zarchi came to realize that he did not fit the Zionist ideal of the young Jewish pioneer—despite his extensive agricultural training (*hachschara*) in his native Poland, before he emigrated to Palestine—of someone who was physically strong and mentally tough. Another factor that contributed to Zarchi's melancholy is the movement, especially among his generation, to the cities, and, therefore, the abandonment of agricultural Zionist ideals. These and other factors from his life and publications, from his feelings of loneliness and at times outright depression, demonstrated an inability to adjust to the gap between utopia and reality as he settled into a new life in *Eretz Israel*.

Finally, it remains unclear how the deteriorating relationship between the *Yishuv* and the Arab majority in Mandatory Palestine during the 1930s and 1940s might have affected Zarchi's melancholic outlook. Walter Laqueur's classic *A History of Zionism* postulates as

“The Unseen Question” the reality that most Zionists in the *Yishuv* and abroad were not overly concerned with the so-called Arab question. Lebovic’s book seems to indicate that Israel Zarchi shared that relative disinterest, as Jewish-Arab relations did not seem to loom very large as a factor in Zarchi’s brief adult life. Lebovic makes very few references to Zarchi and the relationship between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and existing or potential conflicts. For example, Lebovic does refer briefly to the 1936–1939 Arab revolt against British colonial rule, which resulted in the loss of many Jewish, Arab, and British lives. To what extent did this or other issues in Arab-Jewish relations during the interwar years contribute to Zarchi’s melancholy and to that of some of his contemporaries? The book does not fully explain this.

Nitzan Lebovic clearly links Zarchi’s melancholy to his Zionist idealism. The author describes this connection in Zarchi’s publications as a “shift between ecstatic hope and deep disappointment” (46). Moreover, the direction that Zarchi thought the Jewish National Home was taking, a direction that he generally opposed, comes through just as clearly in this book. However, more references to particular issues and the specific political, economic, social, and cultural content of Zarchi’s “deep disappointment” would be of considerable help to the reader. That being said, this is a useful, timely, and valuable contribution to the intellectual history of Zionism and of Israel.

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