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Professor David Roskies
The Jewish Theological Seminary
3080 Broadway
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Dear David:

Thanks for your prompt reply.

I just read your review of Lucy Davidowicz's Vilna memoir and your review is a beautifully written, informative and insightful piece - insightful about her and about Jewish history.

The more I read about modern Jewish history in Europe, whether in fiction, memoir or scholarly form, the more insistent becomes the question: why did the great majority of European Jews, almost to the very end, choose (I think that is a historically accurate word) to remain rather than try to emigrate, anywhere? Zionism remained a minority ideology in Europe apart from the practical difficulties of finding a place to go; the educated and cultured believed that Jewish life could flourish there in the face of every antisemitic political, social, economic, and cultural difficulty. Moreover, if Jewish life was doomed in Europe, what made Davidowicz believe it would not be similarly doomed in the

United States? Was she a Zionist then? Now? Did her experiences in 1938-47 make a difference in this regard and, if so, how?

I believe there is still a chance for a viable form of Jewish identity and culture to flourish in America although I am not yet convinced of it; the critical mass may not be there, except among the Orthodox, for the "pile" (to use an atomic science metaphor) to be self-sustaining. But given her views, and assuming we can divorce them - as she seems to in her writing - from her own traditionalist lifestyle, what does she believe, and what would she like us, her readers, to believe about Zionism, and the future of Jewish culture in America?

My only point of possible disagreement with your review is the question you raise about the inappropriateness of mixing scholarly views with personal memoirs. I do not believe they are inherently mutually inconsistent objectives, especially if the experiences are rich ones and there is a nexus between them and an author's professional views as a scholar or scientist. Her failure to do justice in a "flesh and blood" way to the personal aspects of her memoir may, indeed, be part of the reason she was unable to successfully combine the historical and the personal. However, on this matter I may be biased, because of my own attempt to write a memoir of my 30 years at AT&T that is freighted with some rather weighty observations about AT&T's substantial trials during that period. (From the publisher response so far to my 350-page work, you are surely correct that the successful marriage of the personal and the scholarly is, at best, difficult to consummate!).

Your review has convinced me to read her book, and will provide an enormously useful guide as I do so. Kal Hakavod.

With further regard to Prooftexts: I would be pleased to volunteer my time for as long as funds are unavailable. The opportunity, the challenge, and the privilege would be wonderful recompense.

Sincerely,



Lippman Bodoff

LB:amg