

January 15, 1981

Dr. Sidra Ezrahi  
Institute for Contemporary Jewry  
The Hebrew University  
Jerusalem, Israel

Dear Sidra,

I am honored and thrilled at the prospect of reading a paper at the Van Leer conference on "The Future of Memory: The Meaning and Demeaning of the Holocaust." For the last three months I have been working on this very topic as it pertains to the study of Holocaust literature. Specifically, I am reviewing the recent work of Edward Alexander, Dorothy Bilik (to appear in 1981), Mamida Basmajian, your own book, Alvin Rosenfeld, the Sherwin-Ament volume, and Yechiel Szeituch's Ph.D. dissertation at the Hebrew University. This is by no means a nitpicking review, though it is to appear in the May issue of Proof-texts. The question I am posing is what these books tell us about the "cultural resonance" of the Holocaust, and while I do not deal with pstwar Yiddish writing per se, I use my own and Szeituch's research into Yiddish culture as a kind of foil. It is a tightly argued and highly controversial piece, one that will stimulate a great deal of discussion at the conference. I call it "The Holocaust According to the Literary Critics," with deliberate reference to the New Testament.

Now I don't know how you feel about my presenting something written for another forum, though its publication in Prooftexts may not preclude reprinting it, perhaps in revised form, in the proceedings of the conference. Depending on how much time you allot for my paper, I could add a section on Yiddish literature. Since spring semester began the very day your letter arrived, it will be impossible for me to prepare something entirely new at such short notice and with such a heavy work load (the second issue of Prooftexts goes to press this week!). As long as you've known me, I've never tooted my own horn, but this time I really think I'm on to something and the conference strikes me as an ideal forum to air these ideas for the first time.

I hope these conditions are acceptable and that you can let me know about travel arrangements as soon as possible. If I came, it would be right on time for Purim, which in Israel this year will run for three whole days! Can you think of a better prelude to the conference than that?

Love,

David G. Roskies