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Richard Pipes. *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. 290 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-10165-2.

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Always in Hot Water

Although the memoir is among the most popular of nonfiction genres, the appearance of a book-length memoir by a professor remains somewhat unusual, even for one of Richard Pipes's stature.[1] As Pipes observes, "the life of an academic is not commonly of general interest since it is rather repetitious where teaching is involved and esoteric where it concerns scholarship" (p. xi). Nonetheless, he has published his own, motivated, as he tells us, not so much by a sense of the significance of his life as by the significance of three episodes in twentieth-century history to which he was an eyewitness. Pipes was in Poland when the Germans invaded in 1939. He was at Harvard in the decades following the Second World War, when it was "the world's unchallenged premier university" (p. xii), and he served as a foreign policy advisor to President Reagan during a critical phase of the Cold War. The memoir's four lengthy chapters are organized roughly around these three episodes.

The first chapter, "Poland, Italy, America," follows Pipes and his family from Europe to the United States. Pipes grew up in Warsaw in the 1930s in a bourgeois, secular-Jewish milieu. His father, originally from Lvov, ran a chocolate factory. His mother, a Warsaw native, was the daughter of a successful Hasidic businessman. On October 25, 1939, shortly after the German invasion, the family escaped from Poland, leaving all of their relatives and most of their possessions behind. At the time, Pipes was sixteen. The account of his family's trek across Europe is cinematic. Undertaken with travel documents supplied by an unnamed Latin American diplomat, it required a westward journey through the heart of the Third Reich, with stops in Breslau and Munich, and ended in the relative safety of Rome, where the family waited for visas from the United States. The Pipeses' survival seems just short of miraculous, the result of their own nerve and resourcefulness, the kindness of friends and strangers, and considerable luck.

Pipes's academic career began a few months after arriving in the United States, when he sent out a hundred postcards to colleges, explaining that he would like to attend but, as a refugee, he would need a scholarship. He enrolled as a student at Muskingum College, a small liberal arts college in eastern Ohio, and one of three to offer him admission. In small-town Ohio, Pipes, the European Jew, was regarded as exotic, but embraced by students and faculty. He found it the perfect place to learn English and a comfortable environment in which to adapt to American culture. In the middle of his junior year, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. Pipes never served in combat, but the army helped him to find a career. He signed up for a program that trained soldiers in foreign languages. Although he had not previously taken any interest in Russia, he chose to study Russian, believing that his knowledge of Polish would make it easy. The language course was conducted at Cornell University, where he made the decision to pursue graduate studies in Russian history. The first section of Pipes's memoir ends with the Allied Victory and postwar revelations about the extent of the Holocaust, after which Pipes and his parents attempted to account for missing friends and relatives. Some survived. Most did not. Pipes's sense of loss reverberates throughout the memoir, playing a role in important personal decisions and in shaping his approach to history and, later, foreign policy.

The chapter, "Harvard," begins in the late 1940s and ends in the early '70s. Arriving in Cambridge in 1946, Pipes was placed under the supervision of the émigré historian Mikhail Karpovich and found himself in the company of an extraordinarily talented group of fellow students that included Leopold Haimson, Marc Raeff, Nicholas Riasanovsky, and Donald Treadgold. Pipes also discusses his first experiences as a teacher, a professional and intellectual rivalry with Martin Malia, trips to Russia, interaction with eminent scholars (including Edmund Wilson, George Kennan and Isaiah Berlin) and the stu-

dent movement of the 1960s.

On his first visits to the Soviet Union, Pipes was treated well but left with a negative impression. In 1957, he was struck by the shabbiness of Moscow and Leningrad, and by a dishonesty so pervasive that it had infiltrated all spheres of life apart from "the intimate circle of friends and family." He observed that "everyone was lying, everyone knew you knew they were lying, and yet one had to pretend otherwise" (p. 89).

On a visit in 1962, colleagues at Leningrad University were extraordinarily kind. They helped Pipes to gain access to archives, arranged a lecture series and, when he fell ill, supplied him with antibiotics purchased on the black market. But Pipes found the price of their affection too great. "Such friendliness ... was contingent on my following the rules of the game, which required that I neither say nor write anything that would get them in trouble with the authorities. The difficulty of this condition was that it was likely to conflict with the truth" (p. 98). He was not willing to moderate his views or rewrite history to suit new friends.

His lectures, which examined "how tsarist era conservatives foresaw the miseries of communism," violated "the rules of the game" (p. 98). Pipes did not explicitly criticize the regime, but the ideological implications of his lectures were not lost on his hosts. His Soviet colleagues, worried that they would be punished "for having hosted someone as deviant as myself," savaged him in academic journals and the press, labeling his work "bourgeois falsification." The most vicious criticisms carried anti-Semitic overtones (p. 99). For Pipes, the attempt by scholars not merely to criticize but to vilify viewpoints that clashed with the party line and to punish their spokesmen was symptomatic of the degradation of the Soviet scholarly community. Likewise, Pipes regarded the willingness of many American scholars to accept the intellectually compromising terms of collaboration with Soviet colleagues as a form of corruption, one that was less comprehensible because it was not the result of fear or compulsion.

Pipes is unsparing in his criticism of Soviet totalitarianism, which, in his scholarship, he has connected to Russian political traditions dating back to Muscovy. Nonetheless, he is quick to distance himself from the charge of Russophobia that has been leveled at him both in the United States and in the former Soviet Union. He professes to have great respect for Russian intellectuals, the subject of much of his research, while his criticisms of Russia are reserved almost entirely for political tendencies (p. 62). He sees Russians as tragically unable to "translate their warm human feelings into the impersonal relations required for the effective functioning of social and political institutions." To further illustrate the complexity of his views, he explains that his criticism of the United States is "neatly reversed;" he has "the highest respect for its public life but much less for its culture" (p. 63).

Some scholars have objected to Pipes's generalizations about Russians, his readiness to see continuities over centuries, his high moral tone, and his willingness to move from historical research to confident formulations about public policy. Still, it is hard to dispute either his sincerity or his gifts as a communicator. Moreover, it is, arguably, those aspects of his work that have exercised fellow scholars that have made his histories meaningful to the reading public and have made him one of the few university-trained historians of Russia to achieve national prominence outside of the academy.

The third chapter, "Washington," focuses on Pipes's life as a public servant and as a public intellectual. It begins in the early 1970s when his criticisms of détente caught the attention of the influential cold warrior, Washington Senator Henry Jackson, and ends with his service on the National Security Council (1980-82). Highlights include his leadership of the now "infamous" Team B and the declaration of martial law in Poland in December of 1981.

In 1976, to answer the assertions by the anticommunist right that the CIA had underestimated the Soviet threat, George Bush, then Director of the agency, authorized a competitive exercise in intelligence assessment. Two teams of analysts were formed: Team A, composed of the CIA's own experts, and Team B, composed of outside experts, most of whom were hardliners. The teams were to examine the same data and then to debate their conclusions in front of a committee whose members had been appointed by President Ford. Team B's findings challenged the intelligence community's conviction that Soviet leaders shared the notion of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) with their Western counterparts. Because MAD was understood to make nuclear aggression as devastating for the aggressor as the victim, adherents of this perspective had all but ruled out the possibility of a Soviet nuclear attack. In contrast, team B asserted that Soviet and Western leaders were not playing by the same rules and that Soviet military strategists were actively planning for the type of offensive nuclear war that Americans and Europeans believed to be irrational and, therefore, unthinkable.

Pipes regarded Team A as making errors in judgment

based on wishful thinking and mirror-imaging, or the simplistic projecting of the thought processes of American policymakers onto the Soviets. The most obvious consequence of these errors was complacency in American military planning. Although Team B impressed the President's advisors, it had little immediate impact on policy. Its findings were dismissed by rank-and-file CIA analysts, and rejected by Bush, who limited their influence by keeping the report classified. However, Team B's perspective was resurrected in the presidential administration that Pipes served just a few years later.

When martial law was declared in Poland in 1981, Pipes was already a staff member of Reagan's National Security Council. He discusses in detail how a divided cabinet was further strained as it attempted to formulate a coherent response. The hawks, whose position Pipes coordinated, felt the need to act decisively. Seeking a muscular policy that fell short of military action or the provocation of a Soviet military response, they came to support stiff economic sanctions. Moderates, long resigned to the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and fearing the opposition of America's European allies to forceful policies, wanted to limit the administration to declarations and other symbolic gestures.

Initially, Reagan opted for economic sanctions. However, resistance within the cabinet, Congress, and NATO proved so great that he felt compelled to rescind them. Nonetheless, his initial actions were of historic importance as, for the first time, American officials openly "broke with the Yalta syndrome that had tacitly acknowledged Poland as lying within the Soviet sphere of influence" (p. 175). Time would favor hardliners like Pipes, who hoped to replace policies aimed at coexistence with efforts to win the Cold War.

The most interesting passages in the chapter include Pipes's observations on the process of policymaking and his portraits of the President and his chief advisors. He discusses in some detail the way that the egos and ambitions of individual cabinet secretaries impeded open discussion of key issues and recalcitrant bureaucracies worked to block the implementation of the President's policies. While he has great respect for Reagan's innate political sense and his moral stand vis-à-vis the USSR, he is shocked by the president's inability to follow arguments of any complexity and his unwillingness to engage in serious discussion. Even Reagan's closest advisors came to treat him less as a president than as a doddering old man. Also interesting are the implicit (and sometimes explicit) parallels that Pipes makes between the shortcomings of U.S. foreign policy in the 1970s and 1980s and recent tendencies (p. 156). These include failures in the gathering and analysis of intelligence on the part of the CIA, active opposition to the President in the State Department, and stiff resistance to American policies by European allies. His perspective places some of the problems in American conduct of the war against terror within a historical framework that emphasizes continuity rather than change in American foreign policy in the aftermath of the Cold War.

The book's fourth and final chapter, "Back at Harvard," acts as a coda. It addresses Pipes's visits to Russia following the fall of the Soviet Union, his disappointment with tenure decisions in his own department, and his attempts to come to terms with his own retirement, which he announced to his chair on October 27, 1995, the anniversary of his family's flight from Poland. While he continues to pursue research and does not miss teaching, which after half a century had begun to seem a rote exercise, he misses the interaction with young people. The adjustment is not easy.

This uneasiness gives rise to existential questions that are first raised in the preface and that provide the memoir with an underlying structure. Looking back at his own life, Pipes muses on the unity of his personality over time. "If one has lived to a ripe old age ... , one's life is a long story whose earlier chapters are shrouded in darkness. Are we the same over these decades? Can we still understand what we have once said and done?" (p. xii). Of course, Pipes answers these questions affirmatively, defining himself through two recurring themes.

The first is a personal response to the Holocaust. Pipes attributes to the psychic impact of this catastrophe both his desire to write history (to give meaning to the past and to his own life) and to the moral seriousness of his approach to intellectual matters, including his uncompromising criticism of Soviet totalitarianism, Western scholarship which acted to normalize it, and foreign policies that excused it for purportedly "realistic" reasons. The Holocaust, moreover, is the subtext for the first part of his title; *Vixi* is Latin for "I have lived." For a Jewish boy from Warsaw to have reached adulthood is a miracle; for him to have lived a long and meaningful life is nothing short of a triumph. It is this personal triumph over Nazi totalitarianism that his memoir commemorates.

A second unifying theme, also explicit in the title, is the notion of the "non-belonger." Stubbornly independent and uncomfortable with the ways that groups think, Pipes has seen it as a personal obligation to confront the establishment, whether in government or in the

academy, with difficult questions and controversial opinions. A born contrarian, he seems to relish the "heat" that his ideas have generated. To explain his inclinations, he borrows the words of Samuel Butler: "I never write on any subject unless I believe the opinion of those who have the ear of the public to be mistaken, and this involves as a necessary consequence, that every book I write runs counter to the men who are in possession of the field; hence I am always in hot water" (p. 28). Even the most cursory survey of reviews of Pipes's works in academic journals or of newspaper articles pertaining to his public service would confirm the applicability of Butler's observation.

Richard Pipes has written an elegant and highly readable memoir. In tracing the arc of his own eventful life, he has illuminated much that will be of interest to scholars. Beyond the material on Poland, Harvard and Washington, *Vixi* includes lengthy discussions of the author's own work and its reception, personal observations on the craft of history, and provocative commentary on the state of universities and the field of Russian Studies. There is also a healthy dose of entertaining and often edifying academic gossip. *Vixi* succeeds in shedding some new light on the episodes in twentieth-century history its author has witnessed, but it is more compelling for its illumination of the way that history has shaped Pipes the historian and of the ways that one prolific and influential scholar has sustained his intellectual independence and creativity over the course of a long career.

Note

[1]. There is a growing scholarly literature on memoirs by historians. See, for example, Jeremy D. Popkin, "Ego-Histoire and Beyond: Contemporary French Historian-Autobiographers," *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 4 (Fall 1996): pp. 1139-1167; Popkin, "Historians on the Autobiographical Frontier," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): pp. 725-748; and Mitchell B. Hart, "The Historians' Past in Three Recent Jewish Autobiographies," *Jewish Social Studies* 5, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 1999): pp. 132-160.

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