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REVIEWS

S Fitzpatrick, *A Spy in the Archives,* Carlton, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2013. 346 pp. ISBN 978 0 522861 18 1 (paperback). AUD$32.99. ISBN 978 0 522861 19 8 (e-book). AUD$29.99.

Any book with the word 'archives' in its title will attract instant attention from those of us who call themselves archivists. Add to it the word 'spy' and you have an instant bestseller for a niche audience. Not that this book's appeal is limited to any niche market: comments full of superlatives from such figures as Robert Dessaix ('unusual verve, a disarming candour and a shrewd eye for the telling detail') and Slavoj Zizek ('the insanely readable crowning achievement … a book every historian should dream to write') are telling in themselves. Anyone interested in history will feel compelled to at least look inside. This is a book about history, archives and human connections across the Cold War divide.

The scene is set before the reader from the very start. In the 1960s the author, an Oxford doctoral student specialising in Soviet history, is on a research trip in Moscow and worried that she has been 'outed as a spy' in a Soviet newspaper:

> I didn't intend to be an ideological saboteur, whatever that might mean … all I wanted to do was get on with my archival research and be able to come back to the Soviet Union in the future to do more. I was passionate about my research and fascinated, in a non-admiring way, by the Soviet Union. But this was the period of the Cold War, and relations between the Soviet Union and the West were full of tension and mutual accusations. Anybody who worked on the Soviet Union was at risk of being seen by the Soviets as a spy. But when they actually accused you, the consequences were likely to be serious. (p. 1)

Sheila Fitzpatrick, daughter of Brian Fitzpatrick (1905–65), a notable Australian progressive socialist historian and libertarian thinker, is now an Honorary Professor at the University of Sydney, as well as a Professor Emerita at the University of Chicago, and widely considered a founder of the field of Soviet history. She moved to the United States in the early 1970s where she developed her research career. But before that was a Melbourne childhood in a left-wing family during the Cold War ('I was nine when Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were convicted', p. 5), which did not automatically create a love of the Soviet Union ('I can't say that as a child I was particularly drawn to things Russian', p. 7). This was followed by studies at the Russian Department of the University of Melbourne and first-class honours with the thesis *Music and the People of the USSR*. During her work on the thesis she had tasted the thrill of research using as many Russian-language sources as she could find. She then realised that there was not anything in the world she would rather do and liked the thought of working on the Soviet Union, because so little was reliably known about it. In 1964 she went on to study at St Antony's College at Oxford, also known as the 'spy college' for its alleged connections with the British intelligence community. The atmosphere at St Antony's was depressing for the young Australian woman at the beginning of her scholarly career. A particular disappointment was the feeling among 'St Antony's people' that Soviet history could be written 'without any kind of decent source work' (p. 12).

Fitzpatrick chose as the subject of her dissertation Anatoly Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar (that is, Minister) of Enlightenment in the first Bolshevik Government after the October Revolution of 1917, and decided that she needed Soviet archives and libraries to keep doing the work she wanted to do. This is where the story rapidly develops with all intensity. The reader witnesses the author's determination to overcome bureaucratic systems, both British and Soviet, in obtaining the necessary documents and visas to become a student exchange participant. She arrived in Moscow in 1966 in the mixed atmosphere of Cold War hysteria and reform-minded undercurrents in civil societies both in the Soviet Union (the whole generation of progressive-thinking individuals was later called *shestidesyatniki*, 'persons of the sixties') and in the West (student protests were only a couple of years ahead).

The newspapers on both sides were full of spy scandals in the 1960s and the exchange students felt particularly vulnerable, having heard stories of the expulsion of their colleagues accused of spying, smuggling anti-Soviet materials in or out of the country or being in a location not approved by the Soviet authorities. Having a liaison with a Soviet citizen could also result in expulsion. Another danger was for completed academic work to be denounced as 'bourgeois falsification', thus making it impossible for the authors to return to the Soviet Union to continue research. Fitzpatrick describes in detail how she tried to avoid any possible pitfalls that might jeopardise her research, and the difficulties of daily life in surviving the weather, food and unfamiliar customs. But she also conveys the excitement of an explorer in a dangerous, at times hostile, but nevertheless fascinating environment. This feeling was shared by many of her fellow students: 'we went off to the Soviet Union expecting adventure, even danger … there was the exhilarating sense of being parachuted into enemy territory and left to fend for yourself' (p. 49).

Relationships with the locals are a large part of Fitzpatrick's narrative. She talks about people she met along the way and how relationships progressed, both in positive and negative ways: we meet her Moscow State University supervisor – a conservative literary scholar loyal to the government; ordinary young Russian people, some of whom turned out to be KGB agents; bureaucrats in government agencies and so on. However, the most important encounters are connected with her research. In Moscow she seeks out and meets her subject's daughter, Irina Lunacharskaya, a passionate defender of her father's legacy, and Igor Sats, his brother-in-law and former secretary in the 1920s. They both became not only very important sources for her research but also life-long connections, and figure prominently throughout the entire second half of the book.

'Two extraordinary things happened to me in the first months of 1967: Igor and the archives' (p. 169), writes Fitzpatrick. Igor Sats, then in his 60s, was the person who, in her own words, mattered most to the author from their first meeting to his death at the end of 1979: 'on a par with my father earlier and my husband Michael Danos later' (p. 168). That a deep personal relationship should be mentioned alongside the use of archives would be counted as a credit to any researcher in the eyes of an archivist today.

In the chapter on archives, Fitzpatrick describes the difference between the British archival system with its then 50-year rule (later 30- and now 20-year rule) for access and the Soviet archives, which did not have such statutory restrictions though researchers, in particular foreign ones, encountered difficulties of another sort: 'the automatic Soviet habit of restricting access to information in every possible context' (p. 170). Fitzpatrick explains that her desire to see the archival sources was, on the one hand, the result of strict training in the History Department at the University of Melbourne, and, on the other hand, intensified by her frustrations with the 'St Antony's people for not understanding the importance of primary sources for historians' (p. 171). The reader is

given an account of the author's perseverance in identifying archival repositories relevant to her research, obtaining permissions for access and the struggle to identify and view the needed records (foreign scholars were not permitted to see detailed descriptions of records, such as item lists or inventories, and had to rely on archivists to interpret their topic and identify the relevant files).

Fitzpatrick also writes about her relationships with archivists, who had to obey the not so well concealed orders of the Communist Party and KGB bureaucracy. She observes that they formed their own judgements about who was and was not a legitimate scholar with the main criterion being hard work. Many reference archivists will sympathise, even if secretly, with this attitude: 'if people regularly put in a lot of hours … the archivists tended to think well of them, but if they made a big fuss about getting material but then left it untouched for days, they thought badly' (p. 208). For the author an individual archivist's goodwill could sometimes result in unexpected additional material brought to her as a reward for hard work.

The thrill of chasing archival sources is addictive at any time, but the experience of Fitzpatrick in the Soviet archives of the 1960s with the inevitable game of matching wits with Soviet officialdom can be hardly surpassed. She writes herself of becoming addicted to the fight for knowledge, saying:

> I thought it must be terribly boring to work, say, on British history, where you just went to the archives, checked the inventories, ordered some documents, and they brought them to you … What would be the fun of it? (p. 209)

Winding through this book are the complementary themes of archives and personalities, documents and memories. The archival evidence is enriched by the reminiscences and personal insights that Lunacharsky's daughter and Igor Sats brought to Fitzpatrick's research. They also invited old Bolshevik colleagues of Lunacharsky to talk to the young foreign researcher. The book itself is a memoir based on the author's diary, her letters to her mother and a former fiancé. However, quite often when quoting these documents the authors says that she now has no recollection of this or that fact, but it must be true since it is recorded in her diary or letter. Thus the book is a fascinating example of how memory and archival evidence interact on a number of levels: human memory may be fallible but the truth is often more than merely a sum of facts in written documents. I recommend it to anyone interested in the writing of history, events of the Cold War or archives in a state that no longer exists.

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Astrid M Eckert, *The Struggle for the Files: The Western Allies and the Return of German Archives After the Second World War,* New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012. xv + 427 pp. ISBN 0 521880 18 1 (hardback). USD$99.00.

The English translation of Astrid M Eckert's meticulously researched and eminently readable book *The Struggle for the Files: The Western Allies and the Return of German*