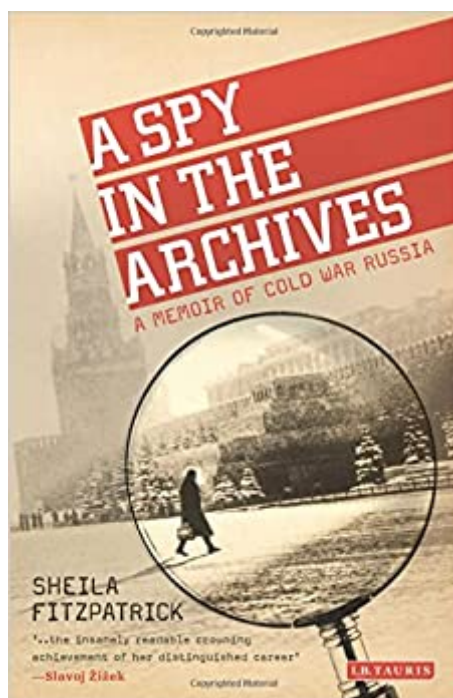


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# A Spy In The Archives: A Memoir Of Cold War Russia



## Synopsis

Moscow in the 1960s was the other side of the Iron Curtain: mysterious, exotic, even dangerous. In 1966 the historian Sheila Fitzpatrick traveled to Moscow to research in the Soviet archives. This was the era of Brezhnev, of a possible *thaw* in the Cold War, when the Soviets couldn't decide either to thaw out properly or re-freeze. Moscow, the world capital of socialism, was renowned for its drabness. The buses were overcrowded; there were endemic shortages and endless queues. This was also the age of regular spying scandals and tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions, and it was no surprise that visiting students were subject to intense scrutiny by the KGB. Many of Fitzpatrick's friends were involved in espionage activities—and indeed others were accused of being spies or kept under close surveillance. In this book, Sheila Fitzpatrick provides a unique insight into everyday life in Soviet Moscow. Full of drama and colorful characters, her remarkable memoir highlights the dangers and drudgery faced by Westerners living under communism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'absorbing... an exceptionally lucid and purposive account... this is a book about self-discovery, and about the shy, self-doubting but unusually astute and determined young woman who embarked on it... a remarkable record not only of personal history, but of Soviet and indeed British history as well.'

- The Guardian 'As gripping as any spy novel, Fitzpatrick's memoir captures student life in 1960s Moscow perfectly. Against a surreal backdrop of KGB informers, shabby Moscow flats and sedate reading rooms, she also tells a story about growing up, as a woman and an intellectual, with a

warmth that is irresistible and an honesty that is almost piercing.' - Catherine Merridale, author of Red Fortress 'A Spy in the Archives is the insanely readable crowning achievement of a distinguished career, a book every historian should dream of writing. Through the autobiographic report of her visit to the Soviet Union, she tells a story of bureaucratic hassles but also of deep and lasting personal friendships.' - Slavoj Zizek 'The vanished world of Brezhnev's Russia brought to life with unusual erve, a disarming candour and a shrewd eye for telling detail.' - Robert Dossaix

Sheila Fitzpatrick is Emerita Professor of History at the University of Chicago and Honorary Professor of History at the University of Sydney. One of the most acclaimed historians of twentieth-century Russia, she is the author of several books, including *The Russian Revolution; Stalin's Peasants, Everyday Stalinism, Tear off the Masks!*, and *My Father's Daughter: Memories of an Australian Childhood*.

Sheila Fitzpatrick's memoir *A Spy in the Archives* is an account of her Soviet studies career and highlights her trips to the Soviet Union; beginning in the 1960s and ending with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The bulk of the memoir, however, concerns her first two research trips taken in X and Y. A look into her thoughts on daily life, as seen through her letters to her mother, as well as accounts told from her memory and notes she took during the time, provide an accurate sense of her daily life and thoughts during the 1960s and beyond as she established herself as a leading Soviet expert. Fitzpatrick argues that her gender as well as shaky translation from English to Russian allowed her work to continue in the Soviet Union for as long as it went. Her firsthand account of researching the Soviet Union through archives and libraries during the time of the Soviet Union provide a primary account given by a Westerner that is nearly unheard of in the field of Soviet-Russian studies. The beginning of *A Spy in the Archives* conveys the manner to which Fitzpatrick went about getting into the Soviet Union and subsequently being able to return and continue research. Fitzpatrick married multiple times throughout her career, which helped her fly under the KGB radar multiple times. Her multiple identities and nationalities make her a unique researcher during a time when everyone was under strict observation. An Australian by birth, Fitzpatrick married a British citizen to get a British passport to then take part in a British Exchange to the Soviet Union. Fitzpatrick's first trip to the Soviet Union occurred in 1966 when she traveled by train for three weeks throughout present day Russia. While Fitzpatrick did not do archival research during this time, this trip set up her subsequent trips to the Soviet Union and was the springboard to her next fifty years of work and research. The evidence used for her memoir

came from first-hand experience, but also through a reexamination of her letters and diaries from that time. This adds to the credibility arguments presented throughout her career and this memoir. A strong attribute of Fitzpatrick's memoir is her employment of storytelling not only by documenting her bureaucratic hassles during her research in the Soviet Union, but also of the personal relationships she forged during her time in the USSR. A crucial part of her Soviet experience came from her decades-long friendships with Igor Alexandrovich Sats and Irina Anotolevna Lunacharskaya, both were Soviet citizens who reciprocated Fitzpatrick's dislike for Victor Ovcharenko's care of Lunacharsky's works, which was the basis for their long-lasting friendships. Specifically, Fitzpatrick became close to Irina because: "Irina was a fluent, persuasive conversationalist and a virtuoso of the telephone, with a well-honed instinct for the limits of the possible in any given situation" (129). Irina overwhelmed Fitzpatrick, something from which Fitzpatrick learned and thrived. Igor "adopted" Fitzpatrick and was one of her greatest allies and critics; orally reviewing her works to her in front of other Soviet scholars. He saw her as a waif that needed to be adopted (145). He had an aversion to privilege that drove those around him mad, but also garnered him tremendous respect. The greatest strength of this memoir is its delicate balance between discussing the professional work of Fitzpatrick with her personal life. Many historians divide their personal life from the research they publish because of their distinct differences. Fitzpatrick's experiences in the Soviet Union directly influenced the work that she completed and the manner in which she did her research. This memoir gives the story behind the story. The title of the memoir, *A Spy in the Archives* is a reference to Fitzpatrick's decades-long self-questioning of whether in fact she was a spy working in the archives of the Soviet Union. The concluding paragraph of the book states that Fitzpatrick still struggles with the notion of whether or not she was indeed a spy. "Perhaps I was, perhaps I wasn't, but I hoped grace would abound and I would escape being cast into the pit" (345). Fitzpatrick's memoir leaves one yearning to learn more about other Sovietologists' experiences during the same period. A supplemental memoir of her work since the collapse of the Soviet Union would be the crown jewel in her storied career. One lingering question that I am left with is how her work changed once the Soviet collapsed and also what fields of Post-Soviet studies can still be explored that have not been extensively researched already. The importance of this book will only grow as time passes and Sovietologists who lived and worked during the seventy-four years of the Soviet Union begin to retire and pass on their accounts as spies.

Sheila Fitzpatrick's memoir "A Spy in the Archives" is a compelling look at the mindset of those western students who had the opportunity, and the guts, to research in Soviet archives during the Cold War. Born an Australian citizen to decidedly communist parents, Fitzpatrick's quest to be admitted to a study program in Moscow in 1966, and then to be admitted to the archives for research, is a backdrop to the deeper questions of what it meant to be a historian presumed both to be a spy and to be spied upon. Over and over, Fitzpatrick, labeled a spy by a Soviet newspaper, had to confront the question of her motives for studying in the Soviet Union. Originally traveling to Moscow out of academic interest, the occasionally paranoid atmosphere that resulted in anything from self-censorship (of letters, speech, and diary entries), to outright accusations of espionage (in favor of both the West and Moscow) led to the author questioning her own motivations. In the end, she attempts to keep herself as far from any accusation of espionage as possible, although in the climate of the 1960s Soviet Union, this was almost impossible. Yet, Fitzpatrick persists in bringing us at least one version of the truth, one based on hard evidence, which was woefully difficult for anyone writing on the Soviet Union to acquire. Sovietologists and Kremlinologists often had to make do with incomplete information, and Fitzpatrick was determined to back up her thesis on the early Soviet commissar, Anatoly Lunacharsky, with hard evidence. However, she does not rely only on the archives. During her stay in Moscow, Fitzpatrick meets Irina Anatolevna and Igor Alexandrovich Sats, both of whom were connected with her work on Lunacharsky. Through Irina and Igor, Fitzpatrick shows not only the scholarly life in the Soviet Union, but can connect the reader to how life was for (not necessarily the average) Soviet citizen. Through Irina, and especially Igor, Fitzpatrick is able to pull back the screen a little bit to show the behind-the-scenes politicking that dictated the lives of Soviet citizens that engaged in any kind of scholarship. Given the amount of time that has passed between the events of the memoir and when the author has written it, Fitzpatrick has written her memoir in an almost uniquely historian fashion, using old letters and diary entries to try to figure out her own mindset while a PhD student in Moscow. Fitzpatrick interrogates her own motivations as a "historian-spy," (197) as she puts it, and attempts to run down the origins of her thought processes. However, as with all historical sources, no matter how complete, there are holes in her attempts to reconcile past, present, and primary source. Several times, Fitzpatrick must come to the conclusion that she does not know what her reasoning for certain actions were, or that in retrospect, she was less clever than she thought she was. Looking back with the added experience of decades, Fitzpatrick is able to place her own actions and experiences in the wider framework of the turmoil that occurred at the time and see how political happenings in the Soviet Union affected scholarly life. As a memoir of Cold War scholarship, Fitzpatrick conveys the

difficulty of working caught between the First World and the Second World, and trying to delicately negotiate between these two powers, both of which want the privilege of any information she might bring back. Fitzpatrick's constant attempts to keep from inadvertently becoming an ideological saboteur (1) comes through as the honest attempt of a student who may be slightly over her head to keep her work, and experiences, as free of the taint of Cold War espionage as possible. Fitzpatrick's memoir of life as a researcher in the Soviet Union, and her attempts to remain true to herself and keep her work as free of political taint as possible is still a struggle that historians undergo today. The urge to identify too closely to the people and times you are studying, or of not detaching yourself enough from your own culture, can both have an effect on the validity and equitability of a work. While it is impossible to go into a study blind to what has come before, and is even dangerous to do so, acknowledging prejudice from the outset, as Fitzpatrick does, is paramount in maintaining historical integrity. Fitzpatrick eventually acknowledges her own "spy-like characteristics" (342) and how that muddies the water of her own allegiance, which she says was "neither to the Soviet Union nor Great Britain" (342). Her memoir of research under the aegis of the Cold War can be adapted to the present times, when our enemies are not so obvious and easy to find.

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