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ISABEL MARGARET DE MADARIAGA

# Isabel Margaret de Madariaga 1919–2014

## I

IN 2012, THE RUSSIAN HISTORIAN VIACHESLAV LOPATIN published a book about Grigorii Potemkin (1739–91), Catherine II's celebrated favourite and lover.<sup>1</sup> It included a chapter entitled 'The scholarly exploits of an English researcher', which focused exclusively on Isabel de Madariaga and her scholarship on the empress's reign (1762–96).<sup>2</sup> Lopatin not only praised the seriousness of her research but stated several times that she had 'rehabilitated' Catherine II and bemoaned the fact that 'even today' scholars in Russia had not attained an equivalent understanding of the empress and of her relationship with Potemkin, though Madariaga's study had been published three decades earlier. Isabel de Madariaga's reaction was characteristic: she was tickled by the idea of a chapter devoted to her; she roared with laughter at the choice of photograph, which had been taken over sixty years before; but she was also delighted and moved that her scholarly contribution had finally been recognised in such a fulsome way by a native of the country to whose history she had devoted her life. Although Isabel de Madariaga had indeed 'rehabilitated' Catherine II, she did far more than this: her scholarship resulted in a major reassessment not only of the empress but also of the country she ruled and its place in Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> V. S. Lopatin, *Potemkin i ego legendy* ('Potemkin and his legends') (Moscow, 2012), pp. 253–67.

<sup>2</sup> Particularly on her magnum opus, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London, 1981).

Madariaga was born in Glasgow on 27 August 1919.<sup>3</sup> Her father was the distinguished Spanish and European man of letters, liberal statesman and political exile Salvador de Madariaga (1886–1978).<sup>4</sup> His peripatetic life determined that her upbringing would be international and cosmopolitan, something which would later be reflected in the cultural and linguistic breadth of her scholarship. Though Don Salvador had been born in La Coruña in Galicia, he was educated largely in France. His own father—convinced like many of his contemporaries that defeat in the Spanish-American War of 1898 had been due to the result of Spain's technological backwardness—was determined that his son would follow a career that contributed to remedying this shortcoming. Though Salvador's own inclinations were always towards literature, he was sent to Paris where he received a scientific and technical education. He studied first at the Collège Chaptal (1900–6), then the École Polytechnique (1906–8) and finally the École Nationale Supérieure des Mines (1908–11), returning to Spain in 1911 where he took up a post working for a Spanish railway company as a mining engineer.

During his sojourn in France he had met Constance Helen Margaret Archibald (1878–1970) and the two married in 1912. Isabel de Madariaga's mother was scarcely less remarkable than her father. Born into a prominent west of Scotland legal and scientific family, Constance had secured a double first class honours degree (in Modern Languages and Economic Science) and gold medal at the University of Glasgow—an extremely rare accomplishment. She then undertook postgraduate research on medieval French economic history at the École de Chartes in Paris, publishing a short study of serfdom on the estates of Sainte-Geneviève, one of the most prestigious abbey-churches in the centre of the city.<sup>5</sup> Constance was

<sup>3</sup>There is a difference in usage between Spanish and English over whether she should be referred to as 'de Madariaga' or 'Madariaga'. Since she always referred to herself in English as 'Madariaga, Isabel de', we have followed that practice.

<sup>4</sup>A modern scholarly biography of Salvador de Madariaga is surprisingly lacking. O. V. Gil, *Vida de Salvador de Madariaga* (2 vols; Madrid, 1990) assembles a vast amount of information, while C. F. Santander, *Madariaga: Ciudadano del mundo* (Madrid, 1991) is popular and celebratory in tone. The recent monograph by T. Nitzsche, *Salvador de Madariaga: Liberaler—Spanier—Weltbürger—Der Weg eines politischen Intellektuellen durch das Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Baden-Baden, 2009), is helpful on his political ideas; while a published lecture by P. Preston, *Salvador de Madariaga and the Quest for Liberty in Spain* (Oxford, 1987) provides a good brief introduction. The *Liber Amicorum Salvador de Madariaga*, edited by H. Brugmans and R. M. Nadal (Bruges, 1966), produced for his 80th birthday, is informative on the later stages of his career and life.

<sup>5</sup>C. H. M. Archibald, 'Le servage dans les domaines de Sainte-Geneviève', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France*, 37 (1910); Salvador de Madariaga, *Memorias* (1921–36):

also a gifted pianist who was close to professional standard and imparted a love of music to her daughter. While Isabel de Madariaga would always see herself as a genuine 'European', she was fiercely proud both of her Spanish roots and of the Scottish and British ancestry of her mother. Unusually, she would become both a Fellow of the British Academy (to which she was elected in 1990) and a corresponding member of the Royal Spanish Academy of History (1991), reflecting this international background.

In 1916 Salvador de Madariaga received an offer from the owner of *The Times* to write for the paper on the Hispanic world. Since this would enable him to pursue his literary ambitions, he threw up his secure engineering career, moved to London, and began to pursue the literary, journalistic, and political causes which would dominate his life. This is why Isabel was born in Glasgow, where Constance went to live with her family during the final stages of her pregnancy. Salvador's career was remarkable both in its variety and its restless, peripatetic nature. He initially worked in Geneva for the League of Nations (1921–7) and then became the first King Alfonso XIII Professor of Spanish in Oxford (1928–31). He was next appointed Spain's Permanent Delegate to the League of Nations (1931–6), served as an ambassador for the new Spanish Republic in the USA (1931) and Paris (1932–4) and, briefly, a minister in the Republican government (1934), while all the time publishing extensively on Spain's literature and history: he was a prolific, not to say compulsive, writer of books and articles.

These successive appointments, and the travelling they involved, meant that the family never settled in one place for long. Isabel de Madariaga later noted that she had attended no fewer than sixteen schools by the time she was eighteen. She would subsequently recall how one of her sharpest memories of childhood was of being frequently at train stations to see her father depart or to meet him on his return.<sup>6</sup> Her education took place primarily in Geneva, Oxford, and Madrid, and this endowed her with a gift for languages which was to be of crucial importance in her scholarly career. Mirroring her father's linguistic accomplishments, she

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*Amanecer sin Mediodía* (Madrid, 1974), p. 153 (a rather briefer and less complete translation of these was published in English: see below, n. 7). She would also publish English translations of two books: C. J. Fuchs, *The Trade Policy of Great Britain and her Colonies* (London, 1905) and C. Gide, *Political Economy* (London, 1914).

<sup>6</sup>I. de Madariaga, 'Salvador de Madariaga', in *Salvador de Madariaga 1886–1986* (La Coruña, 1987), pp. 443–50, at p. 444. We are grateful to Professor Mía Rodríguez-Salgado for drawing this revealing account to our attention and providing us with a copy.

was fluent from childhood in Spanish, French, and English. She subsequently acquired an impressive grasp of German, Russian, and Italian and was thus able to work in all the major European languages. The benefits of her unusual upbringing were far greater than these linguistic skills, however. It endowed her with a sense of Europe as a community of nations and cultures which she would retain throughout her life, and also gave her a love of travel which she never lost.

As an adolescent, Isabel and her elder sister, Maria de las Nieves (1917–2003), met leading musicians, artists, and writers from all over Europe. One of the best illustrations of this came when Salvador de Madariaga was Spain's ambassador to France and the family was living in Paris. A combination of the political advantages which would accrue together with his own broad cultural sympathies led him to secure a Spanish decoration for three distinguished French figures: the writers Paul Valéry and André Maurois, and the composer Maurice Ravel. A presentation lunch was held at the embassy, and the two daughters, together with their mother, presented the decorations.<sup>7</sup> Episodes such as this underline the remarkable and distinctly unusual upbringing which the children received. During the years spent in Paris, Isabel de Madariaga also began serious study of the piano—practising in the ballroom of the Spanish embassy—and she acquired an enduring love of classical music.

Though often absent on official duties, Salvador de Madariaga forged a strong relationship with his younger daughter which would endure until his death.<sup>8</sup> His prodigious literary output included a children's book (written in 1925 but not published until rather later) especially for his two daughters, *Sir Bob* (1930), in which Isabel de Madariaga apparently claimed joint authorship on the grounds that she had provided a crucial line!<sup>9</sup> For her part she was always very close intellectually to her father, though also in awe of him and seeking his approval of her own scholarly achievements. She ended the preface to her major work, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, with the moving comment:

For years, whenever I saw my father, his first words were 'how is Catherine?'. It is a great grief to record that he did not live to see a work which he so warmly encouraged and in which he expressed so constant an interest.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> S. de Madariaga, *Morning without Noon: Memoirs* (Farnborough, 1974), p. 234; idem, *Memorias*, p. 330.

<sup>8</sup> See especially the lecture she gave at the centenary celebrations of her father's birth in La Coruña in 1986: Madariaga, 'Salvador de Madariaga'.

<sup>9</sup> Madariaga, *Morning without Noon*, pp. 99–100; idem, *Memorias*, pp. 88, 155–6. *Sir Bob* was a satirical study of the English ruling class in which puns and word-plays abounded.

<sup>10</sup> Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, p. xii.

His photograph took centre stage on the fireplace of her home in Highgate, and, after his death—during her own retirement—she would devote considerable time to arranging for his papers to be deposited at the Instituto de Estudios Coruñeses José Cornide in La Coruña, doing much of the necessary sorting herself. Her reverence for him seems to have increased as she grew older.<sup>11</sup> Salvador had also fostered an enormously strong work ethic: his *Who's Who* entry described his 'Recreations' as 'a change of work', and he was still writing a few hours before he died, though already gravely ill. His daughter shared to the full his belief in the importance of scholarly endeavour, and retained this until the very end of her own life.<sup>12</sup> Though she enjoyed good food, travel, and music, and adored her garden, Isabel de Madariaga possessed a towering work ethic of her own and never felt able to give up her scholarly pursuits, although this was restricted in later life by failing eyesight.

In the summer of 1936, Spain was plunged into civil war. Isabel de Madariaga always regarded the previous two years in Madrid as the happiest and most fulfilling of her life, and subsequently believed they were decisive in her eventual decision to become a political historian. A pupil at a school for the children of Spain's liberal elite, she benefited from a notably modern curriculum which emphasised practical experience and *formation* rather than rote learning, and was intended to prepare her for entry to the University of Madrid. She now found herself forced into exile. Salvador de Madariaga, as 'liberal of the centre left'—his daughter Isabel's acute description—found himself attacked from both extremes of the political spectrum, particularly after an ill-advised newspaper article saying that there was little difference, from the point of view of political liberty, between the Spanish communists and the right-wing Nationalists and their allies. The naïvety of his political stance seems to have contributed to his difficulties at this time and, rightly fearing for his life, he fled from Spain at the very end of July, a mere fortnight after the fighting had begun.<sup>13</sup>

His wife and daughters were already abroad on a planned holiday, and so left Madrid with only the clothes in their suitcases. The victory of the Nationalists in the Civil War and the emergence of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco ensured that Salvador would remain an exile for the

<sup>11</sup> It comes over particularly strongly in Madariaga, 'Salvador de Madariaga'.

<sup>12</sup> R. Jones, 'Isabel de Madariaga', *Government and Opposition*, 49 (2014), 569–71, at 571.

<sup>13</sup> See I. de Madariaga, 'S. de Madariaga et le Foreign Office: Un épisode d'histoire diplomatique—juillet–décembre 1936', *Revista de estudios internacionales*, 4 (1983), 229–57, at 230; this article incidentally clarifies events involving the family in the summer of 1936.

next four decades, returning to Spain only two years before his own death, accompanied by his daughter. In later life she would often recall this hasty departure which left the family without any of their possessions; subsequently her mother's much-prized Bechstein grand piano would be recovered through the help of a Jesuit friend (it was removed to the British embassy in Madrid, stored safely until the end of the Second World War, and then sent back to London). According to family lore, the only scratch it received was caused by the carelessness of British workmen when it was being delivered.

## II

After the flight from Spain the family settled in England in September 1936, and this enabled Madariaga to take her School Certificate and to apply to the University of London to read German and Russian. She subsequently claimed that in the previous June she had passed the Spanish *bachillerato* but had been unable to collect her diploma because the principal of her Madrid school had been arrested!<sup>14</sup> Her father's informed advice seems to have been crucial in the choice of subjects: there had been talk of a diplomatic career, and these languages would be essential for an understanding of the two most powerful European states at this time, while—like many of her generation—she was both appalled and fascinated by the Stalinist and Nazi dictatorships of the 1930s. At this period the School of Slavonic and East European Studies ([SSEES]; since 1999 part of University College London) in the University of London did not offer a separate degree in Russian, but Isabel de Madariaga's forceful personality and renowned tenacity ensured that it was specially created for her. It enabled her to be the first student to graduate with a degree in Russian language and literature (with subsidiary German) in 1940, obtaining first class honours.

Madariaga immediately became a temporary civil servant. Like many academics of her generation, she joined the domestic war effort against Germany and Italy and, more briefly, the task of domestic reconstruction.<sup>15</sup> She served first in the BBC Monitoring Service (1940–3), the origins of which went back to the crisis over the Italo-Abyssinian War in 1935. Initially a rather small-scale operation, it expanded rapidly with the

<sup>14</sup>I. de Madariaga, 'Biographical Notes provided upon election to the British Academy' [MS].

<sup>15</sup>N. Annan, *Our Age: Portrait of a Generation* (London, 1990), pp. 205, 208.



outbreak of the Second World War. Madariaga was based at Evesham, where a War Office monitoring unit (soon to be called the Y Unit) had moved earlier in 1940.<sup>16</sup> The Monitoring Service assembled information by means of extensive listening in to radio broadcasts of all kinds, and this was then circulated within government and the armed forces. Her linguistic gifts made her a natural recruit for this role. Madariaga was always reluctant to talk about her wartime work, beyond recalling nights spent knitting while listening to radio broadcasts from Spanish fishing boats.

While based at Evesham, she met Leonard Schapiro (1908–83), himself a notably cosmopolitan figure who had also been born in Glasgow, where his mother's family had formed part of the city's large Jewish community. As a child Schapiro had lived in Russia during the 1917 Revolution and then in Latvia, where the family had business interests. Educated in London and trained as a lawyer (he had practised at the English Bar since 1932), Schapiro had also served in the Monitoring Service and was now a member of the Intelligence Corps, moving to the General Staff at the War Office and rising to the rank of lieutenant-colonel.<sup>17</sup> They were married in Oxford in March 1943; significantly, she had consulted her father before accepting Schapiro's proposal of marriage. Moving to London after her marriage, Isabel de Madariaga worked as a temporary civil servant in the Ministry of Information (1944–7), first on the Overseas Planning Committee and then the Central Office of Information, and was subsequently transferred to the Economic Information Unit of the Treasury (1947–8), rising to the grade of Senior Executive Officer.<sup>18</sup> One unusual but enduring legacy of the Second World War was her refusal thereafter to close her blinds once blackout restrictions were lifted with the coming of peace.

Like many women of her generation, Madariaga had found war service liberating and enabling. It convinced her of the importance of political decision-making, and this would influence her own scholarship.

<sup>16</sup> A. Briggs, *The War of Words* (London, 1970) (vol. 3 of 'The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom'), pp. 187–91, 486.

<sup>17</sup> For whom see P. Reddaway, 'Leonard Bertram Schapiro', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 70 (1984), 515–41.

<sup>18</sup> *The British Imperial Calendar and Civil Service List* for 1946, 1947, and 1948 (London, 1946–8), provide glimpses of her wartime service: col. 343 (1946); col. 340 (1947); and cols 24, 361 (1948). Formally established in the summer of 1939, the Ministry of Information under Brendan Bracken's energetic leadership had a wide-ranging role in the war effort, gathering and distributing information and generating propaganda: see I. MacLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London, 1979).

Marriage in the postwar world proved more restricting, however. After 1945, as Noel Annan discreetly wrote, women ‘found few ladders to help them climb’.<sup>19</sup> Settling in London’s Highgate, which with brief interruptions was to be her home for the rest of her life, and becoming part of its distinctive intellectual *milieu*, she began an extended period when she was on the fringes of academic life, searching for something she might do in her new situation. She undertook some of the research which enabled her husband—while still working at the Bar—to complete the books which secured him a permanent post at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 1955 and so enter academic life, becoming one of the leading Western experts on the rulers of the Soviet Union. Schapiro wrote generously in the preface to one of these studies of how his wife has ‘read and re-read the manuscript, and constantly helped by her judgement to improve it ... [and] has also generously taken time off from her own work to do indispensable and invaluable research for me’.<sup>20</sup> This tribute highlighted the extent to which their marriage was a true intellectual partnership from which both derived real benefit.

Yet the resolve which Madariaga would always demonstrate, together with the strength of her personality, were evident in a determination to have an academic career of her own. She registered for a part-time PhD in the University of London under the supervision of G. J. P. Renier (1892–1962), who was Professor of Dutch History at University College. Madariaga also became editorial assistant of *The Slavonic and East European Review* (1951–64), a post which resulted in her retaining a lively interest in the journal for the rest of her life. During these years she also filled a succession of short-term or part-time posts; these included tutoring and temporary lectureships at the LSE, and acting as a research assistant to the noted historian of Hanoverian England, Professor Mark A. Thomson (1903–62) of University College London.<sup>21</sup>

All this inevitably slowed the progress of her doctoral research, which was not completed until 1959. Drawn towards the history of Russia and to the study of diplomacy, which she had initially intended to make her

<sup>19</sup> Annan, *Our Age*, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> L. Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (London, 1960), p. xiv; this assistance is also fully acknowledged in both in his *The Origins of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State—First Phase, 1917–22* (London, 1955), pp. xiv–xv, and *The Government and Politics of the Soviet Union* (London, 1965), ‘Acknowledgements’ (unpaginated).

<sup>21</sup> For Thomson, see Sir George Clark, ‘Mark Alméras Thompson (1903–62)’, in R. Hatton and J. S. Bromley (eds.), *William III and Louis XIV: Essays by and for Mark A. Thomson* (Liverpool, 1968), pp. 1–6, a volume for which Madariaga compiled the index.

own career, her subject was the mission (1778–83) of Sir James Harris to St Petersburg during the War of American Independence. She had come across a set of the nineteenth-century edition of Harris's correspondence in the stock of a *bouquiniste* (a second-hand bookseller) selling his wares by the banks of the Seine in central Paris, and determined to study his embassy.<sup>22</sup> The completed thesis was an outstanding study of eighteenth-century diplomacy, evident in the fact that—at a period when relatively few doctoral theses were published without substantial revision—it appeared in print almost immediately and with only a handful of stylistic changes as *Britain, Russia and the Armed Neutrality of 1780*.<sup>23</sup> A large-scale, authoritative study—the printed version was almost 500 pages in length (she later claimed that her thesis was responsible for the University of London bringing in a word limit for doctorates, though there are other contenders for that honour!)—it transformed understanding of European diplomacy during the American War and, half a century later, remains fundamental for all research on the international dimension of the colonial struggle for independence.

The book was formative both for the subject of diplomatic history and for her own subsequent career. Almost all diplomatic history being written in Britain during the late 1940s and 1950s continued to be based very largely upon the resources of one archive, usually what was then the Public Record Office (now the National Archives) in London. Madariaga's approach, however, was very different and in its own way highly original. Russian archives containing material on foreign policy were effectively closed to Western scholars, especially one married to an expert on the Soviet Communist Party who expressed strongly critical views of Stalin's Russia. But she ranged far and wide in her search for material, working on French, Dutch, Austrian, Prussian, Danish, and Swedish sources as well as British, in addition to exploiting the extensive Russian-language printed documents bearing on the subject.<sup>24</sup> Her preface contained a stark warning about the dangers of distortion or outright error if a historian relied solely or even principally upon 'the unsupported word of an eighteenth-century diplomat', and the whole study exemplified the rigorous source criticism which would characterise all her publications.

<sup>22</sup> Earl of Malmesbury (ed.), *Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury*, 4 vols. (London, 1844).

<sup>23</sup> I. de Madariaga, *Britain, Russia and the Armed Neutrality of 1780: Sir James Harris's Mission to St Petersburg during the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT and London, 1962).

<sup>24</sup> Madariaga, *Armed Neutrality*, p. xiii; cf. pp. 467–72, for the notably full bibliography of sources.

Madariaga's thesis had been extremely unusual in a second respect, which was a corollary of the remarkable range of material consulted. Though its principal subject was Anglo-Russian diplomacy, it located the bilateral relations between the two states within the wider framework of international politics; there is, for example, a notable chapter on the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–9) and its wide-ranging political consequences.<sup>25</sup> Her doctorate was one of the earliest examples of a truly international history, rather than an old-style bilateral study of relations. As she wrote in her preface: 'Anglo-Russian relations cannot be studied in isolation. Inevitably I have been led to examine the policy of the other European great powers in order to establish the background and thus to assess the influences which swayed Britain and Russia.'<sup>26</sup> Here she was encouraged and perhaps inspired by another remarkable and pioneering historian of eighteenth-century diplomacy, Ragnhild Hatton, then a lecturer at the LSE, who championed this approach, effectively directed the thesis (Renier retired in 1957, and never seems to have been a very active supervisor), and was warmly thanked in the preface to her book.<sup>27</sup> The two women were to be particularly close friends in the years to come, and Hatton would play an important role in Madariaga's return to teach at SSEES in 1971.<sup>28</sup> LSE's International History Department was to occupy a central place in the move from diplomatic to international history, in which Hatton was the key figure among early modern historians, and the impact of this shift upon Madariaga seems clear.<sup>29</sup>

Her study *Britain, Russia and the Armed Neutrality* was noteworthy in two further ways. The anti-British League of Neutrals created under Catherine II's sponsorship in 1780, in order to defend neutral commerce from the combined depredations of the Royal Navy and British privateers, was a topic hitherto studied by lawyers rather than historians.<sup>30</sup> The notably lucid treatment of the complex law governing the conduct of

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21–56. She also published a seminal article on 'The secret Austro-Russian Treaty of 1781', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 38 (1959–60), 114–45.

<sup>26</sup> Madariaga, *Armed Neutrality*, p. ix.

<sup>27</sup> For whom see M. S. Anderson, 'Ragnhild Marie Hatton (1913–95)', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 94 (1996), 543–53. Hatton's own thesis had adopted a broadly similar approach: *Diplomatic Relations between Britain and the Dutch Republic, 1714–1721* (London, 1951).

<sup>28</sup> This emerges from Hugh Seton-Watson to Isabel de Madariaga, 1 June 1970, Madariaga Family Papers. These are currently in private hands, and we are grateful to Christopher and Marianne Mathews for facilitating access to them.

<sup>29</sup> See the 'Introduction' to R. Oresko, G. C. Gibbs and H. M. Scott (eds.), *Royal and Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of Ragnhild Hatton* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 1–42, esp. 18ff.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., J. B. Scott (ed.), *The Armed Neutralities of 1780 and 1800* (London and New York, 1918) and C. Bergbohm, *Die bewaffnete Neutralität 1780–1783* (Berlin, 1884).

trade during wartime signalled Madariaga's recognition of the crucial importance of law in history, which would be evident throughout the remainder of her scholarly life.<sup>31</sup> Married to a lawyer, she always gave legal factors a significant role in the study of the past, at a period when this was becoming less common among historians than it had been.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, her book was one of the earliest to embed the study of *ancien régime* diplomacy within the framework of the ruler's court, now seen as the most important site where ambassadors were expected to function. The preface noted 'the important part which court intrigue played in Harris's mission', a verdict which the rest of her study amply confirmed.<sup>33</sup> Britain's envoy arrived in the Russian capital just as a struggle for influence with the Empress was reaching its peak. Nikita Panin, who had been the main ministerial voice behind Russian foreign policy since early in Catherine II's reign, was slowly being supplanted by Grigorii Potemkin, who favoured replacing the existing policy of upholding the *status quo*, and with it peace, with expansion to the south and confrontation with the Ottoman Empire. Harris's relations with Catherine II's still-powerful favourite were crucial to the outcome of his mission. Potemkin skilfully cultivated—and deceived—the inexperienced British diplomat, thereby condemning London's pursuit of the will o' the wisp of a Russian alliance to failure. It is now axiomatic that students of diplomacy in the period at least until the First World War need to consider the court, as well as the chancellery, as an important arena for policy-making and to take account of the personal rivalries and dynastic factors which have full play there. Half a century ago, this was far less recognised and, with hindsight, *Britain, Russia and the Armed Neutrality* can be seen to be significantly ahead of its time as a study of international history in this respect too.

### III

Several factors combined to make the 1960s formative for Madariaga's subsequent life. The noted expansion of British universities, together with the foundation of new ones, created opportunities for an academic career hitherto lacking, and as the author of an important and widely praised

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Madariaga, *Armed Neutrality*, pp. 57–95, for a notable account of the legal framework governing neutral trade by the final quarter of the eighteenth century.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., G. Ionescu and I. de Madariaga, *Opposition: Past and Present of a Political Institution* (London, 1968), pp. 18, 23 and ch. 2 *passim*; from internal evidence it seems clear that Madariaga wrote these sections.

<sup>33</sup> Madariaga, *Armed Neutrality*, p. xii.

monograph, she was extremely well-placed to benefit from this growth. Increasing strains were becoming evident within her marriage, and she and Leonard Schapiro would soon separate amicably, though remaining very close friends.<sup>34</sup> Personal circumstances made it easier for her to accept an appointment outside London, and she now secured the full-time, permanent academic post which had hitherto proved elusive, becoming successively a Lecturer in European History at the new University of Sussex (1966–8), and then Senior Lecturer in Russian Studies at another recently established institution, Lancaster University (1968–71). The former diplomat and expert on Czech literature and politics, Professor Sir Cecil Parrott (1909–84), was trying to establish Russian and East European Studies there and approached Isabel de Madariaga to join his staff as the Russian historian and to become his deputy.<sup>35</sup> Though at first she hesitated, her expressed wish ‘to concentrate on my own field and to build up something new’ finally determined her to accept the appointment.<sup>36</sup> Serving as head of department during Parrott’s absences, she played a significant role in shaping the degree structure in Russian and East European Studies. In fact she already had more experience of universities than Parrott, who had left the Foreign Office only two years earlier and even before taking up her appointment Madariaga was advising him over courses and degree structure.<sup>37</sup> Both here and at Sussex, however, as Simon Dixon has noted, ‘she made lasting friendships without putting down institutional roots’, partly because she was travelling regularly to London, where she was devotedly caring for her elderly and, by now, ailing mother.<sup>38</sup>

In the mid-1960s Madariaga had been one of the founders—along with her husband—of a new journal, based at the LSE: *Government and Opposition*. Her long experience of editing an academic journal, the *Slavonic and East European Review*, was important during the first decade and more of the new periodical, when she largely carried the administrative burden. One of the other founders of the journal and its first editor was Ghita Ionescu (1913–96), a Romanian refugee from Communism and a lawyer, former diplomat and journalist then making his way in the

<sup>34</sup>They would divorce only in 1976.

<sup>35</sup>This emerges from the correspondence relating to her time at Lancaster in Madariaga Family Papers.

<sup>36</sup>Isabel de Madariaga to Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex, 3 June 1968, Madariaga Family Papers.

<sup>37</sup>E.g. Sir Cecil Parrott to Isabel de Madariaga, 15 June (1968), Madariaga Family Papers.

<sup>38</sup>S. Dixon, ‘In Memoriam: Isabel de Madariaga (1919–2014)’, *Kritika*, 16 (2015), 1012–18, at 1014.

British academic system as a research fellow at the LSE.<sup>39</sup> Ionescu, described not unkindly as ‘the supreme impresario’ in recognition of his genius as an academic entrepreneur in the ‘Foreword’ to a Festschrift presented to him, was to be a central presence in the second half of Madariaga’s life.<sup>40</sup> Her next major publication was co-authored with him: a short study of *Opposition*, which grew out of the aims of the new journal. It aimed to correct the established preoccupation with power within political theory since Machiavelli, and instead to argue for the importance of a formal and institutionalised role for critics and opponents of the regime of the day: an approach which had added force for someone who had escaped from Communist rule, such as her co-author, or indeed for an exile from Franco’s Spain such as Madariaga herself.<sup>41</sup>

This book proved only a temporary diversion from her growing scholarly interest in Russian history, fostered by her monograph on diplomacy in St Petersburg. Initially she seems to have contemplated a study of the sixteenth-century Muscovite ruler Ivan the Terrible (1547–84), on which she began preliminary work during the 1960s, but this project was put aside for three decades in favour of a large-scale survey of the reign of Catherine II. She later wrote that her study of the Armed Neutrality had persuaded her that the empress’s ‘very positive achievements had been ignored or distorted’ by Russian Tsarist, Soviet and Western scholars alike.<sup>42</sup> In 1970, when John Keep resigned from the established readership in Russian Studies at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in order to accept a professorship in Canada, she was the natural choice to fill the vacancy.<sup>43</sup> When first encouraging her to apply, Hugh Seton-Watson (1916–84), then Professor of Russian Studies at SSEES, had written—with more than mere flattery—that: ‘we shall very much need someone of distinction to teach Russian History from about 1600 to 1800. As far as I know, there is only one person in this country who fits that description, and that is yourself.’

<sup>39</sup> J. Pinder, ‘Ghita Ionescu 1913–96: freedom and politics’, *Government and Opposition*, 31 (1996), 400–25, is an informative tribute.

<sup>40</sup> S. E. Finer, ‘Foreword’, in G. Parry (ed.), *Politics in an Interdependent World: Essays Presented to Ghita Ionescu* (Aldershot, 1994), at p. x.

<sup>41</sup> Ionescu and Madariaga, *Opposition*, pp. v, 3 and *passim*.

<sup>42</sup> Madariaga, ‘Biographical Notes’.

<sup>43</sup> Seton-Watson to Isabel de Madariaga, 27 March 1970, Madariaga Family Papers; he subsequently wrote that the appointment was ‘rather a formality’, 1 June 1970, *ibid*.

In the autumn of 1971 Madariaga returned to her first academic home, where she would remain for the rest of her professional career. ‘It is strange’, she wrote rather imperiously when accepting the appointment, ‘that I do not seem to be able to stay away from Senate House [where SSEES was located] for long. I was there as a student, I was there during the war working in the Ministry of Information, I was there for thirteen years on the *Slavonic Review*, and now I shall be returning to the same building again!’<sup>44</sup>

#### IV

Isabel de Madariaga was to be a loyal and active member of SSEES. A courageous chairwoman of the newly formed Staff Assembly in the 1970s, she vigorously represented the interests of her colleagues and ensured that the institution engaged with academics and became far more participatory; at the same time she helped to defend the independence of the School within the University of London at a time when its future was under threat.<sup>45</sup> She never forgot that her first post had been as editorial secretary of the *Slavonic and East European Review* and she became a permanent member of its editorial board when she returned to London in 1971, serving until her retirement. She played an important part in setting up a new degree in Russian Studies and was a stimulating and inspiring teacher who cared passionately about the intellectual development of her students as well as about the subject she was teaching. This familiar environment, with its abundant library resources, facilitated her renewed concentration upon Russia and its history, and during the next decade she was preoccupied with her magnum opus.

Catherine II had been central to Isabel de Madariaga’s understanding of Russian diplomacy in the late 1770s and early 1780s. The empress’s personality and policies became her passion for the rest of her academic career. Her research initially produced a number of substantial articles on individual topics—in particular policy towards the serfs and on education—and culminated in her great work, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the*

<sup>44</sup> Isabel de Madariaga to George H. Bolsover (Director of SSEES), 12 November 1970, Madariaga Family Papers.

<sup>45</sup> It may be that her experience of two ‘new’ institutions and especially Sussex, with its less hierarchical structure, strengthened her belief in participatory government in universities: this is suggested by the very interesting ‘Memoir’ on departmental structure which she drew up while at Lancaster, October 1968, Madariaga Family Papers.



*Great*, published in 1981.<sup>46</sup> As the title indicated, it was about Russia as well as about its ruler, and included significant analyses of the country's social, economic, religious and institutional structures. It was followed in 1990 by a shorter, more biographical study which brought the empress's own role into sharper focus and was far more than a simple condensation of the larger book.<sup>47</sup> Her major articles and chapters on the reign and on the Russian eighteenth century were subsequently assembled in one volume published in 1998.<sup>48</sup> It is striking testimony to the remarkable productivity of her scholarly Indian summer that over half of these—seven out of thirteen—had been published since she retired fourteen years earlier.

Collectively these publications transformed the prevailing assessment of Catherine II personally and of Russia's development during her reign. As she wrote in her preface to *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, when she started work there had been no serious scholarly study of the empress since the biographies by A. Brückner and V. Bil'basov (the latter seriously incomplete), in German and Russian respectively, in the late nineteenth century:

... most of the books which have been published belong to the biographical or *biographie romancée* variety. Yet considering the enormous significance of Catherine's long reign in the forward march of Russia towards the achievement of its national political and cultural aims, it is strange that her own role in the process should have been so neglected by historians, particularly since she was no *roi fainéant*, but a highly professional practitioner of the art of ruling.<sup>49</sup>

The gradual opening of Soviet archives to foreign scholars during the 1960s and 1970s had enabled a number of historians, principally from North America, to begin serious research on the era.<sup>50</sup> For the most part,

<sup>46</sup> I. de Madariaga, 'Catherine II and the Serfs'; 'The foundation of the Russian educational system by Catherine II', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 57 (1979), 369–95.

<sup>47</sup> I. de Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: a Short History* (New Haven, CT and London, 1993).

<sup>48</sup> I. de Madariaga, *Politics and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Collected Essays by Isabel de Madariaga* (Harlow, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Madariaga, *Russia*, p. ix.

<sup>50</sup> J. T. Alexander, *Autocratic Politics in a National Crisis: the Imperial Russian Government and Pugachev's Revolt, 1773–1775* (Bloomington, IN, 1969); R. E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility, 1762–1785* (Princeton, NJ, 1973); and D. L. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia: the Panin Party* (New Haven, CT, 1975). In a talk at the 2009 conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia (for which see below, p. 242), Madariaga recalled how important contact and discussions with David Ransel and David M. Griffiths (who worked initially on Panin's foreign policy) had been to her while she was writing her major study: A. B. Kamenskii, 'In Memoriam: Isabel de Madariaga', *Revue des Études Slaves*, 85 (2014), 599–602, at 601. The British scholar Paul Duker had also produced a major book: *Catherine the Great and*

however, Madariaga was forced to construct her account from the abundant published documents and from old narrative histories. She succeeded admirably in her task, to the extent that any study of the reign, in whatever scholarly language, now almost invariably begins with reference to her 'magisterial' and 'masterly' work.

The rigorous, questioning scholarship evident in her first book was again apparent in this study: an unwillingness to accept assumptions without testing them against all the available sources; an extensive knowledge of the great-power 'system' and a distinctive approach to international relations; a broad cultural awareness, based on her languages and wide intellectual interests; a conviction that all policy could only be interpreted through an understanding of the underlying political culture; a judicious assessment of the actions of individuals which balanced their ambitions against the constraints under which they operated. In the process, Madariaga made a fundamental contribution to our understanding in three particular areas: the development of the Russian state; Catherine II's individual contribution to the policies adopted at home and abroad; and her own personality.

Madariaga's analysis of Russia's social and institutional structures was particularly thoughtful and sophisticated and, as with all her scholarship, located the Russian experience within a comparative perspective. She demonstrated, contrary to what was often assumed, that nobles were far from being uniformly rich and powerful: they had fewer political rights than their counterparts in Central and Western Europe, and most were impoverished: in 1762 over half (51 per cent) owned fewer than twenty male serfs.<sup>51</sup> Although nobles had considerable authority over these peasants, it had to be used with caution. Indeed, in an early, and controversial, article on serfdom she challenged the view that Catherine deliberately increased the nobility's power, including the right to exile their serfs to Siberia, in order to win its support for her seizure of the throne.<sup>52</sup> Madariaga was equally robust in her analyses of agrarian society in Russia, demonstrating the complexity of 'the peasant question' where state peasants (non-seigniorial peasants) were often worse off economically

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*the Russian Nobility: a Study based on the Materials of the Legislative Commission of 1767* (Cambridge, 1967).

<sup>51</sup> Madariaga, *Russia*, p. 80; see also her subsequent major reconsideration of 'The Russian nobility in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', in H. M. Scott (ed.), *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, vol. 2: *Northern, Central and Eastern Europe* (1995; 2nd edn., Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 311–76.

<sup>52</sup> 'Catherine II and the serfs', republished in Madariaga, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 124–49.

than serfs, who petitioned or revolted against ‘bad lords’ or corrupt officials or an ‘unknowing tsar’ rather than challenging the underlying premises of serfdom. Furthermore, she challenged the assumption that the gulf—social and cultural—between lord and peasant was wider than in other rural European societies.<sup>53</sup>

Madariaga portrayed Catherine as a remarkably hard-working ruler dedicated to modernising Russia, but also a pragmatist who either instinctively knew, or quickly learned, the limitations of reform. This comes across most clearly in the chapters on institutional and social initiatives.<sup>54</sup> The analysis of Catherine’s ‘Great Instruction’ (*Nakaz*) of 1767 and the Legislative Commission is masterly. The former is an extraordinary document which demonstrated the empress’s ability to absorb information from a variety of sources (and, as Madariaga put it, ‘it is essential to understand precisely what she thought she was borrowing’)<sup>55</sup> and her confidence in putting forward these ideas and publicising them, at least to those responsible enough to appreciate them. Her ‘Instruction’ was to be read aloud on Saturday mornings in government offices, when there was not much work, but only to senior officials! She demolished the theory that Catherine simply distorted Montesquieu’s ideas in her ‘Instruction’. Instead, she shows that the empress indeed made assumptions about the nature of Russian rule, its fundamental laws and its intermediate bodies (presented by her as legal and not social institutions) in order to portray Russia as a monarchy and not as a despotism. Catherine also introduced, in Madariaga’s words, ‘new and perhaps startling conceptions’.<sup>56</sup> This is not only apparent in the empress’s bold opening statement in the ‘Great Instruction’ that ‘Russia is a European state’ but also in her presentation of the most liberal ideas on crime and punishment<sup>57</sup> and her assumption

<sup>53</sup> She conducted a lively, but mutually respectful, debate on this subject with Marc Raeff (1923–2008), then Professor at Columbia University: see especially her ‘Sisters under the skin’, *Slavic Review*, 41 (1982), 624–8, responding to Raeff’s ‘Seventeenth-century Europe in eighteenth-century Russia? (Pour prendre congé du dix-huitième siècle)’, *Slavic Review*, 41 (1982), 611–19. See also Raeff’s more extended statement of his views in *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600–1800* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1983). It should be added that there was considerable common ground between their views of Russia’s past: see Marc Raeff’s gracious tribute in the ‘Introduction’, in R. Bartlett and J. M. Hartley (eds.), *Russia in the Age of the Enlightenment: Essays for Isabel de Madariaga* (London, 1990), pp. 1–6.

<sup>54</sup> Madariaga, *Russia*, Parts III and VI.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>57</sup> A theme she developed in ‘Penal policy in the age of Catherine II’, *La Leopoldina*, 11 (1990), 497–535, reprinted in Madariaga, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 97–123.

that absolute power had to be exercised within fixed and established limits. As Madariaga stated, Catherine expressed views which were extraordinary not only for a Russian ruler but for any European monarch at the time.

Catherine emerges as a ruler who was not only tireless in her attempts to reform Russia but was prepared to draft and redraft new laws—often in minute detail—herself.<sup>58</sup> This was evident over the regulations for the Foundling Hospitals as early as 1764, the Statute on Local Administration in 1775 (where everything from the various levels of urban representation, the duties of urban officials and the layout of the wards in new hospitals is listed down to the smallest detail), the Police Statute of 1782, the Charters to the Nobles and the Towns (and the draft Charter to the State Peasants) in 1785, where what Madariaga calls Catherine's 'love of symmetry' led to parallel categorisation of all social estates, and in the Statute on Education in 1786, where the empress expressed views on issues as varied as corporal punishment (banned) and fresh air (essential) as well as the structure of national schools, their staffing and the syllabuses they should teach. She convincingly demonstrated that Catherine not only wanted to establish institutional uniformity but, far more ambitiously, wished to create useful citizens for Russia. That aim applied particularly to children through modern, largely secular, education (and even by social engineering had the Foundling Homes operated fully in the way intended) but was equally applicable to nobles in the provinces and to merchants and artisans in Russia's towns. The empress encouraged debate about serfdom at the Legislative Commission in 1767–8 and personally seemed to believe that economic progress could only take place with a free peasantry, but—always the pragmatist—soon realised that the nobles would always oppose any move to limit their authority over their serfs.

Madariaga vigorously challenged certain assumptions arising from inexact translation of Russian terminology about the nature of rule in Russia. In particular she asserted that *samoderzhavie*, often translated into English as 'autocracy', is better understood as 'sovereignty': a change in emphasis which coloured how Russia viewed itself and how the West viewed Russia.<sup>59</sup> Concern with the changing meaning of words was one of

<sup>58</sup> Madariaga, *Russia*, p. 307.

<sup>59</sup> Demonstrated in particular in the article 'Autocracy and sovereignty', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 16 (1982), 369–87, and reproduced in Madariaga, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 40–56. An implicit challenge to this argument is evident in C. H. Whittaker, 'The idea of autocracy among eighteenth-century Russian historians', in J. Burbank and D. L. Ransel (eds.), *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington, IN, 1998), pp. 32–59; and the same author's 'The reforming tsar: the redefinition of autocratic duty in eighteenth-century Russia', *Slavic Review*, 51 (1992), 77–98.

Madariaga's enduring characteristics as a historian. Here her initial study of diplomacy, where what was said and how it was said were all-important, had been formative, along with her comparative approach which revealed the distinctiveness of eighteenth-century Russian terminology.<sup>60</sup>

Catherine's interest in the evolution of Russian society can also be seen in her attitude to culture. Madariaga dismissed the charge that the empress was a hypocrite in espousing enlightened causes and corresponding with *philosophes* whilst doing nothing at home to implement those ideas.<sup>61</sup> Instead, the empress is portrayed not only as a 'bluestocking' in her own right (she somehow found the time to be the author of numerous satirical and historical plays, comedies and children's stories) who engaged with the most modern ideas of the day but also as a genuine reformer who tried to encourage the arts through her own patronage and by promoting translations of foreign books. Madariaga debunked the accusation by Soviet historians that Catherine had persecuted the publisher and critic of the regime, Nikolai Novikov, but she recognised that the French Revolution and the events which followed it, in France and Poland, led to 'a parting of the ways between the government and the intellectuals of Russia'.<sup>62</sup> This was, however, a product of extreme times; in Madariaga's neat aphorism, it 'was not Catherine who became "reactionary" in the 1790s, but France which became revolutionary'.<sup>63</sup> These reforms brought about a fundamental change for Russia, with the creation of a more 'civilian society and government'. Madariaga's admiration for the empress was expressed in her comment on Catherine in the 1760s: 'In the boldness of her vision (she was after all writing before the French Revolution) she was more imaginative and far-sighted than any subsequent ruler of Russia'.<sup>64</sup> In general, she made the case that the empress's 'main service to Russia was that she created a framework for government and society, more civilised, more tolerant, more free than ever before or after'.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Raeff, 'Introduction', pp. 2, 5.

<sup>61</sup> In both her studies of the empress, but also in her 'Catherine the Great', in H. M. Scott (ed.) *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London, 1990), pp. 289–312, and 'Catherine II and the *Philosophes*', in A. G. Cross (ed.), *Russia and the West in the Eighteenth Century: Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia, 17–21 July 1981* (Newtonville, MA, 1983), pp. 30–52; these essays are reprinted in Madariaga, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 195–214 and 215–34.

<sup>62</sup> Madariaga, *Russia*, p. 547.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 435.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>65</sup> Madariaga, *Politics and Culture* p. 213, from 'Catherine the Great', in Scott (ed.) *Enlightened Absolutism*, p. 311.

Catherine II was not, however, concerned only with domestic affairs. Russia in her reign extended its frontiers dramatically to the west and the south, with the important acquisition of new ports on the northern littoral of the Black Sea. Madariaga's established expertise in—and distinctive approach to—foreign policy are evident in her masterly chapters on the subject. Here too she portrayed Catherine in a new and distinctive way—as a determined and skilled negotiator who, while she benefited from the experience of Nikita Panin, in the early years of her reign, and subsequently from the advice of Grigorii Potemkin, nevertheless could display stronger nerves than either of them.<sup>66</sup> The empress was, however, as much a pragmatist in foreign policy as in domestic affairs. She was also as sensitive to details; it was Catherine—and not her advisers—who spotted that the draft peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire in 1792 included an unacceptable clause which would have restricted Russian ability to fortify its southern frontier. Finally, Madariaga demonstrated that foreign policy could not be separated from domestic concerns. The savagery which accompanied the taking of Warsaw by Alexander Suvorov's forces in 1794, when civilians as well as retreating soldiers were massacred, could not be understood without appreciating how Catherine interpreted the Polish uprising as a revolutionary challenge to the social and political order, imbued, in her own words, with 'French principles'.<sup>67</sup>

Madariaga not only redressed the balance on Catherine II as a ruler and as a reformer but also portrayed her human side with great sensitivity and perceptiveness. From an early age, Catherine's personality and ways of working were noted by contemporaries: she had 'a gay good-tempered laugh, moving with ease from the most madcap childish games to arithmetic tables, undaunted either by the labours involved or by the texts themselves'<sup>68</sup> commented Stanislaw Poniatowski (who became her lover and, subsequently, King of Poland-Lithuania).

It was Catherine's relationship with her lovers which, of course, fascinated contemporaries and later writers. Grigorii Potemkin was the love of Catherine's life, and Madariaga captured the passionate and affectionate relationship between the two through their many exchanges when emotions mixed with matters of state: 'I take you by the ears, and kiss you in my thoughts, dearest friend'<sup>69</sup> wrote Catherine after Potemkin had suc-

<sup>66</sup> E.g. Madariaga, *Russia*, pp. 221, 418.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 446–8.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

cessfully taken the town of Ochakov in 1788. Potemkin was her ‘golden tiger’, her ‘cossack’ and, quite remarkably, her ‘Pugachev of Yaik’!<sup>70</sup> Towards the end of her life Catherine endured a string of unsuitable and extraordinary disloyal young lovers. The empress is shown as being passionate but also as remarkably tolerant—‘recklessly generous’<sup>71</sup> in Madariaga’s words—of their infidelities and generous to them after they had been supplanted. Indeed, Catherine is convincingly portrayed as a woman repeatedly hurt: by an unhappy marriage and the insecurities of her early life, and subsequently by unfaithful lovers.

In an article published in 2001 Isabel de Madariaga reflected that:

Since I first took Catherine seriously as a ruler, some forty years ago, I have grown to like her very much. This is not therefore going to be an exercise in debunking; it is a personal portrait of someone who has become a close friend.<sup>72</sup>

Catherine had indeed become her close friend. Madariaga’s studies not only destroyed the cruder assessments of the empress’s character but also served to make possible a more nuanced and sophisticated verdict upon her achievements. Above all, they demonstrated that Catherine was a ‘European’ ruler: she was acutely conscious of both Russia’s strengths and weaknesses but was always determined that her adopted country should play its proper international role, and equally certain that Russia should share in Europe’s intellectual and cultural movements, a belief which was only shaken during the final years of her life under the impact of the French Revolution. Catherine’s great achievement was to make Russia a more humane country with a less militarised government and society, in which at least the elite nobles acquired a sense of freedom and self-respect and were able to consider themselves on a par, in their legal status as well as in their cultural practices, with their counterparts in Central and Western Europe. It is impossible not to agree with the concluding sentence in *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* that: ‘Those who remembered Catherine’s rule looked back on it then as a time when autocracy had been “cleansed from the stains of tyranny”, when a despotism had been turned into a monarchy, when men obeyed through honour, not through fear.’<sup>73</sup>

The reassessment of Catherine II was Isabel de Madariaga’s most powerful intellectual legacy, but she extended her analysis of Russian history to other periods. Two important articles developed her conviction

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>72</sup> I. de Madariaga, ‘Catherine the Great: a personal view’, *History Today*, 51(xi) (2001), 45.

<sup>73</sup> Madariaga, *Russia*, p. 588.

that contemporary and earlier historical assessments of Russia, and its tsars, were often marred by the mistranslation of words and concepts from Russian to English.<sup>74</sup> Her interest in establishing a comparative European perspective upon Russia's development led her to write an important paper on the concept of civil rights.<sup>75</sup> The subject of her inaugural lecture in the University of London was not Catherine II, but the political and intellectual influences on Prince Dmitrii Mikhailovich Golitsyn, who tried, unsuccessfully, to limit the power of the Russian Empress Anna (1730–40) at the moment of her accession in 1730.<sup>76</sup> While this may have seemed an odd choice for a scholar whose reputation rested upon her studies of the second half of the eighteenth century, it allowed Madariaga to develop what was a consistent theme in all her writing, namely, that contemporary and scholarly assumptions about Russian 'backwardness' were often ill-informed. Golitsyn was a cultured and widely read man who considered that the Russian aristocracy could and should participate in government in the way their counterparts did in Central and Western Europe.

In the second half of her retirement, Isabel de Madariaga returned to an earlier interest in the Russian sixteenth century and wrote a major biography of Ivan IV, published when she was eighty-six.<sup>77</sup> Overcoming the physical handicaps of advancing age, which made it difficult for her to work in libraries, she completed her psychological portrait of the psychopathic tsar who slaughtered thousands of his own subjects. She set out with a clear-cut aim:

First of all, I have tried to write the history of Ivan IV, standing in Moscow and looking over the walls of the Kremlin towards the rest of Europe, and not looking in—and down—into Russia, over its Western border, from outside .... At the same time I have pursued a comparative approach, for I think that many of the problems which faced Russia were of the same nature as those which France,

<sup>74</sup>'Tsar into Emperor: the title of Peter the Great' in Oresko et al. (eds.), *Royal and Republican Sovereignty*, pp. 351–81; and 'Autocracy and sovereignty', both reproduced in Madariaga, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 15–56.

<sup>75</sup>Originally given at a conference on civil rights at SSEES, and then published in German as 'Der Ursprung der Bürgerrechte in Russland im 18. Jahrhundert', in C. Scharf (ed.), *Katharina II, Russland und Europa. Beiträge zur internationalen Forschung* (Mainz, 1998), pp. 365–84, and in English as 'The eighteenth-century origin of Russian civil rights', in Madariaga, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 78–94.

<sup>76</sup>'Portrait of an eighteenth-century Russian statesman: Prince Dmitry Mikhaylovich Golitsyn', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 62 (1984), 36–60, reprinted in Madariaga, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 57–78.

<sup>77</sup>I. de Madariaga, *Ivan the Terrible: First Tsar of Russia* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2005).



Germany and, to a lesser degree, England had to contend with—though not necessarily at the same time as Russia.<sup>78</sup>

Understanding Ivan IV proved a very different—and also much more difficult—proposition from penetrating the mind and significance of Catherine II. This was a move from the recognisably modern, and European, world back to a time, a country, and a ruler, of a very different era: a journey made more difficult by the limitations of sixteenth-century sources.

Her study, which she characterised as ‘revisionist’, made a significant contribution to our understanding of the ruler and his reign.<sup>79</sup> In the process, the scholarly strengths which underlay her earlier research were again evident: a meticulous and discriminating use of the available primary published sources; a thorough analysis of institutions, law codes and power groups around the ruler and at court; a subtle understanding of the vocabulary used by and about Ivan at the time; a sophisticated and clear assessment of the motivations and achievements of his foreign policy; an awareness of comparative European institutions and forms of rule; above all, an ability to place Ivan within the domestic and foreign context of his times. It is in the latter area that her biography received most acclaim. Her understanding of Ivan, and Russia, within a comparative European framework enabled her, amongst other things, to make an insightful assessment of the way in which the *zemskii sobor* (the ‘Assembly of the Land’, Russia’s protean representative body) functioned, in the process debunking the cruder, Soviet assumptions that this amounted to some sort of pure Russian democracy; and also to look at comparative approaches within Europe to the questions of sovereignty and even to torture and savagery. She displayed again her secure grasp of the details of foreign relations in her analysis of the Baltic conflicts as well as giving a convincing assessment of the domestic costs and consequences of these struggles. In the process she demonstrated, as indeed she had for the second half of the eighteenth century, that Russia, far from being characterised as an alien and barbaric state, should be seen as part of Europe, albeit a country at a lower level of social, economic and political development than regions further west.

In all her work, Madariaga displayed the art of a true historian, as elegantly expressed in a tribute to her by Marc Raeff. After noting the

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>79</sup> Letter to A. B. Kamenskii, 2005, quoted in Kamenskii, ‘In Memoriam: Isabel de Madariaga’, 600.

importance of her father's influence together with her own formation and war service, he continued:

Hers is a heathy English pragmatism that refuses to deal with anything but established and ascertainable, concrete, facts. Hers is a genuinely historicist approach, that is, a dedicated effort at finding out what the past was really like, to the contemporaries, with as little of hindsight and second guessing or distortion of perspective as possible.... Her conclusions are pragmatic, rooted in a conception of human nature that bases human conduct on individual freedom and rationality.<sup>80</sup>

The breadth of her interests in Russian history were reflected in the contributions to her Festschrift which covered subjects as diverse as Russia's great-power status, national identity, literature, education, technology, philanthropy, serfdom, Old Belief, legal history and Western perceptions of the empress.<sup>81</sup>

## V

Many scholars benefitted from her detailed criticisms of their work or from her incisive comments on their papers at conferences, even if the visits to Highgate for forensic dissection could be an intimidating experience even for the most seasoned academic (often tempered by a large gin beforehand and an excellent meal afterwards!). The form this took has been eloquently described by Simon Sebag Montefiore. While an undergraduate at Cambridge, he had read *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, noticed Madariaga's comment that Potemkin lacked a biography and determined to write one. He wrote to her:

and received a summons to her house. At first she was dubious of me, but when she saw I was serious, she became my supervisor, tutor, teacher and, I have to say, tsarina. Our supervisions—for that is what they were—were slightly daunting as she tore through my purple prose and western presumptions, making witty worldly comments and pointing out clichés and other follies. Gradually she taught me how to write history books ... As she sat in her chair, graciously but majestically, ruling the world of Russian academe, I often found myself imagining Catherine the Great in her later years, as sharp and charming as ever. When I put this in my first book on Potemkin, she was rather pleased. And she like Catherine had more than a soft spot for Potemkin. When I visited his grave in Kherson, she asked if I would place a bouquet of red roses from her on his

<sup>80</sup> Raeff, 'Introduction' in Bartlett and Hartley (eds.), *Russia in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Bartlett and Hartley (eds.), *Russia in the Age of the Enlightenment*.

grave and I did ... anything I know about writing Russian history, I feel I owe to her. How lucky I was to have such a tutor-empress.<sup>82</sup>

His experience was shared by others at various points in their careers. Drafts of written work submitted for her consideration invariably came back covered with corrections, ideas and suggestions in her almost unintelligible handwriting, but those who subjected themselves to this scrutiny always found it extraordinarily beneficial. Praise for her could take the form of sharp but always positive criticism, intended to help the recipient to improve. With the significant benefit of hindsight, her father had commented that the six-year-old Isabel 'was great at questions', and her formidable intellect remained her most obvious characteristic.<sup>83</sup>

It was a source of regret to her that circumstances made it impossible for her to conduct research in the Russian archives: by the time these opened up fully to Western scholars she was not physically capable of travelling to Russia or of researching there. Her first visit—as a simple tourist—took place as late as 1978, when she spent a week viewing the sights in Moscow and Leningrad (St Petersburg).<sup>84</sup> But following the collapse of the Soviet Union she took enormous pleasure in meeting and corresponding with a new generation of scholars in Russia, discussing Catherine's reign with them at a time when they were reassessing their own history. Madariaga believed, as she wrote to a Russian scholar towards the end of her life, that 'it was a matter of envisaging the writing of history [as a process] that makes room for progress and change without the book becoming obsolete', an approach which made her actively interested in the reassessment of the Russian past.<sup>85</sup> Her contribution to the rehabilitation of the empress during the generation since the fall of the Soviet Union has been fundamental. Recognition of this could become more public from the 1990s; her books could now be translated into Russian and her scholarship came to be regularly cited by Russian scholars.<sup>86</sup> She was enthusiastic about the new research being undertaken which revealed more about the empress and her policies. The encouragement

<sup>82</sup> E-mail from Simon Sebag Montefiore, to whom we are grateful for permission to cite this account, 11 December 2015; cf. S. S. Montefiore, *Prince of Princes: the Life of Potemkin* (London, 2000), p. xi.

<sup>83</sup> Madariaga, *Morning without Noon*, p. 100.

<sup>84</sup> She was in Russia from 18–26 November 1978, and received a Hayter Travel Grant to enable her to make the trip: Madariaga Family Papers.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted by Kamenskii, 'In Memoriam: Isabel de Madariaga', 600.

<sup>86</sup> Her *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* appeared in Russian in 2002, while *Catherine the Great* was translated four years later.

and kindness she showed to scholars in the United Kingdom, North America and Western Europe was replicated towards a new generation of Russian scholars, who held her in the highest esteem.

Isabel de Madariaga had been one of the founder members of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia in 1968, a group which has proved enormously successful in stimulating interdisciplinary studies, and which has an international membership (it will celebrate its 50th anniversary at a conference in Strasbourg in 2018). She attended many of its annual meetings at Hoddesdon in Hertfordshire, along with the quinquennial international conferences, including the inaugural meetings at the University of East Anglia. In July 2009, she attended the eighth international meeting in Durham University; sensing that this would be her last appearance she entertained the group with an after-dinner speech in which she recounted her career in academic life. She died on 16 June 2014, shortly before the most recent international conference in Leuven, in July 2014, but it was fitting that the panel on 'The Literary Work of Catherine II' was dedicated to her memory. At the final dinner of the conference in Leuven a spontaneous and moving speech was given by a young Russian scholar who had first made her acquaintance over a decade before at a Group meeting.

With her striking good looks and her stylish clothes, Madariaga's presence lit up any discussion, be it at an international conference or in the Senior Common Room of SSEES. During the 1970s and 1980s she favoured capes, which blew after her in the wind as she walked purposefully around the Senate House area of Central London. Her comments were always incisive, often amusing, and invariably put the discussion into a broader cultural and historical context. She invariably sat on the front row and asked the first question, which could be intimidating even for the most experienced scholar. At the same time, however, her unmistakable interest in the speaker's subject was always gratifying and her comments invariably pertinent. Indeed, her unmistakable laugh—a rich sound and her head thrown back—always brought a special warmth to any academic occasion. She particularly enjoyed the conference in Zerbst, the birthplace of Catherine II, in August 1996, in a newly reunified Germany, an event which also happened to coincide with her birthday and which was marked by the town band playing 'Happy Birthday'!

## VI

Isabel de Madariaga's entry into a full-time academic career was unusually late—she was 47 when she took up her first permanent, full-time lectureship. This, together with her own privileged and international background and resulting sense of entitlement, and her essential shyness, all influenced her personality, which was imposing and at times could be rather austere, imperious and even intimidating. Always known within her family circle by her childhood nickname of 'Lolita', she long remained either 'Dr de Madariaga' or, just possibly, 'Isabel' to many of her academic colleagues, who only very slowly graduated to 'Lolita' or 'Lol' after an extended probation. In her mature years she would relax notably, as she came to appreciate how central a place she had come to occupy not merely in the field of Russian studies but also in that of eighteenth-century European history, and allow her innate kindness and interest in people to become more fully apparent. These had long been evident with her extended family, where she was a devoted and much-loved aunt and godmother, always anxious to encourage and support her nephews, nieces and goddaughter and where her real love of children could have full sway. Regular visits to her numerous relatives in Spain and to her sister Maria de las Nieves (when she settled in Italy) continued until the final few years of her life, while she carried on an extensive correspondence with other members of her family throughout her life.

Her conversation, particularly as she grew older, often embodied the self-image of being a latecomer and a cosmopolitan outsider within the British university system. Madariaga always felt more vulnerable and insecure, more needing to prove herself within a male-dominated academic environment than her friends and colleagues appreciated at the time.<sup>87</sup> In later life she began fully to appreciate how substantial the barriers—intellectual, emotional and even physical—were for women in academia. Early in her career she had resented the way, as a woman, she had been excluded from the Senior Common Room (then an all-male preserve) at several institutions at which she had worked, and attempted with various female colleagues to end this discrimination. Though she never self-identified as a feminist, she was nevertheless a trailblazer in this respect.

Despite failing health, Isabel de Madariaga retained her fierce intellectual curiosity and her enthusiasm for Russian history until the very end of

<sup>87</sup> E.g. the comments of Rosalind Jones, who worked with her on *Government and Opposition: 'Isabel de Madariaga'*, 570.

her life. In her own account of her career for the British Academy she stated that she found academia ‘a friendly and interesting place to work in’ and noted that ‘few people in life are actually paid a salary to do what they enjoy doing’. She explained that she had been drawn to the study of Catherine II after her diplomatic study because she thought the empress’s positive achievements had been ‘ignored or distorted’ and that it was assumed that ‘no good could be done by a woman who was not virtuous’. She concluded that: ‘I hope I have done something to redress the balance, but I do not wish to confine myself to one single figure, and am interested in many other aspects of Russian history which are only now gradually being elucidated.’<sup>88</sup> It is a modest account of a rich career which has transformed our understanding and interpretation of Catherine II in particular but of Russian history more generally, in the United Kingdom, in Russia and worldwide.

JANET M. HARTLEY  
*London School of Economics*

HAMISH SCOTT  
*Fellow of the Academy*

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<sup>88</sup> Madariaga, ‘Biographical Notes’.