



Michèle de Saint Laurent
9 December 1926–11 July 2003

Michèle de Saint Laurent was born at Fontainebleau (Seine et Marne), France, on 9 December 1926, sixth of a family of ten children. Her father was an army officer, and for health reasons and finding himself on reserve in 1938, he retired to his family home at Plestin-les-Grèves in Brittany. It was there that Michèle continued the secondary studies that she had started in Rennes, and where she spent her infancy. Her father died in 1939 when she was thirteen years old. From the start of World War II, her mother welcomed and hid British airmen whose planes had been shot down in the region. Denounced, she was arrested by the German forces in 1942, imprisoned at the Prison de la Santé in Paris, convicted by a military tribunal, then deported to Germany. She died in the camp at Ravensbrück in 1944 without having seen her children

again. Michèle was put in charge of the family by her relatives. She succeeded at her secondary schooling at Rennes, then at St Brieuc. After obtaining her Baccalauréat de Mathématiques in 1944 and taking a class in special mathematics in 1945, she studied for a Licence de Sciences Naturelles. She received the Certificat du SPCN at Rennes in 1952 and the Diplôme de Licence in 1954 in Paris where she followed a course in general biology under Professor P.-P. Grassé. She then passed a Certificat de Botanique in 1955. She was married in 1950, and her daughter, Odile, was born in the same year. Without waiting for the end of her university studies, she entered the world of research, taking a term at l'Institut Pasteur in Paris. There, in the service of Professor Deschiens, she was charged with documenting

the effect of iron salts on the mollusc vectors of bilharzia. Preparation of this note led, in 1953, to putting her in contact with the Laboratoire de Zoologie (Vers et Crustacés) at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, a laboratory then directed by Professor Louis Fage, who asked me to welcome her. Having joined this laboratory in 1949, I was engaged in systematic research on hermit crabs, a group remarkable for their adaptation to living in hollow objects, principally gastropod shells. The taxonomy of hermit crabs was poorly known, and equally lacking was any information about their development. Michèle wished to involve herself in a subject related to marine biology, and I suggested that she start with a study of the larval development of hermit crabs. This is what she did, first at the Muséum. Then in 1955, after joining CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) on probation and later as "attaché de recherches," she worked at the Arago laboratory at Banyuls-sur-Mer where she remained until 1960. Even these first publications showed the research qualities which came to characterise her work throughout her career: rigour and precision in observations and analysis of the characters seen, scrupulous bibliographic research, concise descriptions, and intelligent interpretations and discussion. Her drawings, more precise and more accurate than most that had up until that time illustrated works on larval stages, came to serve as models for those that later contributed to knowledge of development, not only of hermit crabs, but also of all decapods. It is necessary to add that during the years of her stay at Banyuls, she made frequent sorties to the sea to collect material for study and that she made a point of adopting effective methods for rearing larvae.

In 1961, she left the Arago laboratory and returned to Paris to the Section des Crustacés of the Muséum, working under the name Michèle Dechancé on larval development and taxonomy of hermit crabs, and describing several new species. Divorced in 1965, she henceforth signed herself with her maiden name. On 1 January 1966, she was appointed "Assistant au Muséum."

Between 1966 and 1970, she revised the classification of a group of the family Paguridae in a series of works in which several new genera were characterised. In 1968, Michèle played a major part in a study of the hermit crabs collected by the "Calypso" along the Atlantic coast of South America. In December, she embarked on the ship "Jean Charcot"

for a voyage of fishing trials. In November and December 1969, she was on board the "Thalassa," a ship of l'Office Scientifique et Technique des Pêches Maritimes, for a dredging expedition in the western Mediterranean. Numerous crustaceans were collected, and, notably, she brought decapods back alive to the Muséum where the larvae were reared for months. In 1970, she went again on "Thalassa," which this time surveyed in the depths of the Bay of Biscay.

The year 1971 was marked by a major expedition on board "Jean Charcot," whose goal was the biological exploration of the region of the Azores, down to 5000 m depth. She played a key role in the preparation of the expedition, called "Biaçores," bringing together 32 researchers over two months. On board at my side, Michèle de Saint Laurent supported me in a very effective way over the whole time of the voyage, November and December 1971, with the result that considerable material was collected including numerous new forms.

Michèle de Saint Laurent's research extended to other groups of decapod Crustacea, in particular to Thalassinidea, to whose classification she brought notable modifications in 1973. The quality of her research was by then widely recognised, and she was invited to Washington at the end of 1974 for a stay of six months to review the collection of thalassinideans of the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. It was in March 1975 during this stay that Fenner A. Chace, Jr., then head of the department of Crustacea, gave her a specimen that had remained unidentified since its capture by the "Albatross" in the Philippines in 1908. She and I collaborated to recognise this specimen as a living representative of the glypheids, presumed extinct for 50 million years. The specimen was entrusted to us, and we described it as *Neoglyphea inopinata* gen. and sp. nov. This discovery, as M. F. Glaessner wrote, was comparable to that of *Polycheles* in 1862, also belonging to a large group, Eryonoidea, that had until then been known only as fossils. One of our first tasks was to compare the living specimen with fossils. The Glypheidea, widespread in European continental seas during the Jurassic and Cretaceous, were well represented in palaeontological collections, and, to further our comparisons, we undertook to visit museums where fossils were held in France, England, Germany, and Switzerland.

However, our knowledge of *Neoglyphea inopinata* relied on the one example collected by the "Albatross," in a poor state of preservation and missing the first pair of thoracic limbs. A complete study of the species depended on obtaining and studying new specimens. The zoological and palaeontological importance of such research, under the circumstances, would allow the organisation of the first expedition to the Philippines in 1976 on board the trawler "Vauban" (MUSORSTOM 1), in the course of which a dozen adult males were captured. Two other expeditions, this time on board the vessel "Coriolis," in 1980 and 1985 (MUSORSTOM 2 and 3), managed to capture females. Michèle, after having helped me prepare each of the three voyages, participated with her usual competent manner by treating the considerable biological material taken at the depths inhabited by glypheids. She profitably used her following stays in the Philippines to collect crustaceans at low tide and in shallow water, not only in the region of Manila but also on the island of Cebu and at Mindanao. After the capture of males and females, a complete detailed description of *Neoglyphea inopinata* could be realised and was published in 1981 and 1989. We had taken equal shares in the study of the morphology of the species, but it was mostly Michèle's analysis and interpretation that enabled the precise phylogenetic placement of the glypheids outside the Palinura, with which they had been aligned, to alongside the Astacidea.

In May 1980, she presented a paper on the glypheids and the classification of the reptant decapods at the International Conference on the Biology and Evolution of Crustacea in Sydney, Australia, and on her way home visited New Zealand, New Caledonia, and Tahiti. Two years later in 1982, she joined the expedition of the "Marion Dufresne" in the seas around the island of Réunion.

In 1985, after the third trip to the Philippines, we were invited to China by Academia Sinica, and we visited principal organisations focused on zoology and marine biology. Received in Qingdao at the Institute of Oceanology by then director Professor Y. Liu, we were able to give accounts of our three expeditions to the South China Sea and to present and comment on the discovery of the living glypheids.

At the Muséum, promoted to the level of "Maître de Conférences," Michèle pursued her research on the taxonomy and phylogeny of

Thalassinidea and extended it to other groups of Crustacea. She proposed elements of a new classification of Brachyura (a new section, Eubrachyura, in 1980), established the new superfamilies of Axioidea (1979) and Enoplo-metopidea (1988) and Retroplumoidea (1989), and wrote several notes on the decapods of hydrothermal vents.

Michèle retired on 1 October 1992 but continued her research activity. In collaboration with researchers from France and abroad, she published a series of works on the collections of decapods, principally on galatheids from various regions of the world. In 2000, her last important memoir appeared in collaboration with Patsy McLaughlin on the Paguridae of New Zealand, a study undertaken over the previous 30 years but which had remained incomplete.

This was not, however, her last publication. In fact, my carcinological colleagues wished to dedicate a special review volume of *Crustaceana* to me on my 80th birthday. It was in this volume, of which she was the principal instigator and editor, that appeared the last works associated with her name.

It pays to reflect on the body of work attributed to Michèle de Saint Laurent and on what she brought to carcinology. Since her first studies, on the larval stages of hermit crabs, she believed that taxonomic analysis did not deserve to be treated as an end in itself but that it must always be accompanied by investigation of lines of descent. For her, it was essential not only to characterise taxa but also to establish their phylogenetic relationships, that is to say, to place them as precisely as possible with respect to each other on the basis of their affinities. Progressively as her research extended to other groups of decapods, it appeared to her that the phylogenetic approach was essential, not only at the level of species and genera but also at higher levels. This would lead her to propose the notable modifications to the classification of the Decapoda Reptantia mentioned above, with, among other things, the establishment of several new superfamilies. Finally, after the discovery of the living glypheid, Michèle advocated exclusion of Glypheoidea from the Infraorder Palinura, where they had previously been placed, and creation of the Infraorder Glypheidea, related to Astacidea.

The fact that all these discoveries and modifications to the systematics of the Crustacea Decapoda have been accepted testifies to the

quality and soundness of her carcinological work. Even more, dedication to her of the 1993 volume of the *Résultats des Campagnes MUSORSTOM* constitutes recognition of her depth of knowledge of the Crustacea and her participation in the first three expeditions of this series.

She was passionate about her research and devoted all of her time to it, at the Muséum as at laboratories and other museums in France and abroad. She was enthusiastic about work at sea, and it was there during sampling that she demonstrated her interest and competence with respect not only to crustaceans but also to the rest of the marine fauna. Everyone who met her, in the laboratory or at sea, appreciated the extent of her carcinological science and her ability to become interested in the groups on which others were working. Modest, never putting her own knowledge forward, she was, however, always ready to help and advise. The many researchers with whom she collaborated know how much each was enriched and how fruitful and agreeable it was to work with her.

Michèle lived for a long time in an apartment in Choisy-le-Roi, some kilometres from Paris. She bought an old house close to Montmirail, about 100 km away, and spent the weekends there tending her garden. Later, she left Choisy-le-Roi for a small apartment close to the Muséum that she could reach on foot. On selling her residence in Montmirail, she bought a house in her favourite region, Brittany, not far from the home where she grew up and not far from some of her brothers and sisters, themselves returning to the place of their childhood. There, beginning in 1984, she built with her own hands, alongside the house furnished under her care, a large garden with a profusion of lovingly cared-for flowers and a kitchen garden that she cultivated herself. Since 1992, Michèle in retirement had split her time between Paris, where she came each day to the Muséum, and the house in Brittany dear to her heart, spending more and more time there. Suffering for many years from hepatitis C, her health deteriorated in 2001 with the appearance of liver cancer. She also developed a neuralgia in the joints of her ankles that made walking painful. Handicapped but still able to live alone in her house, she suffered a fall on 8 July 2003. She was taken to hospital in Lannion and operated on two days later for a fracture of the neck of the femur. Complications followed, and she succumbed on 11 July.

To this unhappy homage that I write today for Michèle de Saint Laurent, and with whom I have been connected for 50 years of shared work and reciprocal esteem, I associate her family to which she was always close and also those who knew her. All were her friends and will mourn her passing.

I have been helped in the preparation of this notice by her daughter, Odile Poncy, and by her elder sister, Maguy de Saint Laurent.

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(Translated from French by Gary C. B. Poore)

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