

## “All in Good Conscience”

In Memory of Michelle Lamarche Marrese (1964–2016)

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Michelle Marrese once said that her entire conscious life had been an “uninterrupted lesson in the Russian language.” In fact, the Russian language was her love, the primary weapon of her scholarly creativity, her fate. She had perfect command of Russian, spoke it fluently, delivered lectures in it, knew Russian literature in the original, and effortlessly read manuscripts from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Michelle Lamarche Marrese was born in 1964. Everyone who knew her sincerely admired her beauty and grace, which, in her own narrative, resulted from the fusion of several cultural inheritances. After graduating from Yale University in 1986, she received her PhD from Northwestern University. In the preface to the Russian translation of her monograph, *A Woman's Kingdom: Noblewomen and the Control of Property in Russia, 1700–1861*, Michelle wrote with appreciation of her mentors and advisers: John Bushnell, David Joravsky, and Sarah Maza.<sup>1</sup>

From 1995 to 2005, Michelle taught Russian history, first at the University of Delaware, then at the University of Toronto. From 2006, she continued her work as an independent researcher. Throughout these years, she held academic residencies across Europe, including Münster, Edinburgh,

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This text was written with the assistance—and the recollections—of Michelle Lamarche Marrese's friends and colleagues Natal'ia Bolotina, Svetlana Romanovna Dolgova, Victoria Frede, Janet Hartley, Daniel Kaiser, Nadieszda Kizenko, Ol'ga Kosheleva, Gary Marker, Alexander Martin, Carolyn Pouncy, Irina Mikhailovna Pushkareva, Natal'ia Pushkareva, Vladislav Rjéoutski, Susanne Schattenberg, Martina Winkler, and Christine Worobec.

<sup>1</sup> Michelle Lamarche Marrese, *A Woman's Kingdom: Noblewomen and the Control of Property in Russia, 1700–1861* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), published in Russian as Mishel' Lamarsh Marreze, *Bab'e tsarstvo: Dvorianki i vladenie imushchestvom v Rossii (1700–1861)*, trans. N. Luzhetskoï (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2009).

and, of course, Moscow (1992–93, 1996–98, 2006, etc.), where she taught for one semester at the Historical Faculty of Moscow State University.

For Michelle, the foundation of historical scholarship involved working with primary sources. In their recollections of Michelle, many colleagues and friends write about meeting her at the archives. Susanne Schattenberg, professor of East European History at Universität Bremen, for example, remembers: "In the spring of 2000, I met Michelle in RGIA [the Russian State Historical Archive] in Petersburg, where she spent a long time in the archive—as did I. I took a liking to her right away, such an attractive, cheerful, very lively scholar. I was only a postdoc, while she was an established academic, and yet she nonetheless befriended me." Professor Martina Winkler of Universität Kiel also recalls that Michelle "made regular visits to Moscow and Petersburg, was a huge fan of intensive work in the archives, and had a great love for detail."

Like all foreign scholars, Michelle did not have the advantage enjoyed by historians in Russia of a more measured approach to reading manuscripts. She needed to do as much as possible in the space of a few short weeks visiting the country. She thus worked every day from the opening to the closing of the reading rooms, refusing to take breaks or even to meet with friends. Michelle's publications were based on countless documents from archives and the manuscript divisions of libraries in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tambov, Tver', and Vladimir, not to mention London, Edinburgh, Dublin, and Paris.

Perhaps her principal archive, to which she devoted many months and even years of her life, was the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA) on Bolshaia Pirogovskaia Street in Moscow. This is how the archivist Svetlana Romanovna Dolgova describes meeting Michelle there for the first time:

As it was my responsibility to provide consultations to foreign researchers, I was probably the first staff member at RGADA to meet Michelle. What struck me most was her "peaceable topic." Most foreign researchers in the 1990s were interested in the colonial politics of the Russian Empire. Michelle's theme, the status of women in 18th-century Russia, seemed innovative to me. I recommended that she explore the exceptionally rich Gagarin family collection, which contained unique documents about everyday life. Michelle was very passionate about her work, and she accumulated material from year to year, analyzing and mastering it in the process.

Michelle used a wide variety of documents in her research: correspondence, memoirs, diaries, legal acts, notarial property transactions, dowry records, wills and testaments, petitions, and so forth. This allowed her to fathom and reproduce the realities of Russian life in the 18th and early 19th centuries

and to overturn many clichéd assessments. As Christine Worobec, professor *emerita* of history at Northern Illinois University, writes: “Michelle delighted in Russian noblewomen’s personal narratives and keen observations, the statements they made through their clothing and jewelry, and the roles that they carved out for themselves.” Vladislav Rjéoutski, a researcher at the German Historical Institute in Moscow, recalls meeting Michelle in Bristol while working on a project on the influence of the French language on Russian intellectual life: “I remember several things: first, Michelle’s beauty—she was a very beautiful woman; second, her outstanding knowledge of the history of a range of Russian aristocratic families, not just the Vorontsov, Panin, and Stroganov families, whom everyone working on the Russian 18th century knows well, but also families that were not especially close to the throne.”

Michelle’s style of research, which appears especially striking in her most important work, *A Woman’s Kingdom*, is captured perfectly by Ol’ga Kosheleva, researcher at the Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences:

I read [Michelle’s] book in the English edition and value it very highly; it is written very conscientiously: that is, nothing is missing; everything is relevant, carefully considered, and well documented; and it simply reads very smoothly. And although I had a good sense of the female sphere in the 18th century, this book provided a clearer and more precise view of things. The book has many comparisons with the West, which was new for me and, I think, for many other specialists on Russia. I would even say that this book sets a standard for historical research. Michelle was not only beautiful but also an extremely smart academic.

In remarks published in the November 2016 issue of the *Bulletin of the Association for Women in Slavic Studies*, Christine Worobec writes:

In preparing this announcement, I had the pleasure of rereading all of the online reviews that I could find of Michelle’s authoritative *A Woman’s Kingdom: Noblewomen and the Control of Property in Russia, 1700–1861*. The reviews form a testament to Michelle’s phenomenal legacy as a scholar. Indeed, I have rarely seen so many superlatives with regard to a single monograph: “definitive,” “path-breaking,” “creative and daring,” “immensely authoritative,” “a marvelous and pioneering work,” “meticulously researched and tightly argued,” “a prodigious feat of research,” “a study of remarkable clarity and insight,” “an example of women’s history at its best,” and finally, “a tour de force of historical imagination and good detective work.”

Michelle’s book addresses the paradoxical legal status of noblewomen in imperial Russia. On the one hand, a married woman could neither work nor travel without the permission of her husband; divorce was practically

unattainable. On the other hand, noblewomen possessed significant rights in the ownership and disposal of property and knew exactly how to exercise these rights in practice. If in Western Europe married women of elevated rank could not dispose of their property until the second half of the 19th century, Russian noblewomen had already received the right to alienate and manage their property in 1753. As Martina Winkler writes,

Michelle's findings about women's property changed the traditional view of "the Russian woman" and established an important comparative perspective: our notion of a woman without property (and thus without agency) is strongly shaped by our knowledge of English women (and perhaps not so much from history, but rather from Jane Austen's novels). This picture is not valid on a universal level. Noblewomen in Russia were property owners and active on their estates. Michelle linked these findings to a strong feminist position.

Michelle's monograph embodies the guiding principle of her research: the complex characterization of an entire society through the study of an individual problem, in this case, the socioeconomic and legal aspects of noble landownership. *A Woman's Kingdom* has thus become a landmark work in the study of the nobility as an estate, of gender, of the foundations of serfdom, and of the development of legal culture and everyday life. The fully realized heuristic potential of the comparative approach not only destroyed the simplistic notion of Russian "backwardness" but also introduced the "Russian problematic" into the context of world history. References to the phenomenon of upper-class women's economic independence in Russia, as described by Michelle, have appeared in studies on British, Polish, Moldovan, and Austrian history, among others.

It is safe to say that *A Woman's Kingdom* has had a significant impact on our historical understanding of Russian society in the imperial period. It is hardly a coincidence that Michelle was soon invited to contribute synthetic articles for such prestigious publications as *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, *The Encyclopedia of Russian History*, and *The Cambridge History of Russia*, which appeared in 2004–8.<sup>2</sup>

In 2008, having received a Fulbright Scholarship, Michelle was a visiting professor at the Faculty of History at Moscow State Lomonosov University,

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Lamarche Marrese, "Primogeniture," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3:508–10; Marrese, "Gender and the Legal Order in Imperial Russia," in *The Cambridge History of Russia, 2: Imperial Russia, 1689–1917*, ed. Dominic Lieven (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 326–43; Marrese, "Dashkova, Yekaterina Romanovna," in *The Encyclopedia of Russian History*, ed. James R. Millar, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004), 1:365–66; Marrese, "Land Tenure, Imperial Era," in *Encyclopedia of Russian History*, 2:819–21.

where she taught a course titled “Women in the Age of Enlightenment.” The first part of the course was devoted to how prominent thinkers of the Enlightenment in France, Britain, and Germany conceptualized women’s nature and abilities; the second explored the impact of Enlightenment ideas on the lives of women in continental Europe, Russia, and the American colonies.<sup>3</sup> Alongside her teaching, Michelle continued her intensive work in the archives and libraries of Moscow, offered talks at the Dashkova Readings, and was preparing two highly significant articles, one on Yuri Lotman and the other on the position and role of women at the Russian imperial court in the 18th century.<sup>4</sup> Along with a 2006 article about the attitude of Princess Ekaterina Dashkova and her contemporaries toward the system of serfdom, these works immediately took their place as groundbreaking contributions to the historiography of the Russian 18th century.<sup>5</sup>

Her “‘The Poetics of Everyday Behavior’ Revisited: Lotman, Gender, and the Evolution of Russian Noble Identity” attracted particular notice, receiving the Heldt Prize for Best Article in Slavic and Eastern European Women’s Studies. Professor Alexander Martin of the University of Notre Dame writes: “I was one of the editors at *Kritika* when we published this article. Michelle was very passionate and perfectionistic about her work. I first saw her manuscript in 2005, and the article didn’t appear until 2010, mostly because of endless revision delays as she worked on it. At one point, she e-mailed me that ‘This [the Lotman article] is the most complicated thing I have ever written.’ But when she delivered, her article was outstanding, so it was worth waiting for.” Other scholars agree. Vladislav Rjéoutski notes:

For me her most important work was her article, “‘The Poetics of Everyday Behavior’ Revisited.” ... Marrese showed that Lotman’s essay was largely based on literary sources and that many of his conclusions concerning the use of languages, the public behavior of noblemen, and gender roles were not confirmed by archival sources. It seems to me that this article poses a very important question about the nature of sources and their analysis, a question, of course, that is hardly new but that was

<sup>3</sup> Michelle Marrese, “Zhenshchiny v Vek Prosveshcheniia,” a course offered at Moscow State University, Spring 2008 ([http://www.hist.msu.ru/News/Fulbright08\\_1.htm](http://www.hist.msu.ru/News/Fulbright08_1.htm)).

<sup>4</sup> Michelle Lamarche Marrese, “‘The Poetics of Everyday Behavior’ Revisited: Lotman, Gender, and the Evolution of Russian Noble Identity,” *Kritika* 11, 4 (2010): 701–39; Marrese, “‘It Is Not at Present the Century of Women’: Russian Noblewomen and Court Culture in the Era of Female Rule,” in *Everyday Life in Russian History: Quotidian Studies in Honor of Daniel Kaiser*, ed. Gary Marker et al. (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2010), 43–60.

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Lamarche Marrese, “Liberty Postponed: Princess Dashkova and the Defense of Serfdom,” in *The Princess and the Patriot: Ekaterina Dashkova, Benjamin Franklin, and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Sue Ann Prince (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2006), 23–38.

not posed, until Marrese's article, either about this material or in relation to such an influential figure as Lotman.

Michelle's "Liberty Postponed: Princess Dashkova and the Defense of Serfdom" was no less innovative and methodologically valuable. Seeking to explain Dashkova's attempt to protect the estate-based freedom of the nobility from autocratic pressure through the preservation of its serf-owning power, Michelle characterized the fundamental features of Russian social development. It was very important to me personally that she incorporated themes from our conversations about the role of geoclimatic factors in the Russian past: "Western European observers frequently singled out serfdom as the salient feature that separated 'backward' Eastern Europe from the 'enlightened' West. In fact, the enserfment of the peasantry was a relatively late development in Russia, emerging in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in response to territorial expansion coupled with a severe shortage of agricultural labor."<sup>6</sup>

It was precisely her painstaking work with a huge array of historical sources and her scholarly integrity that allowed Michelle to provide a new, more accurate and nuanced interpretation of long-standing dichotomies: the private and public spheres, East and West, and backwardness and progress in the comparative context of Russian and European history. Her creative method shifted increasingly toward a more detailed consideration of the language of historical documents. Two of her last works from 2015 and 2016 were based on a meticulous analysis of the private correspondence of Russian noblewomen.<sup>7</sup> In these articles, she concludes that "language occupied a central place in the construction of individual and national identity." A gendered approach, characterized by a subtle sense of psychology, allowed Michelle to analyze the social role of foreign languages in the court career of high-society women during the reigns of the two empresses and to make unexpected and original observations about the nature of Russian autocracy as a whole.

Michelle's articles evoke the laws of the literary genre. As a rule, they begin with a vivid and intriguing quotation from a private letter, which launches the development of the plot. Then, in the course of the action, all manner of

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>7</sup> Michelle Lamarche Marrese, "Performing Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Cultural Identity in the Letters of Ekaterina Rumiantseva and Dar'ia Saltykova," in *The Europeanized Elite in Russia, 1762–1825: Public Role and Subjective Self*, ed. Andreas Schönle, Andrei Zorin, and Alexei Evstratov (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), 90–111; Marrese, "Princess Dashkova and the Politics of Language in Eighteenth-Century Russia," in *French and Russian in Imperial Russia, 2: Language Attitudes and Identity*, ed. Derek Offord et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 31–47.

new circumstances and details emerge. The conflict intensifies through the rich historiography and the clash of different historical points of view on the many issues raised. This prepares the way for the culmination in the scholarly generalization and ends with the conclusion, which outlines the evolution of the given problem in succeeding epochs, leaving one with the feeling of an open and suggestive finale.

Between 1998 and 2016, Michelle published 1 monograph, 12 articles, and more than 12 book reviews. Many people recall how demanding she was of herself and how candid she was in evaluating the scholarship of her colleagues. As Alexander Martin writes, “she was very passionate and perfectionistic about her own work. She had no tolerance for what she thought was poor scholarship, whether by others or by herself.” It was perhaps for this reason that the reviews, which Michelle wrote almost every year, were considered analyses of precisely those books that she considered to be the most substantial works of research.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Michelle Lamarche Marrese, review of Janet M. Hartley, *A Social History of the Russian Empire, 1650–1825* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 46, 1–2 (2004): 234–35; Marrese, review of Lee A. Farrow, *Between Clan and Crown: The Struggle to Define Noble Property Rights in Imperial Russia* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), *Russian Review* 64, 3 (2005): 525–26; Marrese, review of Douglas Smith, ed. and trans., *Love and Conquest: Personal Correspondence of Catherine the Great and Prince Grigory Potemkin* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), *Slavic Review* 64, 2 (2005): 445–46; Marrese, review of Mary W. Cavender, *Nests of the Gentry: Family, Estate, and Local Loyalties in Provincial Russia* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), *Russian Review* 67, 3 (2008): 520–21; Marrese, review of Wendy Rosslyn and Alessandra Tosi, eds., *Women in Russian Culture and Society, 1700–1825* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), *Journal of European Studies* 38, 3 (2008): 344–46; Marrese, review of Stephen F. Williams, *Liberal Reform in an Illiberal Regime: The Creation of Private Property in Russia, 1906–1915* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), *American Historical Review* 113, 4 (2008): 1266–67; Marrese, review of Roger Bartlett and Lindsey Hughes, eds., *Russian Society and Culture and the Long Eighteenth Century: Essays in Honour of Anthony G. Cross* (Münster: LIT, 2004), and Bartlett and Gabriela Lehmann-Carli, *Eighteenth-Century Russia: Society, Culture, Economy: Papers from the VII International Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia, Wittenberg 2004* (Münster: LIT, 2007), *Slavic Review* 68, 1 (2009): 168–70; Marrese, review of Rosslyn, *Deeds, Not Words: The Origins of Women’s Philanthropy in the Russian Empire* (Birmingham Slavonic Monographs 37), *Slavonic and East European Review* 87, 3 (2009): 559–61; Marrese, review of Rosslyn and Tosi, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), *Cahiers du monde russe* 55, 3–4 (2014): 377–79; Marrese, review of Elizabeth Clara Sander, *Social Dancing in Peter the Great’s Russia* (Cologne [actually Hildesheim]: Georg Olms, 2007), *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 56, 3–4 (2014): 329–30; Marrese, review of Anna Kuxhausen, *From the Womb to the Body Politic: Raising the Nation in Enlightenment Russia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 89, 2 (2015): 346–48; Marrese, review of Alison K. Smith, *For the Common Good and Their Own Well-Being: Social Estates in Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), *American Historical Review* 121, 1 (2016): 329–30.

In her last years, Michelle was working on a new book about Princess Ekaterina Dashkova. In the annotations to one of her papers, Michelle wrote:

At present, I am writing about Princess E. R. Dashkova and the political and social power of women at the Russian court, throughout the era of female rule and the return to male sovereignty. Although Dashkova is the centerpiece of the work and there will be a strong biographical element, Dashkova's contemporaries will occupy an equally important place in this book, which is based on archival research in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Dublin, Edinburgh, London, and Paris. The working title is *Queen of Spades: Princess Dashkova and the Politics of Gender in the Era of Female Rule*.

The working titles of chapters, which Michelle mentioned in her lectures and unfinished articles, include: “I am the Prisoner of Friendship,” “Lonely Wives,” and “Beyond the Grand Tour: Motherhood and Cultural Diplomacy in the Travels of Princess Dashkova.” In private conversations, she said that she had found documents confirming not one but several meetings between Dashkova and Benjamin Franklin, spoke with her characteristic humor of the philistine interest in the relationship between the princess and the Russian empress, and dreamed of going to Troitskoe near Moscow in the autumn, where her heroine spent her final years and where she was buried next to a village church.

As Martina Winkler writes: “as a person, she was inspiring in her love of history and Russia. She was able to enjoy life, to be very generous and to keep friendships for a long time.” Her friends recall how she preferred returning to her hotel on foot from the archive, loved *pel'meni* and old ornaments with fascinating stories, repeatedly watched the film *Caramel* about the fate of six women in Beirut, and was moved by the dried flowers from the meadows of the Moscow region in the diaries of the Vil'mont sisters. Michelle often included quotations from Russian literature in her work and even used them in epigraphs. It is impossible that she did not know the finale of *Evgenii Oegin*, which is unmatched in its wisdom: «Блажен, кто праздник жизни рано оставил, не допив до дна бокала полного вина».

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