RESOLUTION OF THE RETIREMENT OF

PROFESSOR MARTINE LOUTFI

The members of the Department of Romance Languages and the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Jackson College of Tufts University, hereby record our warm appreciation for our retiring colleague, Professor Martine Loutfi. Tufts University has benefited from Martine Loutfi's loyal contributions throughout the past 26 years—a remarkable span of academic, advising, and administrative contributions to our university community.

To understand Martine Loutfi you have to understand France and French History. She lived through World War II in Paris, which had a great impact on her youth. Her family went to Tours as soon as her father was released from a prisoner of a war camp. That is where she discovered the pleasure of reading – Perrault's fairy tales were her favorites – and the pleasure of telling stories—which she never stopped doing! She enjoyed telling stories to whoever was ready to listen. This included her older brother, a good listener, although he did not always believe her stories. The Astier family went back to Paris and Martine witnessed the Liberation. That is when she had her very first contact with America in the person of a military officer who offered her chocolate and oranges. No, I will not speak about the deprivation and misery of wars, but it was indeed the first time Martine saw an orange.

Once in Paris, Martine went to the Lycée Lamartine where she enjoyed above all the study of French and theatre. She put on plays and wrote a skit on Ulysses – a traveler you notice! Because of health problems, she had to pursue her education with private teachers. She took her Baccalauréat premiere et second parties, in Math and in Philosophy. Her favorite teacher celebrated her success by taking her to the Quartier Latin – not far from where Martine now lives. The teacher acquainted her with the life of Saint-Germain-des-Pres, which was then the height of existentialism. Martine got into Sciences-Po., Institut de Sciences Politiques, which is in Saint-Germain-des-Pres. So she combined the intensity of the intellectual discovery and the fun life…including jazz clubs and bebop. These few years shaped her mind and gave her intellectual discipline. One of her professors – or more exactly a section leader – was Georges Pompidou himself. Teaching led him to the Presidency. That is France.

Martine was planning to go to I'ENA, the French equivalent of a government school. She could have become an ambassador or a minister. She met, however, Georges Loutfi, a Syrian medical student. At the time, l'ENA had a strict requirement: one could not be a French civil servant and marry a foreigner. Difficult choices had to be made and in the end love prevailed. Fortunately, Martine had also taken courses at the University towards a master in history and a master in law. She pursued her studies in the field of history of colonization. Martine and Georges got married on May 6th and they came to the United States on the 11th. They landed in Boston because he was a resident at Brigham and Women's. Martine's first big surprise was to see how powerful the women committees at the hospital were! She quickly realized that she wanted to be something else than a doctor's wife. She looked for a job but could not get the right visa. So she had plenty of time to do what she loved best, reading. She devoured American literature. She also worked on her English by watching television. Jack Paar in the evening taught her a lot of colloquial English and American culture.

Next stop was Baltimore. Georges was at Johns Hopkins. Finally, Martine was able to work legally. She was hired by Gaucher College. While she was there, President John Kennedy was assassinated. The campus bell rang and they all learned the President had been shot. A very vivid memory. Following her husband back to Boston, she was hired by the French Department at Wellesley College. There she was intellectually stimulated, but it was not always easy for a young married French woman to understand the system. She met some lively and lovely colleagues, in particular Germaine Lafeuille, a distinguished French medievalist who became her mentor. She also met Leo Bersani who taught her how to teach Balzac and/or Stendhal in four lessons!

Americanization taught Martine that in order to succeed in academic life, she had to have a doctorate. Therefore, she looked into her archives and retrieved her best research paper whose topic was; The French establishment of the Protectorate on Tunisia. One interesting aspect was linked to literature; Maupassant had dealt with the intricate political situation in one of his well-known novels, Bel Ami. That is how Martine got the idea to explore French novelists who had dealt with the expansion of the French Empire at the end of the 19th century. The research lasted five years and became a doctoral dissertation and then a book titled "Littérature et Colonialisme." This book was published when "Francophone studies" were not yet recognized as a valid and independent field of research. Martine's book represented a new vision, an undoing of the nationalistic French idea of colonialism. Anybody who knows France understands that Martine was not only a pioneer, she also was a courageous and original scholar. In 1973, her book was recognized for what it was. It received the prize of "l'Association des écrivains de langue francaise," the association of French speaking writers.

By this time, Martine was already working at Tufts where she was developing courses on French culture and civilization under the chairmanship of Professor Jim Wadsworth. The standard curriculum in this area was getting less and less relevant to the students' interests and to the very substance of matters at hand. Martine designed courses that sprang from her own interest and understanding of what contemporary French culture was. She focused on films. Her favorites were Renoir's "Rule of the Game," Truffaut's "400 blows" and Goddard's "Breathless". Through these movies she presented to her students a different perspective on France. This was not an easy endeavor. At the time there was no room equipped to show movies; films had to be rented in heavy metal boxes that had to be carried from the post office to Martine's 3rd floor office in East Hall to some very uncomfortable classroom in Miner … and then back! But the films were very good, and the teacher also, so the course took off.

Martine served Tufts for 26 years. She taught French films and French culture. She taught autobiographical literature. She taught several 20th-century writers, including Marguerite Duras. Among the highlights of her numerous activities, there were her involvement with Tufts-in-Paris and with the European Center in Talloires. Because she had always kept an on-going relationship with young writers in Paris, she was able to develop a course in recent French fiction which focused on novelists she knew very well and whom she was able to invite in Paris, in Talloires, and even here on the Hill. This provided the opportunity for students to meet, for instance, Paule Constant long before she received the Goncourt prize, and Annie Ernaux before she received the Prix Renaudot. Martine's friendship with writers was the basis for her second book, an anthology of contemporary French fiction, titled, "Récits d'aujourd'hui."

You remember Martine wrote a skit as a child about Ulysses. She followed in his footsteps and made good use of sabbatical leaves. She visited the Soviet Union—when it was still the Soviet Union—and went up to the Afghani border where she was turned away. She was more successful the following year and went all the way to the Great Wall of China. There was also a long trip through Southern India with unforgettable memories of Mahabalipuram, land of the Mahabarata. Martine was lucky. That same year, Mahabarata was played in Avignon. Avignon is the French theatre mecca with a yearly summer festival, which Martine religiously attended for 25 years…and she keeps going. Martine also visited the Middle East and Europe. She recently organized a trip to Rome around paintings of Caravagio. I asked her, of all these extraordinary trips, which one did she prefer. She answered: "Going back to my little place in Paris, looking over the Panthéon."

During her retirement party, Martine said that now she does not have to watch over her French accent anymore. She could drop this part of her professional assets and become a real American with a Boston accent. So, this is why she is establishing roots in New Hampshire. By the lake and the golf course she will have plenty of time to prepare trips. Martine enjoys very much her new freedom and looks forward to future trips to Avignon to keep up her love for theatre, trips to Paris to meet her writer friends and to go every day to the movies, trips to Medford, I hope, to meet her working friends. Martine brought fresh air in our lives. We wish her all the best.

Be it resolved that this resolution be spread on the minutes of the faculty of Arts and Sciences and that a copy be handed to Professor Martine Loutfi.