The Department of Romance Languages lost close friend and colleague, Associate Professor of French Brigitte Lane, on March 3, 2015. Later that day Brigitte’s son, Mathieu Barton Lane, had written, “It saddens me to inform you that Brigitte Lane passed away early this morning, succumbing to the cancer which came upon her so quickly at the end of last year. She passed her final weeks at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston where she received wonderful care in the hospice unit. She was surrounded by caring and attentive doctors and nurses who kept her from suffering to her last moment.” Joseph Garreau, Emeritus Professor of French Studies & Culture of the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, and close friend of Brigitte gave the following eulogy on the day of her memorial service on May 2, 2015 at her gravesite at the Mount Auburn Cemetery.

As most of you, if not all of you, already know, for the last decade Brigitte was not only my best friend but my primary friend. Thanks to her I have met many of her own friends who are here today with her own family at this grave site. May I take this opportunity to thank you publicly for your appreciated words of comfort or your phone calls, while defeated by sadness I was grieving her loss. Yes, Mathieu, you were right when you saw me crying inconsolably on her deathbed and said: “You were very close.” Yes, we were.

Now, to turn to her mom and some of my own memories, here is just one revealing example of a brilliant mind that would not quit: Her last 2013 published article, titled Le Clézio et le sacré is dedicated (I quote): “To the memory of my master Professor Albert Bates Lord of Harvard who better than anyone knew how to initiate his own students, myself included, to the process of composition of oral epics.” When Mathieu, who demonstrated, in addition to his filial love, such an admirable fortitude despite his own grief, returned to his mom’s house a few weeks ago and started to clear off her dining-room or rather work table, there were still on it no less than three translations of the Song
of Roland, which she had asked me to take to the rehabilitation center in Lexington last December. The story-pattern theory of the two-companions, as illustrated for example in the epic poem of Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu, or, in the Song, the companionship of Roland and Olivier, that Professor Lord had taught her, of whom she has now become ad aeternum, a close neighbor in this glorious cemetery – that story-pattern indeed occupied her mind to almost her last breath.

We also read on this grave marker: passionate teacher. I could add: teacher ad infinitum, that is even after her official May 31, 2014 retirement from Tufts University. Hoping that she could regain in the meanwhile some physical strength, she has proposed to teach a course this summer on the two latest Nobel Prizes in French Literature: Le Clézio (2008) and Modiano (2014): one looking to the future, the other turning himself to the past. Le Clézio-Modiano: another French duo, as it is so common in our literature to associate our great writers by pairs: Montaigne-Rabelais, Sartre-Camus, Yourcenar-Duras. (Sorry to sound ad nauseam like the old professor.) Mathieu, you won’t remember it but there was also a Modiano novel left on that dining-room table!

To conclude, I would like to read you just one testimony addressed to me, that of a dear friend of Brigitte at Swarthmore College, (where she taught for 10 years before coming to Tufts University) from Carole Netter, whom I also knew. (It’s written in her native French): “Having been a very close friend of Brigitte during the years when she taught here, I share your own grief. I enjoyed her for her great intellect and extraordinary culture, her sense of poetry, her innovative ideas, her generosity, her charming art of story-telling, her niçois savoir-vivre, the stories of her youth in her childhood home facing the Mediterranean Sea, her warm and faithful friendship. I still can hear her soft singing voice, that of the happy times and that of dark thoughts that also tortured her. All this reverberates in me and saddens me. Je suis de tout coeur avec vous et sa famille. I’m wholeheartedly with you and her family.”

Brigitte Marie Andrée, née Desrues, born, she liked to tell us in a car accident on Thursday, the 3rd of September 1942 in Vichy (central France, where her father owned a factory), but because of the war was officially registered at the mairie (the town hall) as being born on Saturday the 5th and buried in the snow on Saturday, March 7, 2015.

Passionate of all things Celtic, Brigitte wanted that her feast day be celebrated on the 1st of February, the feast of Saint Brigid of Ireland, Brigid of Kildare, (who, according to tradition, also died at the age of 72). Her favorite Christian Holiday was Palm Sunday. As if they knew about it - friends of the Mt Auburn Cemetery I suppose - planted a fresh branch of boxwood on her grave, as we still do in our native France on Palm Sunday.

With Heather, Henry, Abby, Mathieu and myself standing by, each of us holding a branch of her favorite white lilies, that we each later deposited on her coffin, after the reading of two poems, the well-known Do not stand at my grave and weep and The Energy of
Prayer by Thich Nhat Hanh, we watched her coffin being slowly descended into the ground.

Sit tibi terra levis. Que la terre te soit légère. May the earth rest lightly upon you, devoted friend.

Degrees: Ph.D., Harvard University, 1982 (Cultures of French expression and African Studies); M.A., University of Kansas; Licence ès Lettres Université de Paris, Sorbonne; Université du Théâtre des Nations (Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt)

Expertise: Oral Tradition/Anthropology, French Cultural Studies, Drama and Theater, Film Studies, Contemporary French literature and society (with a focus on multiculturalism and immigration issues), Interdisciplinary perspectives in all academic domains


Professional Positions: Member Head Committee of the Laurence Wylie North-American Prize in French Cultural Studies; Member Editorial Board Nouvelles Francographies (SPFFA); Referee for L'Érudit franco-espagnol; Referee for the American Society of Utopian Studies; former freelance reader for the Editions du Seuil, Paris (Collection Théâtre)

Books:

- Pour une littérature de l'exil (with the participation of contemporary French writer Leïla Sebbar. Bleu autour Publisher, September 2015.

Selected Articles:

- (Forthcoming) "JMG Le Clézio et le sacré" In Recherches sur l'imaginaire Cahiers n°35. Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 2012.
"Histoire orale des Franco-Américains de Lowell, Mass, Histoire et Identité(s)."


"De la Méduse à Marie: dramaturgie, systèmes symboliques et idéologie dans 'Génitrice' de François Mauriac". Cahiers François Mauriac, 13 (Special 1986 Anniversary Issue), 164-374.

Community work and personal interests:
Children's Theater workshops (formerly in Paris and New York City underprivileged areas); Art: painting, clay sculpture, masks and puppets building; Picasso, Matisse, De Chazal works and folk art; art and ethnology museums' ethics; oral-traditional epic literature from the ancient world; shamanism as a pre-scientific mode of thought; poetry; cinema, in all its dimensions; global Amerindian cultures and their representation in films (from the Western tradition until today); African Yoruba Nigerian traditions; Celtic studies, especially in terms of the aspects of the ancient diasporic Celtic world; flowers, trees, the mysteries of the vegetal world and their symbolic and ritual dimensions; music, singing, especially traditional French songs and hearing other people's voices; imaginative cooking