French prof dies after long illness

Frederic Shepler, an associate professor of French, died Monday following a long illness. Shepler, who had been seriously ill for over a year, was 44.

Shepler began teaching at Tufts in 1968 after receiving his Ph.D. from Yale. He had previously received his B.A. from Boston University in 1962 and his M.A. from Middlebury College in 1963. Shepler became the first recipient of the Lilian Leibner Award for distinguished teaching and advising in 1974. "He was always so concerned on a personal level with a student's development," said Religion Professor Howard Hunter. Shepler's specialty was 20th century poetry.

His book on the poetry of Henri Michaux is entitled, Creatures Within: Imaginary Beings in the Work of Henri Michaux. "It's a very hard field to teach but he got students interested in it," said Alan Clayton, Chairman of the Romance languages department. According to Clayton, students always enrolled heavily in his classes. Clayton described him as a strong teacher and a sensitive reader of texts, especially poetry. "He was one of the best teachers of humanities that we've had," said Clayton.

Shepler stopped teaching mid-way through the Spring 1983 semester. At that time, according to Clayton, Shepler had begun to feel faint and had trouble breathing thus forcing him to discontinue his teaching. Throughout his illness, however, he was filled with confidence and hope said Clayton, "He never gave up."

"He touched a good many people at Tufts in a very special way," said Hunter. Shepler was in general described as a cordial warm and very sensitive individual. "I never heard anyone criticize him," Hunter said. Italian Professor Jean Dillon referred to him as "One of the superlative people Tufts has had." "For those who knew him, his death will leave a permanent void," said Hunter. "They've been blessed by having known and worked with him; that's its own reward."