The following tribute was read by Nancy Shumate at the event to honor of Justina Gregory on the occasion of her retirement from Smith College on April 1, 2017.

[Author’s note: the cat’s name in the last paragraph has been corrected. The comments on Justina’s first three books were adapted from the nomination letter for the Engel lectureship. NS]

LAUDATIO

Justina Winston Gregory spent her earliest years not far from here, across the border in the wilds of southern Vermont, growing up in an old New England farmhouse to which she still returns at every opportunity. As a girl she whiled away her days playing the panpipe under the apple trees as her goats and sheep frolicked nearby and the earth freely yielded up its bounty without being cultivated. Well, it may not have happened exactly like that. But if Justina was not strictly a shepherd girl out of pastoral poetry, she did spend her childhood in the country, she even had a pet sheep, named Liba (so I’m told), and this upbringing instilled in her a deep love of nature and marked her character with an unusual but appealing fusion of Yankee rusticity and European sophistication, which persists to this very day. (A word about that sheep: Patrick once told me that when it came time to ask for Justina’s hand in marriage, he had to go to the sheep, not Justina’s father. And in the same vein, she is the only classicist I know who could write an article on donkeys in archaic Greece with an affection for domesticated animals born of personal experience.) Justina’s parents were accomplished people of letters in their own right, refugees from the city and freethinkers ahead of their time in their move “back to nature,” well before it became a cliché in the 1960s. Justina spent her youth toggling between the books and ideas that they represented, and more mundane tasks like trying to stay warm through the Vermont winter in a house with only wood stoves for heat.

In time she made her way south and was admitted to Smith College in the class of 1967, a scholarship student at a time when there were far fewer of them than there are now. She excelled, needless to say, in the study of Classics, under the tutelage especially of the late George Dimock, a much loved figure in the long annals of the department. Justina went on to Harvard for graduate study—this was the unreconstructed Harvard of circa 1970, no picnic for any woman, but even less so for one with small children. Nursing a baby with one hand and reading the
Oxford Classical Text of Sophocles with the other, Justina earned her Ph.D. in 1974, and except for a one-year detour to Yale early in her career has been back at Smith every since. This is someone with deep Smith roots, so it is only fitting that she will go away bearing a triple crown of the College’s honors for excellence: She was chosen as the Katherine Asher Engel Lecturer in 2010; that same year she became Sophia Smith Professor of Classics, and in 2015 her achievements in the classroom were recognized with the Sherrerd Award for Teaching.

Something that has always impressed me about Justina is her absolute faith in the value of scholarship – especially a particular kind of slow, careful philological scholarship – and her unwavering conviction that pursuing it is a noble calling. Following that calling with a focused and quiet passion, Justina has established herself as one of the pre-eminent scholars of Greek tragedy of her generation through a steady output of distinguished books and articles appearing over the course of some forty years. Not even the burdens of service to the College and the profession, which Justina’s sense of duty also called her to shoulder in an unbroken line of responsibilities, has interfered with her unflagging commitment to scholarly engagement.

Her first book, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians*, published in 1991, was instrumental in provoking a kind of revolution in Euripidean studies, and consequently in the study of Greek tragedy as a whole. In this book, Justina challenged a long-established view of Euripides as an iconoclastic or subversive rebel against tragic tradition -- a view inspired by nineteenth-century debates, and ultimately grounded in an overly literal reading of the broad-brush caricatures of Euripides by the comic poet Aristophanes. In contrast, her work gave a nuanced account not only of Aristophanes’ lampoons, but of the full spectrum of Euripides’ reputation in the fifth and fourth centuries, while recognizing both the distinctiveness of his tragic practice and its continuities with the tragic tradition. Her revisionist perspective met with some skepticism in the early 1990s, but soon earned respect and influence among a younger generation of scholars. Indeed, there has been a sea change in Euripidean scholarship in the past twenty-five years and her work has been central to it, helping to change fundamentally the scholarly conversation about tragedy.

In addition to the study that was crucial for this change, Justina has produced two other books that represent important contributions to her field. The first is her commentary on Euripides’ *Hecuba*, which came out in 1999. In classical studies, the most rigorous and demanding form of scholarship remains the scholarly commentary on a text, requiring as it does
a mastery of subjects and methods as disparate as philology, metrics, textual criticism, material culture, and every kind of history, including literary, critical, social, and political. One reviewer found Justina’s *Hecuba* “both erudite and accessible;” “admirably clear [and] impeccably researched” (George, *BMCR* 2000.11.25). Commentaries are among the most valuable works a classical scholar can produce; they are used for decades, and in some cases centuries, long after the shelf life of fashionable critical studies has expired.

The invitation from Blackwell to serve as editor of their *Companion to Greek Tragedy*, which appeared in 2005, was an indication of the stature in her field that Justina enjoyed by that time. This collection of some thirty essays, by an international group of prominent scholars, is intended as a basic resource on the subject for both specialists and academics in other fields. Editing such an ambitious volume requires enormous critical discernment across a range of subfields, as well as the ability to manage a herd of unruly scholars and elicit each one’s best work. The reviews made it clear that Justina succeeded admirably in this task. According to one, the *Companion* is a “superb, lively, genuinely stimulating collection of essays which make the plays come alive; its particular strength lies in its range and diversity of material, which generate a real sense of a living, multifarious genre at the center of Athenian polis life” (Wright, *BMCR* 2006.06.30). In addition to serving as the editor, Justina contributed an essay – on Euripides, of course – to this volume, which is sure to be the handbook of choice on Greek tragedy for years to come.

Far from slowing down or disengaging as she has approached retirement, Justina has been hard at work on a new book, which has been accepted by Oxford and should appear next year. In *Cheiron’s Way: Youthful Education in Homer and Tragedy*, she takes on an issue dear to her heart, the education of the young, by examining the formative processes that made a range of epic and tragic protagonists who they were later in life. How appropriate this is as a capstone to the career of someone who has been not only a serious scholar, but a dedicated and beloved teacher to countless Smith students, a good number of them now scholars themselves.

Over the years Justina has consistently inspired devotion in her students through exercising what seems to be a perfect balance of rigor and kindness. Of course, she’s been known to show a film when it’s relevant, or to incorporate a Powerpoint if it really illuminates the topic at hand. But on the whole, she has caught and held the attention of young minds not by leaning on the bells and whistles of technology, but by becoming an expert practitioner of what
has been called the “chalk and talk” school of instruction. Students still respond to this method and rise to its challenges, *mirabile dictu*, perhaps precisely because opportunities for serious thinking and undistracted discussion are rapidly disappearing from other spheres of their lives. As Justina prepared to retire she bequeathed her first-year seminar, “Women in the *Odyssey*,” to Scott Bradbury, sharing advice and all her materials with characteristic generosity. On more than one occasion he has remarked to me how impressed he is by the obvious care that has gone into crafting the course, from choice of readings to pacing to the design of writing assignments: everything calculated to meet the students where they are, and to bring out the best in them. Even in her final years teaching, Justina was hatching new courses: this seminar; a partial-credit course on English etymology for the widest possible range of non-majors, courses in translation on Greek culture to supplement her lovingly nurtured sequence in the original language.

As I perused the student encomia submitted for her Sherrerd nomination, it became clear that choosing a sampling of quotes would be difficult, so uniform were they in their praise. So I’ll just cite one that seems to cover most of the bases: “In her first-year seminar I encountered serious academic research for the first time. She challenged us to read texts that seemed incomprehensible at first, but under her guidance revealed their meaning with careful reading and deep thought. Her expectations for our essays were high, but our…drafts came back covered in [useful] commentary, and with her help I learned to write…[In] her …course on Sophocles’ *Antigone* [in Greek], …Justina guided our sometimes halting translations, revealing her own mastery of the [language]…I…still depend on her for guidance post-college, in the early years of my career. There is a network of alumnae who still see Justina as a mentor, and more than once she has offered to connect me to past students for…help.”

This last comment bears highlighting, for it reminds us that Justina’s instruction has never ended at the classroom door or even at graduation. Even now she asks about students by name: “How is so-and-so doing? Did she sort out that credit shortage?” She continues to cultivate her relationships with students long after they’ve left Smith, following their personal and professional developments and offering advice, contacts, and support. Her natural inclination toward the role of mentor has extended to junior faculty. Scott and I were once its grateful beneficiaries, and when younger colleagues have cycled in and out of the department in replacement positions, she has taken the lead in looking after them with strategic career counseling, guidance on teaching methods, and general encouragement.
I think that my colleagues will agree that whatever window of department history their employment has spanned, Justina has always seemed to be our pillar, a strong personality in a small package, a force of nature that has kept us on course. So it’s not surprising that the prospect of her absence leaves us feeling a little at sea, just a bit orphaned, like scouts who’ve suddenly lost their den mother. In the spring: “We’re so exhausted. Maybe we can cancel the picnic this year.” “No, we’ll have the picnic. The students expect it.” In the fall: “Maybe we could cut back on the number of guest lecturers we invite this year. It’s all just too much.” “No, we’ll have the usual number. If we want to be taken seriously, we have to show engagement with the outside world.” She served as chair for more than her share of terms without complaint, steering the department through difficult times when not only its well-being but its very existence seemed to be under threat. Without being asked and without reward, she took upon herself invisible but important tasks that the rest of us never seemed to find time to do: serving as faculty liaison for Phi Beta Kappa and student Mellon Fellowship nominations; curating and managing our library book orders year after year, so that Neilson’s classics collection is one of the best in any undergraduate college. She has been the one to reliably offer her homes, either on Butler Place or up in the country, for gatherings of the department and its friends, creating a warm incubator for departmental cohesion that can’t be duplicated even in the Caverno Room. Indeed, my earliest memories of Smith involve long, leisurely evenings of talk in the Dimocks’ living room after department events, before we all got so busy and atomized. Justina is a bridge back to that time. It wasn’t a perfect time, as we all know, but it had its virtues, and hospitality was one of them.

And so, Justina, hail and farewell—*ave atque vale*. I don’t expect you to rest in retirement; in fact, I wouldn’t be surprised to see another book or two. But however you decide to use this new chapter, that prerogative has certainly been well earned. There will be more time for the places and the people you love, especially, of course, Patrick, and now another Patrick, *maior* and *minor*, and for the special joy that a grandchild brings. (I can’t help but add here that Justina has been blessed with what seems to be one of the happiest marriages I have ever had the pleasure of observing.) There’ll be more time for Hodge the cat, or whatever bedraggled refugee feline turns up on your doorstep, and for cultivating your garden (and I hope that the bags of fresh vegetables that have mysteriously appeared in my mailbox most summers will continue to mysteriously appear). There’ll be time for the Red Sox—night games, without having to worry
about getting up the next morning for class. We know that we’ll still see you; you’ll always belong to this place. You’ll be in and out, back and forth, with the freedom that your new life allows. But it won’t be the same. We miss you already.