

Memorial Minute for Marie-José Madeleine Delage, Professor Emerita of French Studies
Smith College Memorial Gathering of November 5, 2025
Written by David Ball, Professor Emeritus of French and Comparative Literature,
Read by Jonathan Gosnell, Professor of French Studies

Marie-José Delage began her career at Smith as an Instructor in 1960 and never dreamed of remaining in the United States. Luckily, she did, and became a full professor in 1977. She directed the Junior Year Abroad in Paris five times. She rented an apartment there for sabbaticals, but after her retirement, she gave away her house in Northampton, endowed a scholarship for students in the Paris JYA, and moved back to her old family house near Bordeaux in Libourne, where she died.

I would not have written this memorial minute if not for Marie-Jo, as my wife and I always called her. She interviewed me in Paris when I applied for a job at Smith and I remember that I enjoyed talking with her in French. We became friends soon after I arrived. She was a stout, straightforward Frenchwoman who liked wine from the region where she grew up and good scotch—tastes I share. Our friendship grew closer over the years, yet oddly enough, we always addressed each other with the formal *vous*. And she kept her endearing trait of always making English sound just like French.

Her scholarship was impressive, although she always dismissed it somewhat mockingly herself. She introduced, translated and annotated the complete sermons of Césaire, the bishop of Arles, from his 6th-century Latin into French, as well as a biography—no easy task, as this was not the classical Latin she learned in school. She also published several articles on him and co-authored a graphic “novel” of his life. Wikipedia says that Caesarius, as he is called here, was “the leading ecclesiastical statesman and spiritual force of his age,” and “His concern for the poor and sick was famous throughout and beyond Gaul,” no doubt the reasons he was canonized. I remember, after a visit to the Roman amphitheater in Arles, her telling me that Césaire told his flock not to take its stones for the walls of their houses. The massive amphitheater is still standing, so I guess most of them listened.

We will never listen to Marie-Jo again, and we will miss her.

**A personal note from friend and colleague Ann Leone to conclude:*

"As a student, I took one course from M-J, and there our scholarly overlap ended; my field of research and hers were centuries apart. I came up for tenure at a contentious time, and I don't remember how M-J voted, but ever after, she was a stalwart supporter. After we both retired, we gradually became friends. One day, I asked her if it would be ok to drop the use of the formal form of 'you', which had always divided our department between those who used the formal form and those who used the familiar. She didn't bat an eye, but I'm pretty sure that it was a surprise, if not a shock. We had dinners together, always with an excellent French wine that M-J offered. She and I spent a couple of late afternoons at my son's farm, sitting in a field watching cows or sheep, whichever came by- with a glass of excellent French wine in hand. I wish we had discovered each other as friends long before we did."