

# ELLIOTT CHRISTOPHER FORSYTH

## 1924–2012

VÉRONIQUE DUCHÉ

Emeritus Professor Elliott Forsyth died peacefully surrounded by his family in December last year, in his eighty-ninth year. Elliott Christopher Forsyth was born on 1st February 1924 at Mount Gambier, South Australia, the son of the Reverend Samuel Forsyth OBE and Ida Muriel née Brummit. Educated at Prince Alfred College in Adelaide, he graduated with Honours in French at the University of Adelaide in 1947.

After teaching at the Friends' School in Hobart (1947–1949), Elliott Forsyth embarked for France to undertake postgraduate studies in Paris. A student of the distinguished Renaissance scholar Raymond Lebègue, he obtained a doctorate at the Sorbonne in 1954.

He subsequently held positions as Lecturer and Senior Lecturer in French at the University of Adelaide (1955–1966), and also taught in a visiting capacity at the University of Wisconsin in the US. In 1966 he was appointed Foundation Professor of French at La Trobe University, Melbourne, and in 1987 Emeritus Professor at the same university. In retirement he also had a close connection with the University of Melbourne and in 1999 was appointed an Honorary Professorial Fellow in that University.

During his long career he was able to inspire a taste for the French language and French culture in several generations of students, and he was a world-renowned authority on French Renaissance literature.

A born teacher as well as a tireless researcher, Elliott Forsyth recently published an article on the educational benefits that can be gained from the study of a language other than one's own. He worked on French exploration in the Pacific and in 1988 he was the co-ordinating editor, principal translator and a co-author of *Baudin in Australian Waters: the Artwork of the French Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands (1800–1804)*. He also took an interest in Baudelaire's poetry, as well as in Corneille's theatre, but his main research field was French Renaissance literature.

His seminal work on French revenge tragedy (*La Tragédie française de Jodelle à Corneille (1553–1640) : le thème de la vengeance*), which first

appeared in 1962, was published in a second revised edition in 1988 and his highly-regarded edition of Jean de La Taille's *Saül le Furieux* (1968) was reprinted in 1998, as was his study on Ronsard's concept of poetic inspiration (1975 and 1997). His *Concordance des "Tragiques" d'Agrippa d'Aubigné* (1984) is a very useful tool for all Renaissance scholars and his major work on divine justice, *La Justice de Dieu : Les Tragiques d'Agrippa d'Aubigné et la Réforme protestante en France au XVI<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, published in 2005, demonstrates his extensive knowledge of the French Protestant Reformation. In 2006 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Letters by the University of Adelaide for his publications on the French Reformation.

A Commander in the Order of the Academic Palms (France), Elliott Forsyth was also a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators. In 2003 he was awarded the Centenary of Federation Medal.

When I arrived in Melbourne, I was very keen to meet this renowned Renaissance expert. He kindly invited me to his home, and we had very interesting conversations about French studies and Renaissance authors. I was struck by his generosity and his modesty, as well as by his perfect use of the French language. His enthusiasm for Renaissance literature was contagious and I wish I had had more time to share with such an erudite scholar.

*The University of Melbourne*