



Keith John Goesch, Foundation Professor
of French at Macquarie University,
Mauriac Specialist
(1927–2015)

Kenneth Dutton

Keith Goesch was a country boy. Born in Cootamundra, in the south west slopes of NSW, he received his secondary education at a small high school in Temora, a town in the same region. When he came up to the University of Sydney with a Teachers' College Scholarship, he felt that—in his own words—he 'had a long way to go to catch up with the metropolitan students who had attended special Honours classes'. But Ian Henning, at that time a Senior Lecturer, recognised his potential and referred him for extra tuition to the then Professor of French, the redoubtable G. G. Nicholson. Contrary to his reputation for severity, Nicholson took him patiently and painstakingly through his essays, explaining the corrections that had been made to them, in the manner of what one of Keith's contemporaries called 'a courtly old gentleman'.

Boarding with relatives in Sydney throughout his university course, Keith graduated in 1948 with First Class Honours in French and undertook a Diploma in Education. He was granted leave of absence from his secondary school teaching position in order to take up a French Government Scholarship and left for Paris, where—thanks to a recommendation from the Sydney *lecteur* at the time, Maurice Valuet—he was able to undertake research for his doctorate under the distinguished Professor René Jasinski. The subject of his thesis (rather improbably, in the eyes of his later colleagues) was a writer who had been something of an *enfant terrible* of French literary society in the 1920s, the novelist and poet Raymond Radiguet.

Having been awarded the doctorate with a *mention très honorable*, Keith returned to secondary teaching while awaiting the availability of a





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university position. During this time, he worked on rendering his doctoral thesis suitable for publication: it appeared in 1955 under the title *Raymond Radiguet : Étude biographique, bibliographie, textes inédits*, with an *Avant-propos* by Jean Cocteau.

After a year as a Lecturer at New England University College in Armidale, Keith was appointed to a Lectureship at the University of Sydney, rising to Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor, before being appointed in late 1965 to the Chair of French at the newly-established Macquarie University. He held this position, along with that of Head of the School of Modern Languages (later the Department of French Studies) until his retirement in 1999, when he was awarded the title of Emeritus Professor; he had already been appointed a Doctor of Letters *honoris causa* by Macquarie University in 1992.

Outside the University, Keith took on numerous educational and administrative roles. Vice-President of the Alliance française of Sydney and Chair of the NSW Secondary Syllabus and Examination Committees, he worked with the ABC on its 'French for Schools' programmes, lectured to WEA classes, produced French recordings for use in schools throughout Australia and, with the assistance of the Macquarie French staff, a *Son et Lumière* presentation seen by over 6,000 students and their teachers. Also with his Macquarie colleagues he produced a number of works aimed at secondary school students, notably a book on French civilisation entitled *Voilà la France*, and a collection of French poetry entitled *Poèmes de France : Anthologie de la poésie française*. Whilst he was head of the School of Modern Languages, he introduced a number of foreign languages, both European and Asian, into the University. On his retirement, the then Vice-Chancellor of Macquarie, Professor Di Yerbury, wrote: 'One of Professor Goesch's many prominent contributions has been towards the University strategies for internationalisation. He has been instrumental in negotiating links and exchange agreements between Macquarie and a number of overseas institutions.'

From the early 1960s onwards, the chief—almost the sole—focus of Keith's research was the work of novelist and essayist François Mauriac. It began with the publication by A. G. Nizet in 1965 of his *François Mauriac : Essai de bibliographie chronologique 1908–1960*, with a preface by Mauriac himself. Mauriac was later to write to Keith expressing his surprise 'that there should be someone at the other end of the world interested enough in [his]





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work to devote lengthy studies to it.¹ The remark was to prove prescient, as the number of works Keith devoted to Mauriac was to grow in number and substance over the next thirty years and more. An important milestone was *D'Autres et moi : Textes recueillis et commentés par Keith Goesch*, published by Grasset in 1966, again with a preface by Mauriac. Of a similar nature were *Les Paroles restent : Interviews recueillies et présentées par Keith Goesch*, Grasset, 1985, and *Paroles perdues et retrouvées : Textes recueillis et présentés par Keith Goesch*, Grasset, 1986.

After Mauriac's death in 1970, it was Mme François Mauriac herself who nominated Keith as a member of the Advisory Board of the *Association internationale des amis de François Mauriac*, and in 1995 the Université Michel de Montaigne in Bordeaux awarded him the degree of *Docteur honoris causa*. His work on Mauriac was also recognised by the award of the Medal of the City of Bordeaux, a city of which Mauriac—along with Montaigne and Montesquieu—was one of the favourite sons.

An indication of the esteem in which he was held by Mauriac scholars was the publication in 2000 of *François Mauriac et d'autres : Mélanges en l'honneur de Keith John Goesch*, the proceedings of a colloquium held at Macquarie University by the *Société internationale des études mauriaciennes* in 1998. Edited by Bernard Swift, Roda Kanawati and Angus Martin, this publication contained essays on Mauriac by scholars of such distinction as Jacques Monfrier, president of the above Society, and Pierre Brunel of Paris-Sorbonne and the Institut Universitaire de France. In an elegant *hommage*, Mauriac's son Jean quoted his father as accepting with 'gratitude and pride' the honour that Keith's work had done him. He added, with some justification, that Mauriac wrote 'without forgetting Pamela, your dear wife, who is also a "Mauriacian", since she has assisted you in your work from the very beginning'.

Keith Goesch died on 26 October 2015 after several months' illness. He is survived by his wife Pam and their two sons.

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¹ [...] qu'il puisse se trouver à l'autre bout du monde quelqu'un qui s'intéresse à mon œuvre au point de lui consacrer de longues études.

