



Remembering Alain Rey

Dear Alain,

I remember you, long before I met you, you were always the one whom the French had nicknamed 'the King of Words',

I remember you as a high school student, learning to write my first essays, and the *Petit Robert* always coming to my rescue,

I remember you, the person hiding behind the red edge of the three volumes of the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, which I found at home, and at my friends' and friends' friends' homes...

I remember wishing to direct Éditions Le Robert, because you had been its soul for fifty years,

I remember our first meeting, sitting next to you at an editorial committee meeting of Le Robert, and you were telling anyone who would listen that you were ready for the letter C of the *Dictionnaire historique*,

I remember our first lunch, when I discovered, stunned, the fabulous extent of your knowledge and culture, and I remember having the magical impression, for the first time in my life, of rubbing shoulders with genius,

Alain Rey died on 28 October 2020, at the age of 92. He was a prominent French linguist and lexicographer, and editor-in-chief of *Dictionnaires Le Robert* for over half a century.

Photo by courtesy of [Ulf Andersen](#).

I remember, during that same lunch, that you admitted to me, laughing, that you sometimes lost the memory of proper names, and I remember understanding, listening to you, that for you the common names of our language are its nobility,

I remember so many interviews and lectures, where, to the great delight of your audience, you answered a single question, the first and the last, passing, by analogy – always – from one word to another,

I remember so many pretty stories about words, about publishing, and anecdotes about you, told over and over again by the oldest among us at Le Robert, which passed on to the younger ones,

I remember the day when we described you to the media as a ‘living national treasure’, according to the Japanese expression, and that this expression has since been often repeated,

I remember your visits to Le Robert over the last few years, which were always a cause for celebration, with colleagues coming out of their offices to surround you, listen to you, and celebrate your presence,

I remember how you listened to me, and how you welcomed the projects proposed to you,

I remember the epic launches of the *Dictionnaire culturel en langue française*, and the successive editions of the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*,

I remember your free, poetic and baroque thinking, and your refusal of conformism,

I remember you becoming in a few hours the star of the youngest, after rapping, at the drop of a hat, with icons of the French song,

I remember our phone calls in the last months of 2020, the warmth of your voice, unchanged since the France Inter years,

I remember the call from Danièle, your wife, early in the morning, announcing your death, and the sadness that overwhelmed me, to the point of choking,

I remember that every day I think of you, what you were and what you did for Le Robert, for the French language, and for all those who loved you,

I remember you, dear Alain.

Charles Bimbenet, Managing Director of Éditions Le Robert

For more information:

[Wikipedia](#)

[Le Monde](#)