
Alain Rey is not a university professor but rather France’s foremost lexicographer and is a household name as the longtime host of a popular, daily segment on the public radio station France Inter. As editor-in-chief of the Robert dictionaries since the 1960s, his practical experience renders him uniquely qualified to assess the work of the most important lexicographer of the Classical Age in *Antoine Furetière: Un précurseur des Lumières* (Fayard, 2006). Rey effectively launched modern Furetière studies in 1978 with his commanding introduction to a reprint of Furetière’s 1690 *Dictionnaire universel*. In the interim, Furetière’s dictionary and literary work has received some scholarly attention, and the field of “metalexicography,” the study of dictionaries, has burgeoned. So this reviewer was eager to see what was new in Rey’s return to a subject whose study he pioneered.

In the event, precious little is new. Except for a few minuscule revisions—two new pages on minor seventeenth-century French dictionaries by Jesuit Fathers Pomey and Danet, new section breaks and sub-chapter headings, and a bibliographical reference to a letter previously thought nonextant—the text is a reprint of Rey’s 1978 introduction, a fact nowhere indicated in the volume. This said, the availability of Rey’s seminal study in monograph form is a boon for scholars. It remains an excellent starting place for those interested in the author of the most complete picture that we have of the French language in the era of Racine, La Fontaine and Boileau, fellow members of the Académie française whom Furetière counted as friends until controversy erupted upon his announcement of the imminent publication of his *Dictionnaire universel* in 1684.

The book covers four areas: Furetière’s biography as a man of letters and Academician, a play-by-play of his bitter polemic with the
Académie and his desperate attempt to get his dictionary published, an account of the dictionary’s reception, and Rey’s own appraisal of it.

Rey deftly inscribes Furetière’s upwardly mobile professional trajectory, which culminated in a precipitous tumble from institutional grace, within seventeenth-century France’s literary field, which is richly evoked. Incorporated in 1635 by Richelieu in order to, in the words of Paul Pellisson, “nettoyer la langue des ordures qu’elle avait contractées,” the Académie française was commissioned to monitor literary production and author a dictionary, plus volumes on grammar, rhetoric and poetics. The latter three projects were quickly dropped, and work on the dictionary dragged on for decades. Admitted to the Académie in 1662, upon encountering his fellow Immortels’ “étonnante tradition d’incompétence et de paresse,” in Rey’s elegant formulation, Furetière began composing his own dictionary on the sly. Fearing precisely such competition, in 1674 the Académie successfully petitioned Colbert, himself an Académicien, for an exclusive privilege over French dictionaries in France. Yet the Secrétaire of the Académie himself, Charpentier, somehow signed off on Furetière’s request for his own privilège in August 1684. How did this happen? Rey buys Furetière’s own account of having invited Charpentier for dinner and slipped him the sheet to sign when the latter was the worse for drink. Mortified upon learning that one of their own was about to contravene their monopoly over the genre, the Immortels voted to expel Furetière from their ranks. Worse, they obtained the revocation of Furetière’s privilège in March 1685 (a few months before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes—“une foi, une loi, un roi, et un dictionnaire,” as Jean-Pol Caput quipped.) Furetière’s reaction was to plead his case, to both the king and the nascent literary public, in three Factums published in 1685 and 1686. These are mordantly funny, and it’s unfortunate that Rey does not quote from them more extensively. Bayle reported in his Nouvelles de la République des Lettres, in which he covered the polemic over the course of six different issues, that Furetière’s Factums “ayant été lu au Roi, le fit extrêmement rire.” Moved to laughter, the king nevertheless was not moved to action in Furetière’s favor. Exhausted by the affair, Furetière died at sixty-eight in 1688. Before he died, however, he had made arrangements with Reinier Leers, Bayle’s publisher in Rotterdam, where the Dictionnaire
universel was published in 1690 and promptly smuggled back into France, where its sales were robust. Rey reports an extraordinary coincidence: on 24 August 1694, Leers traveled to Versailles to present a copy of Furetière’s dictionary to Louis XIV, the very day on which a delegation from the Académie presented to Louis its just finished dictionary, nearly sixty years in the making. Racine wrote to Boileau that the king visibly preferred the Furetière version.

Indeed, Louis could have easily discerned the superiority of the Dictionnaire universel in a cursory side-by-side comparison. It is apparent at a glance that the Dictionnaire universel surpasses its competitor in terms of content, with more entries and longer articles. Whereas the Académie obsessed over “le bon usage,” omitting words considered unbecoming for the highborn, Furetière included them. As Rey notes, Furetière’s innovation was to indicate their register: archaic (“vieux”), technical (“term de médecins, etc.), vulgar (“bas”), or regional. Also salient are the curious groupings occasioned by the Académie’s attempt to organize entries by root word, instead of simple alphabetical order. For example, one finds these entries in the following order: GERER, GESTION, GERONDIF, GESTE, GESTICULER, GESTICATION, DIGERER, DIGESTIF, INDIGESTE, INDIGESTION, INGERER, SUGGERER, SUGGESTION. However erudite and enlightening one finds these etymological groupings, the dictionary’s usefulness as a reference work was patently vitiated by its ordering principle. Japed Furetière in his third Factum, “On a de la peine à s’abstenir de rire, quand on trouve le mot digérer comme un composé de gérer. A ce compte, il faudrait dire que l’estomac est celui qui gère les affaires du ventre quand il digère de la viande.”

In one other change from the 1978 version of Rey’s text to the present volume, the title has shifted from Antoine Furetière: imagier de la culture classique to Antoine Furetière: un précurseur des Lumières sous Louis XIV. That both descriptors are applicable is indicative of Furetière’s ambiguities and contradictions, which Rey does not shy away from: at once a fervent devotee of the monarchy and a critic of Old Regime institutions and practices; a sycophant benefiting from sinecures and a maverick harbinger of a free market for intellectual work; intolerant of the lower social orders while valorizing the terms employed by artisans and laborers; intolerant of Protestants—at least in examples of
usage found in his definitions of words including EMPESTER, EM-
POISONNER, ERREUR, INFECTER, and SÉDUIRE—Furetière
found refuge for his dictionary among the Huguenots of Holland.

One cannot help but remark certain affinities in the positions and
practices of Furetière and Rey. Like Furetière, Rey has been silenced
by the French government. In 2006 Rey was fired from his radio
show by the head of Radio France, Jean-Paul Cluzel, an appointee
of French president Nicolas Sarkozy. Like Furetière, Rey promotes
an inclusive view of language which causes some elites to shudder;
two of his recent titles are L’Amour du français, contre les puristes et autres
censeurs de la langue (Denoël, 2007) and Lexik des cités (Fleuve noir, 2007),
a dictionary which grants citizenship to the language of the youth of
France’s troubled suburbs. Finally, like Furetière, Rey competes against
the Académie française and works more productively, updating the Petit
Robert in new editions year after year, while over seven decades have
passed since the last complete edition of the Dictionnaire de l’Académie
française, its eighth, was published in 1932.

Marion Kobelt-Groch and Cornelia Niekus Moore, eds. Tod und Jenseits
in der Schriftkultur der Frühen Neuzeit (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen; vol. 119).
Review by Frank Sobeich, Universität Trier, Germany.

This interdisciplinary and interconfessional volume resulting from
a conference held at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel,
Germany, from 3-5 May 2006 deals with concepts of death, the after-
world, and salvation in Early Modern Western Europe, especially the
German-speaking territories. It is characterised by its claim to deal not
only with “death,” but to connect it with the hope of an afterworld,
which was an integral part of “death” then. The different concepts
of that hope are traced here especially for the Lutheran tradition.
First, I will sketch the contents of the seven English and six German
articles, which are with no exception of high quality::

After the German introduction by the editors, Susan C. Karant-
Nunn presents an overview on the relationship between popular belief
of the laity and Lutheran clergymen and state authorities concerning