

Who was Jean Améry? Victim or survivor? Agnostic or Jew? Austrian or exile? Philosopher or novelist? Jean Améry is not easy to classify but what this biography (the first available in English) demonstrates is that he is more - far more - than some enigmatic cult figure: he is one of the most influential of Holocaust survivors and one of the most provocative writers and thinkers of the twentieth century.

Jean Améry - born Hans Maier in Austria in 1912 - is perhaps best known for his seminal work, *At the Mind's Limits*, one of the central texts on what Améry himself described as 'the subjective state of the victim.' But as Irène Heidelberger-Leonard's book reveals, Améry was not just a 'professional concentration camper', as he sometimes dubbed himself in a mixture of mockery and resignation.

Drawing on a wide range of previously unpublished documents, Heidelberger-Leonard illuminates the turbulent life of this complex figure, from his modest origins in pre-war Austria; his flight from his homeland to join the Austrian Resistance in Belgium; his imprisonment in Auschwitz and his liberation in Belsen; his return to Brussels in 1945 to his eventual suicide in Salzburg in 1978. This definitive biography examines how Améry grappled with what it meant to be both a victim and survivor of the concentration camps and what his experiences there reveal about the tension between human dignity and the reality of horror. Focusing chiefly on Améry's literary works, one of the book's great strengths lies in exploring how every aspect of Améry's life and thought is inextricably connected with his writings.

This biography brilliantly demonstrates the importance of Améry in his own time and shows how his relevance extends far beyond.