



How Many Years

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Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-1987), first woman in the French Academy, is best known for her MEMOIRS OF HADRIAN (1954), where fiction re-creates a personal voice for the Roman emperor. In HOW MANY YEARS (1995), she breathes life into the records of her father's family. HOW MANY YEARS and DEAR DEPARTED (1991), which traces Yourcenar's mother's line, are panels of a triptych autobiography, LE LABYRINTHE DU MONDE, completed by MISHIMA, A VISION OF THE VOID (1980).

In HOW MANY YEARS, Yourcenar marries the history of mankind with her own family. Most anecdotes foreshadow aspects of her life and work, although there is little direct mention of the adult author. The region and culture from which she sprang, the Flemish and French-speaking border of Belgium and northern France, serve as major components in the story. Yourcenar paints the interlacing of families in marriage, business, and political activity throughout generations, each step unfolding a fuller portrait of an age.

HOW MANY YEARS proceeds from general prehistory through more specific sources, regional archives and mute portraits to family memoirs, her father's stories and her personal memories. Literary figures, some from Yourcenar's novels, join the family party. The text is accompanied by family portraits and photographs, as well as genealogical charts and detailed translator's notes. The translation by Maria Louise Ascher is supple and unobtrusive.

HOW MANY YEARS is a resource for the Yourcenar scholar, but as a quirky, personal history it also speaks to the general reader. Yourcenar paradoxically transforms her autobiographical archives into a family album for humanity.

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