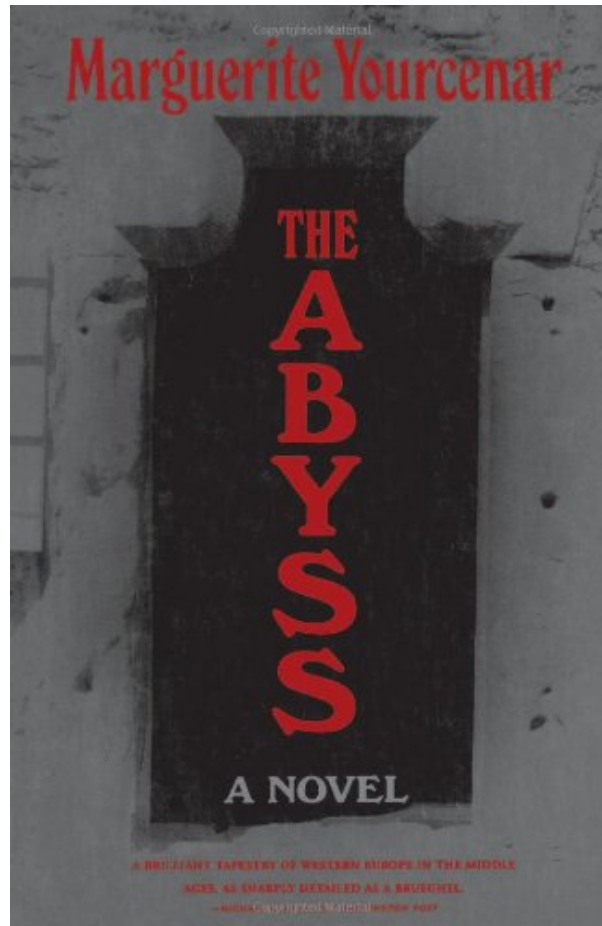
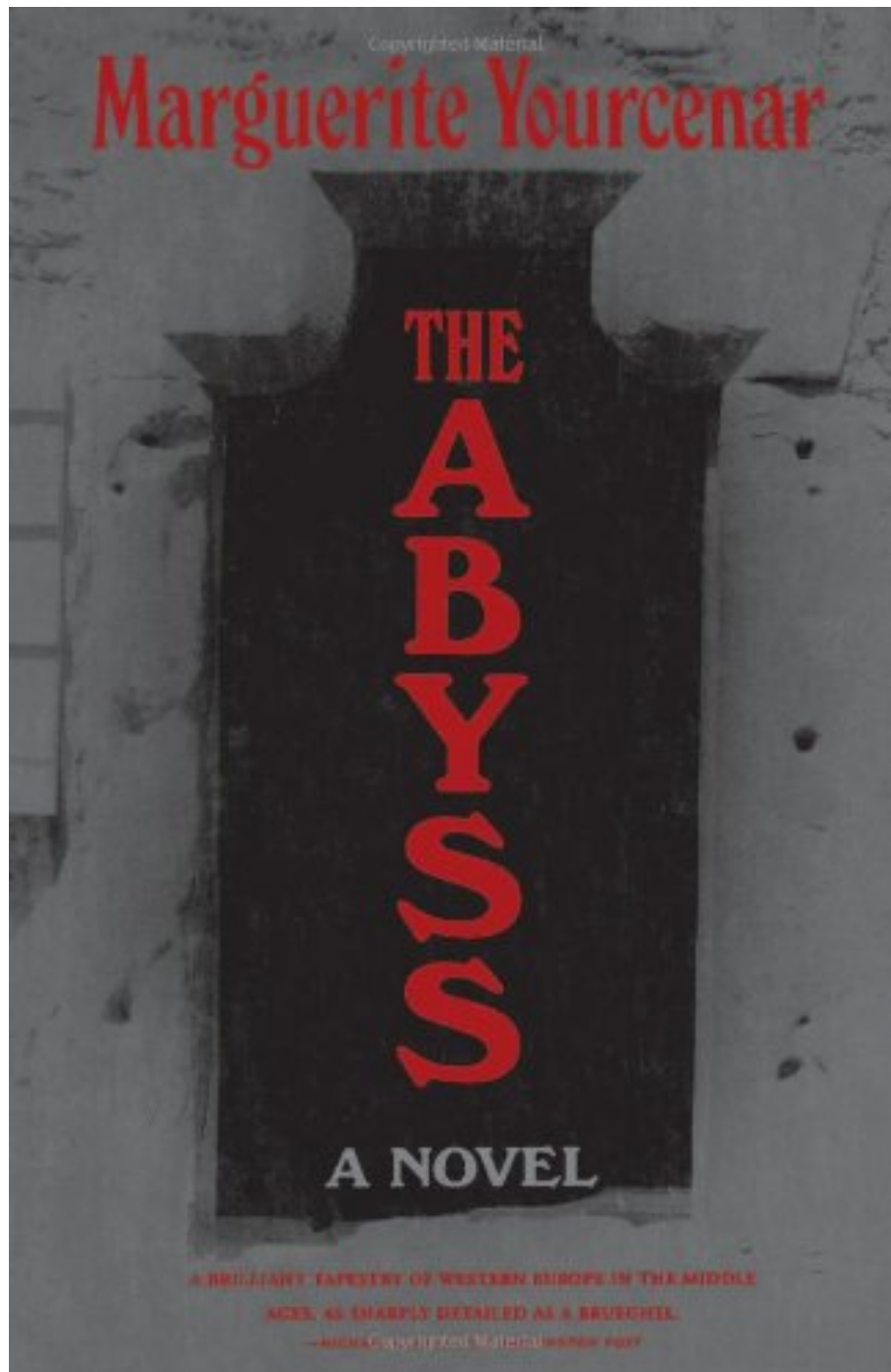


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## Review

“Marguerite Yourcenar instantly assumes command of our imagination in her novel *The Abyss*. Almost before we know it, the author establishes a scene (a road in northern France) and time (the second quarter of the sixteenth century), and engages us in the fate of two cousins. The younger, sixteen-year-old Henry Maximilian, has set out to become a soldier and poet; the elder, twenty-two-year-old Zeno, has left a seminary to make himself an alchemist-philosopher. The book reads as if an old map--decorated with walled cities, boats on rivers, castles, people, and animals--had come alive . . . As rich as a tapestry.” ?Naomi Bliven, *The New Yorker*

“A brilliant tapestry of Western Europe in the Middle Ages, as sharply detailed as a Brueghel.” ?Michael Kernan, *The Washington Post*

## Language Notes

Text: English, French (translation)

## About the Author

Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-87) wrote stories, plays, poems, and novels, notably *Memoirs of Hadrian*. She was the first woman to be elected to the Academie Francaise.

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Marguerite Yourcenar instantly assumes command of our imagination in her novel *The Abyss*. Almost before we know it the author establishes a scene and time, and engages us in the fate of two cousins.

- Sales Rank: #304818 in Books
- Published on: 1981-08-01
- Released on: 1981-08-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .85" w x 5.50" l, 1.05 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 374 pages

## Features

- ISBN13: 9780374516666
- Condition: New
- Notes: BRAND NEW FROM PUBLISHER! 100% Satisfaction Guarantee. Tracking provided on most orders. Buy with Confidence! Millions of books sold!

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## Most helpful customer reviews

54 of 55 people found the following review helpful.

A Monument in Literature

By A Customer

The Abyss is one of the two books that haunted Marguerite Yourcenar during her whole life, the other one being the famous "Memoirs of Hadrian".

Zenon, the Hero of the Abyss, is much closer to the author as he shares with her the passion for the unknown countries of the soul and the spirit. Like always, Marguerite Yourcenar delivers an analytical vision of the universality of human condition without turning her book into a boring dogma. She has the unique talent and intelligence to be inhabited by her characters and delivers here a chef d'oeuvre in many regards. The accuracy of the description of the torments of Zenon emphasized by the precise knowledge of major events of this part of this history transforms almost this book into a mystical experience. The chapter named "The abyss" is a piece of literature that can be read many times while still discovering a teaching or a new element of poetry.

It would be VERY unfair not to mention here, Grace Frick, Marguerite's life companion, who was maybe the best French translator of her generation and delivers here a magnificent English text.

Du grand art!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

I really suck writing reviews

By Sagan

My first Yourcenar novel. I really suck writing reviews. All the good things you like in a novel are here.

Good character development

Vivid description of locations and events; its as if you're right there really strong plot

things I didn't like

pace is VERY SLOW in the beginning. Very boring.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

An unparalleled historical evocation, eminently modern

By Luc REYNAERT

The main character in this novel, Zeno, is a physician, alchemist and philosopher who lives in the 16th century in Europe. This century is marked by extreme religious fanaticism (extermination of the Anabaptists in Münster), natural disasters (the plague) and the advent of many new ideas (Paracelsus, Copernicus), also in sexual matters (more freedom).

Zeno is the prototype of the anti-establishment protester who doubts, but who everywhere and openly expresses his views on the existing world order. Because of his outspokenness he is seen as a real danger by the existing politico-religious rulers.

His discussions with the masters of the world are crystal clear. Personally, they criticize heavily the existing world order. They see perfectly the huge dichotomy between their worldview and the real world, between the precepts of their religion and the real actions taken by their reigning politico-religious colleagues. But, there is no question of challenging the powers that be; they are in fact the first to profit from them.

After a wandering life in Europe, Zeno returns to Bruges, where he is attacked for his assistance to Protestants, his political tracts and a sex scandal in a cloister causing the death of a newborn.

Pessimism

While the 'Memoirs of Hadrian' are an expression of the author's serious hope in a political leader (a just and sincere emperor) who is capable to save the world, 'The Abyss' is a fundamentally pessimistic book which

paints a world of pure ferocity.

This ferocity is a deeply ingrained human instinct, which expresses itself not only in religious dogmatism and fanaticism, but also in political tyranny and war.

This book is a long meditation on the sense of life, seeing the true nature of mankind, rampant selfishness and the cowardice of the masters of the world.

It is one of the greatest masterpieces of French and world literature.

A must read.

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