

For Yom Hashoah 5785/2025, get to know

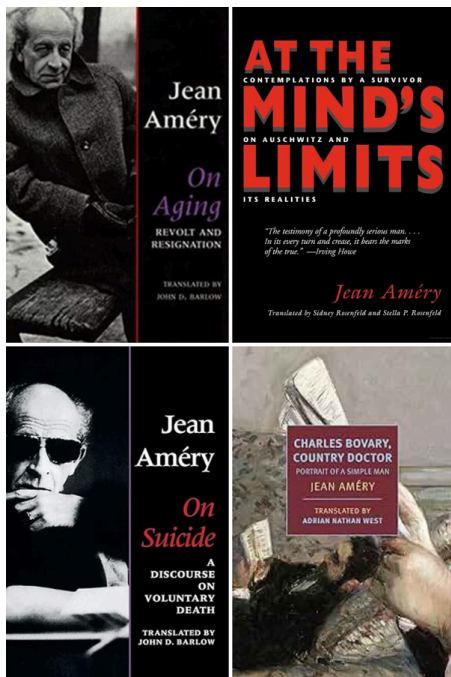
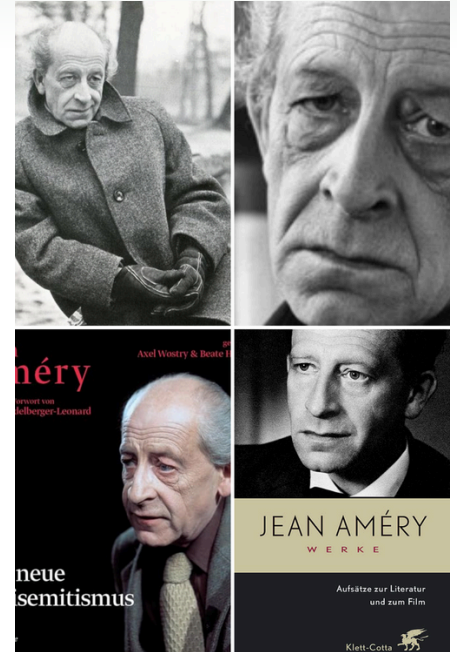
Jean Améry

Auschwitz Survivor Essayist Novelist Humanist (1912 - 1978)

Jean Améry (née Hanns Chaim Mayer) was born in Vienna in 1912 to an assimilated Jewish family. After losing his father in WWI, he grew up with his mother in Austria. He trained as a bookseller while studying literature and philosophy, and published his first novel in 1934/35.

Though initially opposing the Nazis, Améry only recognized his Jewish identity after Austria's 1938 "Anschluss" and the imposition of the Nuremberg Laws. He and his wife fled to Belgium, where he was arrested as an "enemy alien" and sent to Camp Gurs. After escaping and joining the Belgian resistance, he was recaptured in 1943 while distributing anti-Nazi materials.

Following torture by the Gestapo at Fort Breendonk, Améry was deported to Auschwitz in 1944, receiving prisoner number 172364. He was later transferred through multiple camps before being liberated from Bergen-Belsen by the British in April 1945, weighing just 45 kg.



Post-war, Améry worked as a cultural journalist in Brussels, publishing in Swiss newspapers and refusing German publishers. He adopted the pen name "Améry," an anagram of his family name, Mayer. The 1963 Frankfurt Auschwitz trial led him to address his experiences in writing. His 1966 essay collection "At the Mind's Limits" made him a key voice in Holocaust literature.

Améry addressed many philosophical topics in his writing, which included novels, hybridized fiction and non-fiction works, and essays. He championed Enlightenment values and wrote about aging, suicide and antisemitism. He is buried in Vienna's Central Cemetery.

"We did not become wiser in Auschwitz ... We perceived nothing there that we would not already have been able to perceive on the outside; not a bit of it brought us practical guidance. In the camp too, we did not become deeper... ..in Auschwitz we did not become better, more human, more humane, and more mature ethically. ... We emerged from the camp stripped, robbed, emptied out, disoriented — and it was a long time before we were able even to learn the ordinary language of freedom."

– Jean Améry from *At the Mind's Limits*