

Cut and Tape: Marguerite Yourcenar's Emendations to a Typescript of *L'Oeuvre au noir*

ABSTRACT

Marguerite Yourcenar (1903–1987) was a Belgian-born French novelist, essayist and short story writer. She worked on *L'Oeuvre au noir* (translated into English as “The Abyss”) from 1921 until it was published in 1968. A typescript of the manuscript dated 1956–1968 is preserved among the substantial collection of Yourcenar’s papers and correspondence in Houghton Library, at Harvard University. The loose sheets of the typescript, with extensive corrections, deletions, and emendations, were oversewn by machine and then commercially bound in two volumes. Yourcenar’s editing involved cutting apart her typed pages, rearranging the sections and taping them back together. Her penchant for revisions meant that some pages were an assemblage of up to seventeen separate pieces. In some cases, a single word or phrase was changed three or four times. By 2002 when the manuscript was brought to the Weissman Preservation Center, it was in such poor condition that it had been off-limits to researchers for years. The primary curatorial and conservation challenge of this typescript was the failure of the rubber-based adhesive tape used throughout. The composite leaves sometimes fluttered into a pile of paper scraps when a page was turned. To complicate matters, Yourcenar often typed and wrote directly on the tapes securing the previous emendations, making their retention and exact placement paramount. This talk will describe the treatment protocol designed to address the different types of emendations and the techniques used to return the 460-page manuscript to a stable condition accessible to researchers.

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