Guide to the May Sarton Collection

Prepared by Special Collections Staff
Ella Strong Denison Library
Libraries of The Claremont Colleges
Scripps College
1090 Columbia Avenue
Claremont, CA 91711
Phone: (909) 607-3941
Fax: (909) 607-1548
Email: denison@libraries.clairemont.edu
URL: http://libraries.clairemont.edu/den/
© 2005
Claremont University Consortium. All rights reserved.
Guide to the May Sarton Collection

Collection number: D1955.1

Ella Strong Denison Library
Libraries of The Claremont Colleges
Claremont, California

Processed by:
Special Collections Staff

Date Completed:
2005

Encoded by:
Kelley Wolfe Bachli

© 2004 Claremont University Consortium. All rights reserved.

Descriptive Summary

Title: May Sarton collection
Dates: 1945-1989
Bulk Dates: 1957-1967
Collection number: D1955.1
Creator: Sarton, May, 1912-
Collector: Divelbess, Diane
Collection Size: 1.83 linear feet(4 manuscript boxes).
Claremont, California 91711

Abstract: May Sarton, 1912-1995, was a writer best known for her published personal journals, including Journal of a Solitude; she also published several acclaimed novels and volumes of poetry. This collection includes correspondence, manuscripts, articles, clippings, photographs, and ephemera relating to May Sarton's life and work. The material range in date from 1945-1989, with the bulk of the material from 1957-1967.

Physical location: Please consult repository.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access
Collection open for research.

Publication Rights
All requests for permission to publish must be submitted in writing to Denison Library.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], May Sarton collection. Ella Strong Denison Library, Libraries of The Claremont Colleges.

Acquisition Information

Biography / Administrative History
May Sarton (May 3, 1912-July 16, 1995), poet and novelist, was born Elanore Marie Sarton in Wondelgem, Belgium, the daughter of George Sarton, a noted historian of science, and Eleanor Mabel Elwes, an English portrait painter and designer. Sarton moved with her parents to England, and in 1916 the family immigrated to the United States. All three became naturalized Americans in 1924, by which time Sarton's name had been Americanized to Eleanor May. Sarton attended Shady Hill School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, an open-air school that encouraged creative and intellectual development. Her experiences there, particularly her relationship with several remarkable female teachers, greatly influenced both her life and her writing. After graduating, Sarton left home to become an actress in Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theater rather than attending college. When that theater disbanded in 1933, the young actress formed her own Apprentice Theater, forgoing any serious devotion to a strictly literary career until her company failed in 1935.
Although she avoided college (her parents had intended for her to go to Vassar), Sarton read voraciously and had begun writing poetry early in life. Her first published poems (five sonnets) appeared in Poetry magazine in 1929; likewise, a volume of her poems, Encounter in April, was published in 1937. Poetry continued as her preferred genre throughout her life, but she could write it only when inspired by what she referred to as her "Muse." Sarton filled the intervals by teaching (including a three-year stint between 1949 and 1952 as a freshman composition instructor at Harvard and another from 1960 to 1964 as a creative writing teacher at Wellesley), writing novels, and keeping journals. In all of her work Sarton treated the recurring themes of solitude, the conflict between marriage and women's freedom, relationships among women, and aging.

Sarton's first novel, The Single Hound (1938), was about an aspiring poet and represents the first of many novels about the artistic life. The Bridge of Years was published in 1946, followed by four or more novels per decade through the 1970s. Anger appeared in 1982. Faithful Are the Wounds (1955) probably received the greatest single recognition, perhaps because its protagonist was a man and the subject matter McCarthyism; certainly it differed from her usual themes.

Although widely read, Sarton's novels received little attention from scholars and literary critics, primarily because she wrote to explore her own feelings and was not always careful with style. Although ignored by the literary establishment, Sarton's reputation grew among feminists as they read and discussed her work.

Hailed by feminists but poorly rewarded by critics, Sarton jeopardized her chances for general recognition with the publication of Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing in 1965. In this novel about the difficulties of the female writer, she shocked the literary world and many of her dedicated readers by presenting a protagonist who was openly bisexual. Her agent advised against publication, and her publisher, Norton, would not advertise the book; this so angered Sarton that she bought a full-page ad for herself in the New York Times. Sarton apparently lost two jobs in 1965 after revealing that she was a lesbian. Indeed, she went on to speak openly of her sexual preferences in her journals. These revelations damaged her universal reputation but made her a heroine to many feminists.

In spite of critical neglect, Sarton continued to produce approximately one book per year, claiming it was a financial necessity to do so. Nevertheless, she received huge amounts of mail from fans, particularly in response to the journals and memoirs. Although she resented this burden of correspondence, Sarton was touched by the reader response to her work and, until her 1987 heart attack, answered each letter herself. In her journals, her greatest distress seemed to focus on the time that cancer and depression stole from her work.

Although she had no inclination to marry and usually lived alone, Sarton had many friendships. Her writing schedule usually tied her up for three hours each morning only. This gave her time to entertain, and she also maintained friendships through frequent correspondence. She wrote to and occasionally saw Virginia Woolf. In "My Sisters, O My Sisters," Sarton aligns herself with other female authors, calling them, "We who are writing women and strange monsters." She felt women were treated badly by male critics, but despite her own feeling that she was being ignored, the author received many fellowships and honorary doctorates.

Sarton died in York, Maine. An interviewer for Publishers Weekly called Sarton's literary recognition "one of the most interesting and long-overdue." In a career spanning sixty years and encompassing more than forty volumes of poetry and prose, Sarton grew gradually from an unknown to a respected and unique artist of her craft.

(Adapted from the American National Biography, http://www.anb.org)

Scope and Content of Collection
May Sarton spoke at Scripps at two convocations, in 1957 and in 1959. Scripps published her speeches as special editions of the Scripps College Bulletin: The Writing of a Poem (1957) and The Design of the Novel (1959). In the years after her last visit, Sarton corresponded with Dorothy Drake, librarian emerita of Denison Library, and Marion Winne, assistant to the president of the college. She inscribed copies of her publications for the Macpherson Collection, and sent manuscripts of her poems for the collection as well.

A second gift of Sarton correspondence and published material was given to the library by Diane Divelbess, Scripps Class of 1957; these materials range in date from 1959-1989.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
Sarton, May, 1912-
Women writers
Women poets
Authors

Processing Information
Front matter compiled by Caitlin Silberman, 2005.
**Manuscripts**

**Box 1 : 1**

"Death and the Turtle" (1964) from *A Private Mythology*

Abstract: Autograph letter signed offering manuscript of "Death of the Turtle" to Denison Library, February 1967 all drafts -- 1- pages, typed and handwritten

Physical Description: 2 photocopies

**Box 1 : 2**

"The Design of the Novel" [typed and signed]

Physical Description: 17 pages

Physical Description: 1 page photocopied

**Box 1 : 3**

"A Light Left On" (1953) from *The Land of Silence* [ typed and handwritten plus signed typed finished version]

Physical Description: 7 pages

**Box 1 : 4**

"Nativity" [handwritten and one photocopy]

Physical Description: 1 page

**Box 1 : 5**

"On Being Given Time" (1953)

Abstract: "Most if not all the drafts" typed and handwritten. Also includes a letter from Archibald MacLeish concerning suggested revisions and a printed version of this Christmas poem with changes suggested by MacLeish written in

Physical Description: 10 pages

**Box 1 : 6**

"Palm" [typed and handwritten]

Physical Description: 2 pages

**Box 1 : 7**

"These Images Remain" (1953) from *Land of Silence* [typed and handwritten]

Physical Description: 14 pages

**Box 1 : 8**

"The Writing of a Poem"

Abstract: Typed and signed original mss. of convocation speech delivered at Scripps College, March 12, 1957. One copy of pamphlet

Physical Description: 23 pages

**Correspondence**

**Box 1 : 9**

To Dorothy Drake

postcard, Sunday, Feb 24, 19-

postcard, June 5, London, No Date postcard, July 19, [1957], Brussels postcard, April 10, 1955

Typed Letter Signed, January 30, 1955, Cambridge, MA

Typed Letter Signed, March 1, 1955, Cambridge, MA

Typed Letter Signed, March 23, 1955, Cambridge, MA

Typed Letter Signed, Easter Day, 1955, Cambridge, MA

Typed Letter Signed, March 6, 1956, Cambridge, MA

Typed Letter Signed, February 14, 1957, Cambridge, MA

Typed Letter Signed, February 4, 1958, Cambridge, MA

Typed Letter Signed, Sept. 2, 1961, Munsonville, MA with Autograph Letter Signed enclosure

Typed Letter Signed, July 15, 1962, Cambridge, MA

Typed Letter Signed, June 30, 1966, Munsonville, NH

Typed Letter Signed, February 20, 1967, Munsonville, NH

From Dorothy Drake

typed draft, February 24, 1955
| Box 1 : 10 | Marion Ewing  
|           | postcard, April 2, 19--, Honolulu  
|           | postcard, July 15, 19--, Belgium |
| Box 1 : 11 | Elsa Gidlow [excerpt, photocopy; origin unknown]  
|           | Marion Winne [letters found in MW's books of May Sarton] |
| Box 1 : 12 | Autograph Letter Signed, [n. d. ], Nelson [NH]  
|           | Typed Letter Signed, February 7, 1968, Nelson, NH  
|           | autograph card, signed, [No Date]  
|           | autograph card, signed, [No Date]  
|           | L.A. Times clipping, [May 18, 1975]  
|           | Christmas poems [broadside, most inscribed and signed by May Sarton] |
| Box 1 : 13 | "A Recognition" 1962  
|           | "Reflections by a Fire" 1958 "Minting Time" 1957  
|           | Physical Description: 2 copies  
|           | "Of Friendship at Christmas" 1952  
|           | Physical Description: 2 copies  
|           | "Letter to an Indian Friend" No Date  
|           | Physical Description: 2 copies  
| Box 1 : 13 | "A New Year Poem" 1942 "Celebrations" 1943  
|           | "The Birthday" 1946  
|           | "Beautiful Upon the Mountains" 1946  
|           | "The Invisible Bridges" 1948  
|           | "New Year Poem, 1948"  
|           | "New Year Poem, 1950"  
|           | "The Tree" 1951  
|           | "On Being Given Time" 1953  
|           | "Nativity" 1954  
|           | Physical Description: 3 copies  
| Box 1 : 13 | "Lifting Stone: A Painting by Katherine Sturges" 1955  
|           | "A Celebration" 1956  
|           | "A Flower-Arranging Summer" 1960  
|           | "The Beautiful Pauses" 1961  
|           | "The House in Winter" 1963  
|           | [Notes on May Sarton by Dorothy Drake; No Date]  
| Box 1 : 15 | Pamphlets  
|           | Physical Description: pp. 101-112.  
| Box 1 : 15 | "May Sarton, Lecture Subjects..."  
| Box 1 : 15 | "In Memoriam" by May Sarton. Brussells: ... Willy Godenne [inscribed and signed by May Sarton] No Date  
| Box 1 : 15 | "Poet in Residence" by May Sarton. Carbondale, IL: reprinted by the English Dept. of Southern Illinois University 1948  
| Box 1 : 15 | [mailing envelope]  
| Box 1 : 16 | The Leaves of the Tree, by May Sarton. Mt. Vernon, Iowa: Cornell College Chapbook Number 22, 1950. [inscribed to Jean Dominique by May Sarton, July 1950]  
| Box 1 : 17 | Typescripts of poems “The Work of Happiness,” "Truth," "New Mexico"  

**Guide to the May Sarton Collection**

D1955.1
Bibliography of works by May Sarton

Itinerary for Scripps College visit, 1957

Magazine and Journal publications

Poems except where noted:

*Poetry,* Vol. LXVIII, no. 11, “Theme and Variations”

*Writing Today*, Number 3 (Summer 1946), "The Tortured"

*Poetry, Vol. 74, no. 5* (August 1949), "Songs I, II, " "Humpty Dumpty"

*The Cornhill,* No. 1012 (Summer 1957), "Reflections on a Double Mirror" signed, "Annunciation"


Physical Description: pp. 20-22

**Poems**

*The Virginia Quarterly Review,* Vol. 42, no. 3 (Summer 1966): "Of The Muse,"


*The Beloit Poetry Journal,* Vol. 1 no.1 (Fall 1950): guest editor, May Sarton, "The Stone Resists"

*Voices, A Journal of Poetry,* No. 151 (May-August 1953), "A Bunch of Roses," "On a Winter Night"


Clippings of articles and poems by/about May Sarton:


*New Hampshire Profiles,* May 1964, "Home of the Month" featuring May Sarton's Nelson house

*The Nation,* August 18, 1956, review by May Sarton

*The Husk,* Vol. XXIX no.2 (December 1949), "The Just Exchanges"

*Saturday Review of Literature,* Vol. XXXII no. 12 (March 19, 1949), "Innumerable Friend"

*Audience,* Vol. IV no.2, "To the North"

*News from Belgium and the Belgian Congo,* Vol. V no. 43 (December 29, 1945), "Homage to Flanders"

*The Reporter,* June 27, 1957, "Sukiyaki on the Kona Coast" by May Sarton [essay]


Magazine and journal articles by/about May Sarton

*The New Yorker* "Profiles" -- List of articles by May Sarton

*Queen's Quarterly,* A Canadian Review, Vol. LII no. 3 (Autumn 1945), "The Teachers" [poem]


[essay] *Family Circle,* January 1969, "Homeward" column

*Family Circle,* November 1968, "Homeward" column


*The Reporter,* June 27, 1957, "Sukiyaki on the Kona Coast" with enclosure [essay]

*Harper's,* April 1957, "My Father's Death" [poem]

Clippings--photocopies

Clippings--originals

Photographs of May Sarton (see also Scripps Archives photos "Guests/Visitors--May Sarton" taken at Denison Library when May Sarton visited Scripps)
portrait by Lotte Jacobi [No Date], signed by May Sarton on back
snapshot, Belgium 1953, sitting in chair, signed by May Sarton on back
portrait, [1953], by Peter Rossiter, looking right "886F" portrait, [1953], by Peter
Rossiter, looking left "887F"
portrait, [ca. 1950], by Peter Rossiter, looking down, [copy?] "600F' portrait,
1950, by Peter Rossiter, looking down [original?]

Box/Folder 4
Box 4 : 1
Correspondence and Articles of May Sarton--Diane Divelbess gift

Correspondence

postcard, January 8, 19--., Nelson
autograph card, [No Date], St. Charles, MO
Autograph Letter Signed, April 1, 1957, Honolulu
"Dear May Sarton" 1959, one handwritten draft and one handwritten copy
Typed Letter Signed November 13, 1959, Cambridge, MA Typed Letter Signed.,
October 16, 1960, Nelson, NH
Typed Letter, "Dear Miss Divelbess" from the American Library Service, January
18, 1961., "Dear Miss Divelbess" from the American Library Service, January 23,
1961
postcard, 'Dear Miss Divelbess' from the American. Library Service, January 26,
1961
postcard, "Dear Miss Divelbess" from the American. Library Service, February 1.
1961
postcard, 'Dear Miss Divelbess' from the American. Library Service, March 16,
1961
postcard, 'Dear Miss Divelbess' from the American. Library Service, July 7, 1961
Typed Letter Signed, December 30, 1961, Nelson, NH
Typed Letter Signed, December 29, 1962, Nelson, NH
"A Recognition" broadside, Christmas 1962, inscribed to DD and signed
Typed Letter Signed, February. 17, 1963, Nelson, NH
Typed Letter Signed,, March 3, 1963, Nelson, NH
Typed Letter Signed, May 6, 1963, Cambridge, MA
"New Year Poem, 1950" broadside, May 1963, inscribed to DD and signed
Typed Letter Signed., May 26, 1963, Nelson, NH
"The House in Winter" broadside, inscribed to DD and signed
Typed Letter Signed., January 1, 1964, Nelson [NH]
Typed Letter Signed., December 28, 1964, Nelson [NH]; also enclosed: 3 typed
drafts of poems "An Elegy" November 28, 19--., Yaddo; "After a Shock" [No Date];
"A Word from Limbo, For My Students" Thanksgiving, 1964 at Yaddo; in envelope:
one photo of Scrabble, May Sarton's cat; one holiday card, inscribed to DD from
May Sarton; one Old Gold cigarette wrapper; one slip with handwritten notes [by
DD?] 
Typed Letter Signed, February. 20, 1965, Nelson [NH]
Typed Letter Signed, December, 29, 1965, from Beacon Hill Booksellers
postcard to DD, September 23, 1965, Beacon Hill Booksellers
Typed Letter Signed, August 16, 1966, Nelson, NH Typed Letter Signed.,
December. 30, 1966, Munsonville, NH
"A Flower-Arranging Summer" broadside, inscribed to DD and signed Typed Letter
Signed., Sept. 24, 1667, Belgium
Typed Letter Signed, January 18, 1969, Nelson [NH], plus signed postcard
postcard, [December. 1973], York, ME
postcard, [Jan 11, 1977], York, ME
Typed Letter Signed, February 7, 1977, York [ME]
Typed Letter Signed, March 20, 1977, York
Typed Letter Signed, March 3, 1968, Nelson, NH
Typed Letter Signed, January 17, 1982, York
Typed Letter Signed, June 11 [1978]
**Magazine articles by May Sarton**
  - Box 4:3  
    - "Summer Music"
  - Box 4:3  
    - "Prothalamium"
  - Box 4:3  
    - "Leaves Before the Wind"
  - Box 4:3  
    - "Transition"

**Pamphlets not on May Sarton**
- *An Exhibit of Productions from Stanbrook Abbey Press* exhibit at UCLA in 1967
  - Box 4:4
- "Western Barbecue hosted by Metropolitan Water District of Southern California," 1965
  - Box 4:4
- "A Salute to Scripps College" commencement address by James A. Blaisdell No Date
  - Box 4:5
- *Family Circle* "Homeward" column June 1968, July 1968
  - Box 4:6
- *Family Circle* August 1968, September 1968
  - Box 4:7
  - Box 4:8
  - Box 4:9
- "An Informal Portrait of George Sarton" reprint of *The Texas Quarterly*