"I was broken in two/By sheer definition." May Sarton's Duality of Love, Life, and Lesbian Literature

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Description/Abstract
May Sarton (1912-1995) was a contemporary author whose published work comprised 51 poetry books, novels, and nonfiction journals written from 1937 until 1994. Although her writing career was prolific and Sarton gained a tremendous amount of positive attention from the general public, critical reception of her work either ignored or undervalued her writing. By contextualizing Sarton's work through lesbian pulp fiction, the primary source of fiction featuring same-sex relations in the mid-to-late-twentieth century, this paper aims to give a historical background to receptions of modern queer literature. By exploring parallels between censorship of lesbian pulp fiction and the condemnation of Sarton's novels, it was determined that lesbianism was the primary source of backlash against Sarton's work, despite Sarton's denial that queer characters were not the focus of her writing.

Recommended Citation

SARTON. My first book was a book of poems, Encounter in April, followed by my first novel, The Single Hound. There was quite an interval before the second novel, The Bridge of Years. And then Shadow of a Man. SARTON. Oh, yes. I was in love with her. I've said what I really want to say about her in the portrait [A World of Light]. She was a marvelous friend. But as for the vision of life in the whole of my work, I would like to feel that my work is universal and human on the deepest level. I think of myself as a maker of bridges—between the heterosexual and the homosexual world, between the old and the young. As We Are Now, the novel about a nursing home, has been read, curiously enough, by far more young people than old people.