



Understanding May Sarton

Mark K. Fulk

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UNDERSTANDING MAY SARTON introduces readers to the poetry, fiction; and memoirs of a pioneering feminist whose works, acclaimed but underappreciated during her lifetime, have attracted an expanding readership since her death in 1995. With the inclusion of Sarton's final novel, *The Education of Harriet Hatfield*, her final volume of poetry, *Coming into Eighty*, and her three final volumes of nonfiction, Mark K. Fulk provides a comprehensive study without limiting Sarton's literary accomplishments to the categories of feminist and lesbian writing, as other critics have done. Fulk traces the evolution of Sarton's poetry from the celebration of women's sexuality to an increased engagement with Eastern beliefs, and finally to poems resonating with the life of the elderly. He finds that the author's struggles as a Belgian emigrant to America become significant in understanding her, but Sarton's depictions of small-town life and intimate communications among women, along with her groundbreaking coming-out novel, *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing*, create a fuller picture of her self-documentation. Fulk clarifies the influence of early personal struggles on her work, identifies her primary thematic concerns, including the ideals of beauty, serenity, and healing, and elaborates on her achievement of an earthy spirituality that sustained her through isolation and difficulty.

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