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Dear Juliette: Letters Of May Sarton To Juliette Huxley



Synopsis

May Sarton's love for Juliette Huxley, ignited that first moment she saw her in 1936, transcended sixty years of friendship, passion, silence, and reconciliation. In the extraordinary breadth and variation of these letters, we see Sarton in all her complexities and are privy to the nuances of her rich amitié amoureuse with Juliette, the preeminent muse and most enduring love of her life. The letters chart their meeting; May's affair with Juliette's husband, Julian (brother of Aldous Huxley), before the war; her intense involvement with Juliette after the war; and the ardent and life-enhancing friendship that endured between them until Juliette's death. While May's intimate relationship with Julian had not been a secret, her more powerful emotions for Juliette had. May's fiery passion was a seductive yet sometimes destructive force. Her feelings for and demands on Juliette were often overwhelming to them both. Indeed, Juliette refused all contact with May for nearly twenty-five years, the consequence of May's impulsive threat to tell Julian of their intimacy. The silence was devastating to May, but her love for Juliette never diminished. Their reconciliation after Julian's death was not so much a rekindling as it was a testament to the profound affinities between them. Although theirs had been a relationship rife with complications and misunderstandings, the deep love and compassion they shared for each other prevailed. Included in this volume are original drafts of and notes for an introduction May Sarton was hoping to complete.

Book Information

Hardcover: 400 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; 1st edition (June 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393047334

ISBN-13: 978-0393047332

Product Dimensions: 9.5 x 6.6 x 1.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,242,506 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #70 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > LGBT > Lesbian](#) #1234 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Women Authors](#) #1587 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Women's Studies > Women Writers](#)

Customer Reviews

The poet May Sarton's reputation took a nosedive after her death in 1995 and the unflattering

biography (by Margot Peters) that followed. The publication of her tender, revealing letters has managed to arrest this decline. Susan Sherman, who edited Sarton's *Selected Letters, 1916-1954*, now offers insight into Sarton's most profound and affecting romance, with Juliette Huxley, the Swiss-born wife of the English scientist Sir Julian Huxley. May and Juliette met in 1936, while May was involved with Julian. Their love affair culminated in one passionate week in Paris in 1948, after which--hurt by May's angry threat that she would tell Julian--Juliette broke off the relationship. After Julian Huxley's death in 1976, they began to write one another again and kept in contact until Juliette's death. As May Sarton wrote in old age, "I have had many lovers, many friends since I was 25 and met Juliette Huxley, but none has so nourished the poet and the lover as she did, the incomparable one." The book includes drafts of introductions by May Sarton and excerpts from a few of Juliette Huxley's responses to Sarton. --Regina Marler

The letters that American poet and novelist Sarton wrote to Swiss-born sculptor Juliette Baillot Huxley are witty, passionate and soul-baring. The two first met in England in 1936, when Sarton, 24, became captivated by Juliette, 39, even while embarking on an affair with Juliette's famous husband, Julian Huxley (brother of novelist Aldous Huxley), a zookeeper, peace activist and the first director general of UNESCO. While their romance was a matter openly shared with Juliette, Sarton's deep love for Juliette remained a secret. "There was perhaps one week only of physical intimacy" between the two women, according to Sherman (who edited Sarton's *Selected Letters*), yet this was a true union of souls, as the lettersAlyrical, effusive, profound, uninhibitedAmake abundantly clear. Sarton helps Juliette through the war years, muses on the difficulty of self-acceptance, offers a constant flow of sharp opinions and impressions on art, politics, people. Her letters are strewn with her musical, crystalline poems, some never before published. She frequently quotes writers who nourished her imaginationAYeats, Rilke, Proust, Virginia Woolf, Valery. We catch glimpses of Sarton's circle of friends, among them poet Muriel Rukeyser (with whom she lived during the 1940s), novelist Rebecca West, imagist poet Hilda Doolittle, Paris-based American journalist Janet Flanner. Juliette broke off their relationship after Sarton threatened to tell all to Julian. After a 27-year silence, Sarton resumed their correspondence in 1976, months after Julian's death. In a tenderly affectionate foreword, Francis Huxley, son of Julian and Juliette, recalls Sarton's last visit to his mother, then age 97 (Juliette died in 1994, Sarton in 1995). An appendix includes two dozen of Juliette's letters to Sarton. Photos. (June) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I am almost finished this wonderful book. As a lover of May Sarton's writing, this has proved to be such an insight into her relationship with Juliet and Julian Huxley. Her language is a delight and I have enjoyed reading it every day.

It is interesting to read her insights. I think letter writing is a lost art. It is so powerful though.

Dear Juliette: Letters of May Sarton to Juliette Huxley is both biography and autobiography, plus a rich example of the nearly lost art of letter-writing. May Sarton wrote to Juliette Huxley between the years 1936 and 1948, then resumed in 1976 until about a month and a half before her beloved Juliette died in 1994. These letters reveal the growth of the human being, May Sarton from the age of 23 until she was in her eighties: the breadth of her interests, her passions, her humor, her anxieties and most of all her deep love for a remarkable woman, Juliette. In her preface and footnotes, the editor Susan Sherman, broadens the scope of the book into a biography by filling in the details about the people and events that May writes of. As both women were fluent in French, May often slipped into that language as she wrote. Susan Sherman's translations are extremely helpful. This is a book one wants to own, so to savor a few delightful (and some very sad) letters at a time. As a whole it reveals a much more truthful picture of May Sarton than Margot Peters's recent biography.

Susan Sherman, editor of Dear Juliette, was bequeathed the challenge of bringing to life Sarton's relationship with Juliette Huxley. Too frail and in ill health to complete the process of selecting and editing hundreds of letters and completing an introduction that would preface this story, Sarton asked Ms. Sherman to complete the work. As editor of previous volumes of Sarton's unpublished poems and letters, including May Sarton Among the Usual Days and May Sarton: Selected Letters 1916-1954, Ms. Sherman was well qualified to bring this project to fruition, the results of which are this monumental achievement presenting the immortalization of the "ethos of a love affair." In a letter written to Juliette in 1937 Sarton comments: "How difficult it is to love well - to know when it is better to be silent, that even joy can strain the heart so frightfully - though in general everything that denies life seems false to me." (63)* That comment sums up a great deal of Sarton's feelings about human relationships and would remain essentially the same throughout her life. She could not deny love, regardless of the pain, suffering, fear or misunderstanding that may develop. Sarton first met the Huxleys, Julian and Juliette, in 1936. This meeting would change her life forever. Ironically, she first shared a love affair with Julian Huxley, biologist and then Director of the London Zoo. It was

through this affair that Sarton grew to realize her real passion was reserved for women, as she explained to Julian in a letter: ". . . there is a part of me perhaps the writing part that needs a woman as a man needs a woman. ... However much one loves there are things one can't do against one's own spirit." (70) It was the writing part of her, the poet, who fell in love with Juliette. Juliette became Sarton's muse as poetry flowed from her pen. "One of the great virtues [of poetry] is that power to say an apparently unsayable thing quite simply." (44) Yet this love, as intense and powerful as it was, was not destined to be fully reciprocated. Juliette's fear and misunderstanding eventually dictated a twenty-seven year separation which was only overcome upon the death of Julian Huxley in the mid 1970s. Eventually May Sarton and Juliette Huxley were reunited, the circle of the ethos of their love affair was completed. The intervening years of silence had not destroyed the love Sarton held for Juliette, it had just tempered it. ". . . the pain is no longer acute; joy is no longer as intense as one looks back." (295) But the letters and poetry that were written around this passionate friendship remain and are a testament to its endurance. They underscore Sarton's prescient statement from 1948: "I would race through the years to meet you at the other end." (241) *page numbers are from the text of *Dear Juliette* Lenora P. Blouin Author: May Sarton: A Bibliography Scarecrow Press, 1978 Forthcoming: *May Sarton: A Revised Bibliography* Scarecrow Press, 2000

From Erika Pfander Director of the Chamber Theatre of Maine; Director and Producer of May Sarton's only plays: "The Music Box Bird" and "The Underground River"

DEAR JULIETTE;
LETTERS OF MAY SARTON TO JULIETTE HUXLEY

Readers of May Sarton-whose numbers are legion- must indeed be grateful for Susan Sherman, the gifted editor of this exquisite book. As official editor of Sarton's letters Ms. Sherman is undertaking the herculean task of compiling and editing Sarton's voluminous correspondences: it is clear from what she has given us in this richly rewarding volume (and, two previous volumes: *May Sarton: AMONG THE USUAL DAYS* and *MAY SARTON; SELECTED LETTERS (1916-1954)*), that she is uniquely qualified for the task. Sherman is a writer of grace, wisdom, and integrity-evidenced by her sensitive selection of letters and photographs, and her illuminating notes and preface. This volume is a gift to all Sarton's readers, for the letters let us hear Sarton's voice at every stage of her life. While the journals, which have moved and inspired so many-with their bracing honesty, intelligence, and keen observation of nature (human and otherwise)-are full of the richness and challenges of daily life in her middle and late years, their references to the past are memories. Her letters, however, are those memories, as well as each day's life as it was lived, and they reveal her ardent, vibrant mind and sensitive spirit. Throughout her life she was a seeker of beauty, justice, and truth-and thus was vulnerable to (but not diminished

by) heartache and disappointment. Her involvement with the Huxleys spanned the years 1936-1948; her deep love for, and abiding friendship with Juliette survived a 25 year silence, and when renewed- lasted until Juliette's death, a year before May's own death in 1995. What a delicate balance, that three-way relationship [Julian-May-Juliette]-and what a privilege to be given an intimate view of this remarkable friendship between two extraordinary women set against extraordinary times.

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