May Sarton is a contemporary writer of remarkable versatility and scope. The author of thirty-one volumes, she is at home in three genres—autobiography, fiction, and poetry—and she continues to work in all three. Her most recent book of memoirs, The House by the Sea, was published in 1977; her latest novel, A Reckoning, will be published in 1978; and she is currently preparing a new volume of poetry.

Although she is an indefatigable and compelling writer of journals and memoirs, it is in her poetry that May Sarton most reveals herself as a human being and an artist. The poems, written over a period of forty years, do not express an easy and comfortable movement toward arrival, resolution, and conclusion. Rather, they suggest an energetic alternation of mood, antithesis of idea, ebb and flow of experience. For the most part, these are poems of process rather than statement. Therefore, the arrangement of this selection is not chronological; instead, it attempts to preserve and to clarify the central rhythms of the poet's voice and vision.

May Sarton is neither the victim nor the champion of any particular subject matter, current of taste, literary technique, or tradition. The private moment of erotic love and the public event of Kent State are equally occasions for her poetry, and the voice to which these occasions give rise ranges from the pastoral to the polemical.

In form, these poems range from the closed couplet to a clean, tough deliberately dissonant free verse; the experience always dictates the form. For example, in "The Furies" the form is extremely strict: a series of sestets made up of trimeter couplets. Here is the final stanza:
"We'll to the Woods No More, the Laurels Are Cut Down"

At Kent State

The war games are over,
The laurels all cut down.
We'll to the woods no more
With live ammunition
To murder our own children
Because they hated war.

The war games are over.
How many times in pain
We were given a choice—
"Sick of the violence"
(Oh passionate human voice!)—
But buried it again.

The war games are over.
Virile, each stood alone—
John, Robert, Martin Luther.
Still we invoke the gun,
Still make a choice for murder,
Bury the dead again.

The war games are over,
And all the laurel's gone.
Dead warrior, dead lover,
Was the war lost or won?
What say you, blasted head?
No answer from the dead.