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Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John



Synopsis

First a serious poet and novelist, then a cause celebre, Radclyffe Hall was also a sometime feminist and a Catholic convert who believed in spiritualism Sally Cline uses new material to explore the connections between Hall's writings, life, and milieu, creating a biography that is both a signal contribution to women's studies and a marvelous read. 16 illustrations Author publicity .

Book Information

Paperback: 434 pages

Publisher: The Overlook Press; 1 edition (June 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0879517085

ISBN-13: 978-0879517083

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 1.3 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,908,956 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #87 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > LGBT > Lesbian](#) #5833 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Great Britain](#) #15047 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors](#)

Customer Reviews

She's best known as the author of *The Well of Loneliness*, "the one lesbian novel everyone has heard of," feminist scholar Sally Cline wittily remarks. But in her lifetime (1880-1943), Radclyffe Hall was a popular writer who deliberately courted controversy with her fifth novel, banned as obscene in 1928 after one of the 20th century's most notorious literary trials. Cline devotes valuable critical attention to Hall's other books, and to a flamboyant personal life (a virtual who's who of homosexual Britain) that was at odds with her political and religious conservatism. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Claiming access to new literary and personal material, Cambridge professor Cline aims to cover the entire life of Radclyffe Hall (1880-1943) and not simply the period of her most famous work, *The Well of Loneliness*, often considered the first lesbian novel. But though she successfully considers new facets of Hall's life, such as her Catholicism and her involvement in politics, which led many to see her as more than a lesbian novelist, there is little here that was not already covered in Michael

Baker's *Our Three Selves: The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (LJ 10/15/85). And though this new biography is enjoyable and highly readable, it suffers from a couple of stylistic problems, one being the problem of naming. Hall was born Marguerite but was later known as Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall and then Radclyffe Hall and called John by her friends, and Cline refers to her by the name appropriate for the time period being discussed, which can be confusing. Recommended for large academic libraries with substantial women's studies collections. Kim Woodbridge, Drexel Univ., Philadelphia Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is an academic treatment of Radclyffe Hall's life and work, along with the stories of those who influenced both. While extremely dry and exhaustively detailed, especially in the beginning, any fan of classic lesbian literature will find it intriguing. I had this book on my nightstand and would read it a little bit before bed a few nights a week. It took me about 3 years to finish ... in that time, I became very attached to the characters. They may not be very lovable, or moral, but the unadorned picture Cline paints of Hall, her family and her lovers is interesting specifically because it is authentic and not glossed over. What I shook my head at time and time again was how true it was to all lesbian relationships and the joy, dysfunction and mechanics that are still playing out in women's relationships today. It's also a study in privilege - of being white, European, and wealthy, even while being marginalized as a female and an "invert." Truly, I believe Hall was a transgendered man, and would have a much different life story if born 50 years later. Sad to have finally closed the last page.

Sally Cline creates an incredibly dynamic portrait of Radclyffe Hall in her biography and her depictions of turn of the 20th century lesbian life are just thrilling. Radclyffe Hall was attractive, wealthy, adventurous and talented, and Sally Cline faithfully shows her successes, as well as her weaknesses, and manages to bring together a sense of what this literary upper class world was like. This book traces Radclyffe Hall's life as she grew from party girl into a prolific author, later writing her magnum opus, *"The Well of Loneliness"* and shows the inevitable obscenity trials that followed. Radclyffe was a tremendously successful author at the time of the book's publication, and though she knew this book would destroy her career, she was driven to write the novel that would open the eyes of middle class heterosexual readers to the realities and difficulties of lesbian life. The book was ordered destroyed in England and the ban has never been lifted. Sally Cline does a great job of portraying the bohemian literary and art world at the turn of the 20th century Europe this time when England was just shaking the strictures of the Victorian era, women were coming into their

own and demanding representation in government, and the role of women were changing in the home and in society, while the shadow of war and economic uncertainty loomed. The book makes you realize that as revolutionary as her life was, Radclyffe was always just being true to herself.

the major players in this book were so thoughtfully unlikeable that it flavored [negatively] nearly every page. Author goes into exhaustive detail about the minute details of these women's lives. The greater part of the book was taken up with Hall's youth, Una Lady Troubridge and a Russian nurse; , of whom she was embarrassingly enamoured. If prospective readers enjoy tortured prose, a woman of some talent but a larger ego, and a great deal of egomaniacal self justification you are going to love this book!

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