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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

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Customer Reviews

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 at a 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 minutiae of these women's lives. The greater part of the book was taken up with Hall's youth, Una Troubridge and a Russian nurse, of whom she was embarrassingly enamored. 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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