Radclyffe Hall’s Queer Transition: Disjointed Identity in “Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself”

Radclyffe Hall is known for her queer modernist novel The Well of Loneliness. Yet, Hall was also a short story writer. “Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself” reframes autobiographical elements of queer identity central to her novel while integrating stylistic experimentation. The heroine is reluctantly discharged from World War I service and returns to a stultifying life in England, bound once again by gender and age. Miss Ogilvy’s failed reintegration culminates in a trip to an island that contains the remnants of ancient inhabitants, whereupon the narrative takes a radical turn. Miss Ogilvy projects herself into the body of a caveman whose bones she observes. The short story shifts abruptly from realism to fantasy, from claustrophobic society to the freedom gained when one embraces one’s internal being.

Critic Jay Prosser has effectively discussed the way in which transgender identity requires a leap of imagination to project oneself into another body. “Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself” renders this queer experience in structure as well as content. The modernist short story is known for the seamless depiction of boundaries that dissolve and disunities that are rendered coherent. Hall instead writes in a visible narrative break, a jarring transition from realism to fantasy. Hall queers the short story by embracing disjunction, rendering in language a jolt of transition rather than a merger of real and fantastic. In “Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself” boundaries remain, but her protagonist and her readers scale them as they imagine an essential self.

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